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KONA

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Rona Choral Society

*Bringing Choral Music to
West Hawai'i*

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Cover Feature



The Music of Rona Choral Society

By Jeanne West | Photos by Hannah Koki | HAWAII FAMILY PORTRAITS

For 36 years, the Kona Choral Society has brought choral music to the West Hawai'i community. Programs include choral masterworks, world music, spirituals, gospel songs, and beloved Hawaiian mele. Under the direction of Artistic Director Susan McCreary Duprey since 2010, the 100-plus singers of KCS offer four different programs to the community every year.



In early December, their free “Joy to the World” concert launches the holiday season with new songs and well-known carols. Later in the month, KCS presents “Messiah and More.” This ticketed performance features a full orchestra. The singers perform Part I of Handel’s Messiah, along with other new and familiar choral works.

In February, KCS celebrates Black History Month with its “Gospel Heritage” concert, a free program of moving spirituals and gospel songs. The range of musical traditions in the KCS repertoire reflects the diverse cultural heritage of the peoples of Hawai’i Island and the broad experience of Director Duprey. Known for her visionary leadership and deep commitment to the performing arts, Duprey has decades of experience in choral direction, conducting, and arts administration. Her expertise spans classical, contemporary, and multicultural repertoire, reflecting her dedication to fostering inclusive and innovative artistic experiences.

THE YEAR’S CULMINATING PERFORMANCE

Each concert season concludes with a ticketed Spring masterworks performance. Past performances have included both classical and contemporary masterworks, such as Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” and Dan Forrest’s “Jubilate Deo.” This year, the concert takes place on Mother’s Day, May 10th, when the chorus performs Morten Lauridsen’s “Lux Aeterna,” accompanied by a full orchestra at the Outrigger Kona Resort Convention Center.

Written in 1997 and set to a collection of sacred Latin texts, “Lux Aeterna” is shaped throughout by the central image of light: eternal light, healing light, consoling light. The title itself means “eternal light.” “There is a beautiful sense of unity across the five movements of this piece,” says Director Duprey. “Emotionally, this is not a piece that asks us to

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manufacture intensity. It asks instead for sincerity, stillness, focus, and generosity of sound. We’re offering our audience something personal yet universal—something calming, something healing.”

THE VOICES OF KONA CHORAL SOCIETY

In all its performances, KCS draws on both local and statewide talent, bringing high-caliber performances to West Hawai’i while keeping the community at its heart. Audiences regularly exceed 500 attendees, demonstrating the enthusiasm for live choral music on the island. Equally important is the opportunity KCS provides for residents to participate and for so many singers to have a creative outlet. No auditions are required, and singers of all experience levels are welcome. For many members, the chorus offers not only a creative outlet but also lasting friendships and a profound sense of connection and community.

KCS is a registered non-profit organization governed by a volunteer board of directors. “Volunteers form the lifeblood of Kona Choral Society,” says Board President Althea Champagne. “The section leaders that coach the singers, the librarians that keep track of and distribute music scores, the marketing folks that prepare and distribute concert advertising, the production crew that sets up the stage, the ushers who welcome the audience at each concert—all are volunteers,” she notes. “They are community members who love bringing beautiful music to Kona.”

KCS also takes its music on tour to both mainland and international venues. For its tours, KCS joins with its sister chorus on O’ahu, the Windward Choral Society—also directed by Susan Duprey. Together they form the touring group Na Pu’ukani. This year, from May 30 to June 6, the combined choruses will cruise around Hawai’i, singing on O’ahu, Maui, Kaua’i, and Hawai’i Island, celebrating the life and legacy of early 19th-century missionary Betsey Stockton.

Tickets to the May 10th Mother’s Day concert at the Outrigger can be purchased online at www.KonaChoralSociety.org. There you will also find more information about performances and how you, too, can join the voices of Kona Choral Society. **[KONA]**