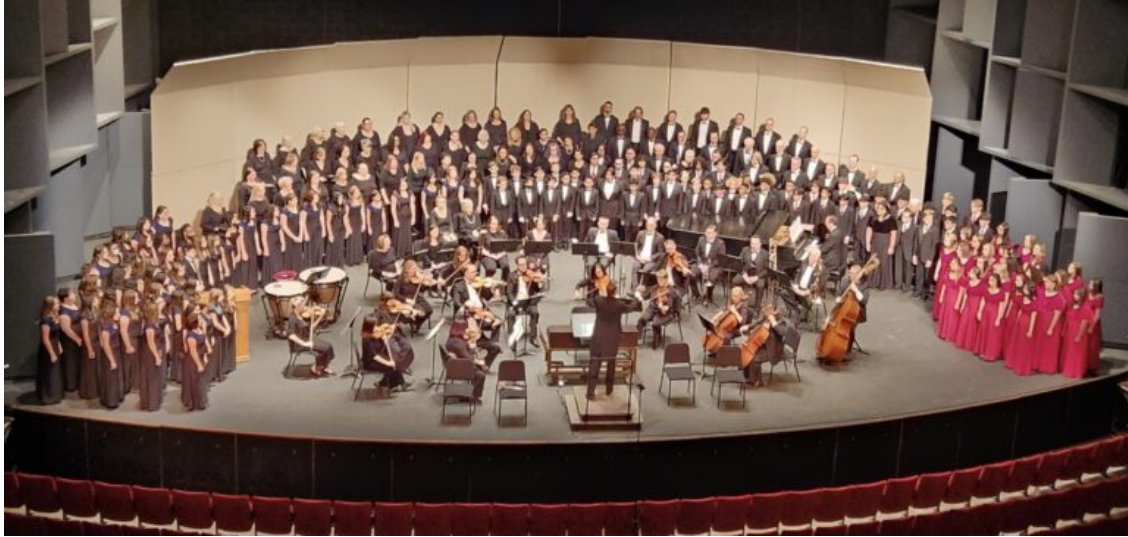


The Scarlet & Gray

MOSTLY MOZART commences the Christmas season at UNLV

By **Madeline Derivet** - November 17, 2022



Combined choirs from Thurman White Academy of the Performing Arts, Desert Oasis High School and the Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society perform on stage. Photo courtesy of Randy Pagel.

The Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society kicked off the holiday season with MOSTLY MOZART in early November.

The Nov. 6 performance was a compilation of works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Givovanni Battista Pergolesi and a Christmas choral work by Daniel Kantor. It was held in UNLV's Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall.

Thurman White Academy of Performing Arts and Desert Oasis High School were featured as guest choruses. Solo performances were given by Amy Cofield, Valeria Sokolova Ore, Marco Valera and Carnell Johnson. Randy Pagel was the event's guest conductor.

Pagel, a native of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, is celebrating his second year as a guest conductor for the Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society. He was appointed following the passing of Dr. Douglas Peterson, who had served as conductor, music director and CEO of the Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society for 52 years.

"I accepted under the condition that I conduct the Brahms 'Requiem,' which is the greatest choral work in my opinion, and that we dedicate the performance in Dr. Peterson's memory," Pagel said. "That performance was magnificent and very well attended."

Pagel first identified his passion for music at age 4. One day in the toy aisle at K-Mart, he attracted a crowd of shoppers with Christmas songs and commercial jingles. Weeks later, he received a toy piano for Christmas.

Pagel led the Peace Lutheran Church choir in his hometown by age 13, and was designated to serve as the permanent director. His piano playing and musical direction led individuals from ages 5 to 16 in song.

"In high school, I would occasionally lead the choir when the director was out," Pagel said. "Everyone thought I was pretty good and my friends were very receptive to my teaching, so I knew I would make a career of it."

Pagel opened Thurman White Academy of Performing Arts in Henderson in 1992, and he was the school's Director of Choirs and guitar teacher until 2006. By the end of the first school year, the choir program had grown to over 300 students.

Within two years, the choir was invited to perform at a state music convention. Within four years, the students performed at a western regional convention. By years six and seven, the choir had made its national debut.

During year eight, Pagel's choir landed its first performance at Carnegie Hall and was invited back to the esteemed venue three more times. Additionally, the choir gave two performances at Chicago's Orchestra Hall and one at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C.

"Aside from these prestigious events, we performed over 50 times each at various events in Las Vegas," Pagel said. "Some of our favorite events were for charities or children who appreciate us singing for them. This led to my passion of facilitating my students to have a sense of belonging to the community and spreading the joy of music to everyone."

Pagel's leadership earned the choir invitations to sing for elected officials like President Ronald Reagan, Secretary of State Colin Powell, President Jimmy Carter and President George W. Bush. Pagel also noted that the choir performed for every Nevada governor, senator, congressman and local politician during his time at Thurman White.

"When we performed for President Jimmy Carter, it was at Caesars Palace," Pagel said. "We had to prepare our concert of music specifically chosen by President Carter. After preparing and hoping for several weeks, we didn't know if the performance was confirmed until the day before. When we came on the stage to perform, President Carter and his wife, Rosalyn, were about 15 feet from us. After each song he would make comments like, 'Oh, I just love that piece!'"

Moreover, Pagel's choir had the opportunity to sing for dignitaries and pro athletes such as Michael Chang, Rollie Fingers, Tasha Swikert and Roger Clemens. Olympic gold medalist Connor Fields performed in the choir while he was in middle school.

"Performing on the Strip at so many events, and having people from all over the world comment on how well your choir sings and how well they carry themselves is always a joy to hear," Pagel said. "We truly took on the responsibility of representing middle school aged students because often they get a bad rap."

In 2007, the Cannes Film Festival featured the choir's music video, "Love Sees No Color." At this point, the choir was no stranger in providing choral backgrounds to musicians. Promoter Fred Nassiri had the video aired on national television and invited the choir to attend a local presentation gala honoring the achievement.

MOSTLY MOZART commences the Christmas season at UNLV - UNLV Scarlet and Gray Pagel was first given a holiday in his recognition, "Randy Pagel Day" in May 2002 by the mayor of Henderson. The following year, he was inducted into his high school's hall of fame and received another "Randy Pagel Day" in Oshkosh. The most recent "Randy Pagel Day" was given in May 2015 in honor of Pagel's 25-year anniversary with Clark County School District. This is also when he was awarded the Key to the Las Vegas Strip.

Sunday's MOSTLY MOZART event was the Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society's 59th season opener. Sophomore Alexander Miller attended the showcase, and felt moved by the performances he saw. His favorite aspect of the concert were the seasonal themes present within the music.

"The energy of the performance was amazing," Miller said. "I loved the blend of classical music and Christmas music and with the weather getting colder this was exactly what I needed."

The Southern Nevada Musical Arts Society's next performance will be on Dec. 3 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena. They will be accompanying Andrea Bocelli as a guest chorus for the 12th time. The group's final performance of the season is scheduled for March 26, 2023, at the Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall.

"Next year is our 60th anniversary and I would like to do the Berlioz 'Requiem,' which would be a tremendous undertaking musically and financially," Pagel said. "However, in order to be successful and accomplish things in life, you have to take chances. Otherwise, you have to settle for mediocre, and that's never been in my lexicon."

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