

Chorus' artistic director sees dream coming true

BY GERALDINE FREEDMAN/For The Sunday Gazette



Members of the Auriel Camerata pose for a photo.

Opportunities for singers abound in the Capital Region with several choruses and even a few opera companies. But tenor Derek Stannard and soprano Deirdre Michael wanted to try something different, which is how the Auriel Camerata was born.

Stannard, a Ft. Ann native, received his undergraduate degree from the Crane School of Music in Potsdam and has sung with, among others, the Burnt Hills Oratorio Society, Opera Saratoga, and the Battenkill Chorale. He currently is a member of Albany Pro Musica and the Director of Music Ministries at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Glenville. Michael, who regularly sings with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as a member of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, has been a soloist with Octavo Singers and Albany Pro Musica.

Auriel Camerata

WHEN: Saturday

WHERE: St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
58 Third Street, Troy.

HOW MUCH: \$25

MORE INFO: 867-7282, 346-6204,
www.aurielcamerata.org

When meeting at various gigs, Stannard and Michael talked about the idea of a chamber-size vocal ensemble that would present the kind and variety of repertoire the larger choruses rarely touch, and would pay its singers, something that never happens unless the singer is a soloist. About two years ago, they decided to make that dream a reality. For this conversation, Michael was not available.

Q: What was the first thing you did?

A: Deirdre and I sent out a letter to interested people ... singers that we knew and trusted and would be looking for something like this. We wanted to start a new paradigm, to have a small professional vocal ensemble. It's a

different thing than what other choruses are doing. It would be at a different caliber and done in a different way.

Q: What kind of response did you get?

A: We were excited. By 2014, we had 12 singers and were able to get our feet wet for a concert at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany. That fall we had our first official concert at Immaculate Conception. Last spring we did a noon hour concert at St. Paul's in Troy and later a concert at St. Paul's in Albany. By then we had more singers – we now have a roster of 22. Most come through our fall auditions. We don't rehearse weekly but have about four or five rehearsals up to the concert. Deirdre, who's the executive director, and I, as the artistic director, choose the singers and assign them to a concert.



Derek Stannard

Q: What type of repertoire did you do and what are you doing this year?

A: We started with early music and world folk music traditions. This year, on Saturday, we'll be singing three of Bach's motets with Andre O'Neil on cello. Baroque violinist Juan Carlos Zamudio will play Biber's "Rosary" Sonatas. William Jon Gray will conduct. And on Dec. 19, we'll do an a cappella Christmas [concert] of traditional favorites.

Q: Considering that your group is so new, how are you paying your singers?

A: From the beginning, we've had enough people who were able to provide funds and there have been donations and money has come from ticket sales. But we have been sliding by the skin of our teeth. Our primary goal this year is to get our 501(c) 3 status and get a board set up. They'll handle the fund raising.

Q: You also mentioned you want to do outreach. What has happened with that?

A: We established the Auriel Scholar Mentoring Program to give a stipend to a local college age singer who wants to pursue music after graduation. We include that singer on our concerts and at the master class that internationally known soprano Maureen O'Flynn does at the Massry Center for the Arts. That will be held March 31.

Q: How are things going, now that you're going into your second year?

A: It's been great. There's a lot of new interest in the group and we hope to build the audience. Long term, our five-year plan is to tour and sing in big venues like in New York City at the Cloisters. We'd also like to do a living composers concert, and we're talking about commissioning works especially from local composers. But for now, we're doing pretty well. We're still alive.

The Nov. 7 concert is at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 58 Third Street, Troy. Tickets are \$25. For further information: www.aurielcamerata.org; 867-7282, 346-6204.