

# Tucson Weekly

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## Keeping the Music Alive

by [Celia Ampel](#)

When the snowbirds pack up for the summer, Tucson's songbirds are just getting started.

The Mixed Summer Chorus, a collection of 70 local singers from about a dozen different community and church choirs, will perform Friday after eight weeks of rehearsal.

Terrie Ashbaugh, executive and artistic director of the Southern Arizona Women's Chorus, started the summer group last year for vocalists whose choirs ended when the mercury began to rise.

"Over the years, I've heard from my church choir and other community choirs ... how much they miss singing over the summer," said Ashbaugh, who is also the director of music at Ascension Lutheran Church and School.

She put out a call for singers through e-mails to local choirs. That call assembled 45 men and women from five community and three church choruses. This year, the group has not only attracted more members, but is able to bring them in from all over the area.

Members of the Cochise County Chamber Chorus commute from Benson. Other singers travel from Sierra Vista or Green Valley. All of them just want to keep harmonizing through the heat.

"It's the same thing as a muscle," Joanie Kroeckel, an alto in the choir, said. "It's nice to keep the voice going over the summer."

Kroeckel sings in the Southern Arizona Women's Chorus and the choir at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church during the year. She said singing in the mixed chorus was a fresh experience for singers used to smaller or single-sex choirs.

"There's a totally different sound," she said. "I thoroughly enjoy it; I have fun."

Rick Sack, a bass-baritone, sings with the Sons of Orpheus during the colder months. This is his first year in the Mixed Summer Chorus.

"It fine-tunes your musical skills over the summer in a really fun atmosphere," he said.

The group only has eight weeks to learn the music for an hour-long concert, so rehearsals are focused.

"It's an intense two-hour rehearsal each week, and we don't have a lot of rehearsals, so it's mostly work," Sack said.

During the first few rehearsals, Ashbaugh and assistant director Stacey Seaman worked with men and women separately. When all 70 singers came together, Ashbaugh said the choir produced a full, rich wave of sound.

"The power in this group is amazing," she said. "It's phenomenal to stand in front of them."

Because so many choruses are represented in the group, Ashbaugh said she tried to choose pieces from various genres for the concert.

The choir will perform classical pieces like "Awake the Trumpet's Lofty Sound" and novelty music like "Hold On," a country-folk song.

The emotional content of the pieces also varies.

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The Mixed Summer Chorus keeps songbirds humming.

The Mixed Summer Chorus will perform at 7 p.m., Friday, July 29, at Ascension Lutheran Church, 1220 W. Magee Road. Admission is free.

Kroeckel said her favorite song on the concert program is "Leave No Song Unsung," a piece about living a full life. She said it was slow, pretty and meaningful.

"'Leave No Song Unsung' and 'Cloths of Heaven' are very touching pieces," Ashbaugh said. The latter "could even be a tear-jerker."

However, the concert features mostly light, playful music like "The Rhythm of Life," from the Broadway musical *Sweet Charity*.

"It's a nice repertoire of easy music to listen to," Sack said.

Sack said his favorite piece of the concert is "Walk in Jerusalem." He said he realized the gospel tune stayed with him long after rehearsal was over.

"I keep humming this; it's sticking in my head," Sack said of the piece. "So that's the one I'm really looking forward to."

Ashbaugh said she would ask the audience to sing along with some of the upbeat pieces. With any luck, she said, the concert will encourage shy singers to join a local chorus.

"A lot of people say 'Well, I can sing in the shower,' or, 'I'm not good enough to sing in a choir,'" she said, adding that she hopes they'll reconsider.

The mixed chorus also shows members of different choirs that there's no need to compete. Instead, Ashbaugh said, they can "share the joy of choral music."

She said the message of the summer chorus' repertoire is to be at peace with others and to do good in the world.

To that end, donations of money or non-perishable food will be accepted at the concert to benefit Interfaith Community Services, an organization that helps the disadvantaged, disabled and elderly in Tucson and Pima County.

When Ashbaugh moved here with her husband, she had no job and little money, she said.

"ICS was there to help us," she said. "They gave us gas coupons ... grants for utilities, grants for rent."

She said she would do even more to help the charity if she could.

"I still don't have a lot of personal money," Ashbaugh said. "I'd like to write them a \$10,000 check ... but I do what I can."

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