



For Immediate Release

Contact: Michelle Salyer
Communications & Marketing Manager
Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy
Michelle.Salyer@HTES.ORG
321-723-8323 Ext. 310

Opera Comes to the Space Coast as Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy Presents “Evangeline”

Nov. 7th Performance Marks Only the Third Presentation of the Chamber Opera in the World and the First Opera for Holy Trinity’s High School Choral Department



Senior Mason Sands plays Gabriel and junior Anikka Schleismann plays Evangeline in Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy’s chamber opera,

MELBOURNE, Fla. (Oct. 13, 2015) – It’s not often that Space Coast residents can enjoy live opera without traveling to Orlando or beyond, but on Saturday, Nov. 7 at 5 p.m., patrons of the arts are in for a treat as Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy presents the chamber opera, “Evangeline,” composed by Vermont-based composer Gwyneth Walker.

The performance, to be held at Holy Trinity’s Scott Center for Worship and the Performing Arts at its Pineda campus, marks only the third time that “Evangeline” will be presented in the world. It is also the first time Holy Trinity students have performed a chamber opera, an opera written to be performed with a musical ensemble rather than a full orchestra.

According to Walker, “*Evangeline*” tells the story of the expulsion of the Acadian people from Nova Scotia, Canada, from 1755 to 1764. Forced into exile by the British, the Acadians were separated from one another, and traveled the United States and abroad in search of their loved ones. Many Acadians resettled in southern Louisiana and later became known as “Cajuns.” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a poem documenting these events, called “Evangeline,” in 1847. Although the characters in Longfellow’s poem are fictitious, their story represents the very real and

tragic series of events. Walker was inspired to write the operatic piece after visiting the Saint Martin de Tours Catholic Church and the Evangeline Oak, a tree named for the heroine, in St. Martinville, Louisiana, in 2014. Walker’s chamber opera debuted in spring 2015 at Southeastern Louisiana in Hammond, Louisiana, and was presented again last spring in Nova Scotia, Canada, both areas in which the tragic love story was set.

The Holy Trinity production features a 17 member cast: Anikka Schleismann, soprano, as Evangeline; Mason Sands, tenor, as Gabriel; Kathryn Wacaster, mezzo, as Benedicta; Tim Yinqi Ma, baritone, as Father Felician; Cindy Hall as the Fiddler and the advanced chorus singers as the ensemble. To prepare for their challenging roles, the students are not only working daily with their chorus and orchestra director, Lorie Wacaster, but are also working with Kyle Knappenberger, opera singer and adjunct music professor at Florida Institute of Technology.

According to Wacaster, the students chose to take on the challenge of presenting Walker’s chamber opera after enjoying some of her previous compositions. Although this is the first time the high school students have sung opera, they are eager to bring the story of “Evangeline” to life for its third worldwide performance.



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"We are proud to bring Holy Trinity's very first chamber opera to the stage and to showcase the talents of some incredibly gifted young performers," said Wacaster. "I think the audience will be amazed at the quality of the production and the caliber of vocal talent here at Holy Trinity."

While most high school students may not be opera fans, senior Mason Sands, who plays the hero Gabriel, feels the story is powerful enough to resonate with fans of all genres of music. "Ultimately 'Evangeline' is the story about how love conquers all, even past separation," Sands explained. "The relationship between Gabriel and Evangeline is one that will definitely pull at heart strings, not only because of how they act toward one another but also because of the music. The music really emphasizes the longing, the love, between the two. It's really beautiful music and it's a very beautiful relationship."

The production also has gained an enthusiastic endorsement from its composer. "I am delighted that your students are presenting 'Evangeline' this fall," said Walker in an email. "I am quite impressed with your efforts, for I had not thought of high school students performing this opera."

Walker's vote of confidence adds to the group's determination to hit a high note with "Evangeline." "It's a challenge for us to change from a school chorus into an opera company but we're very capable and we're very excited," said junior Anikka Schleismann, who plays the heroine, Evangeline. "We'd like as much support as we can get from the school and the community."

Tickets will be available at the door on the day of the performance. Adults are \$5; students are free. Doors open at 4 p.m.; the performance begins at 5 p.m. Seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Founded in 1957, Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy was built on a tradition of strong academic and spiritual programs that focus on developing the whole child. Holy Trinity is fully accredited and is a recognized leader in Brevard education for students from pre-K through grade 12. More information is available at www.htacademy.org

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