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**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Finding hope in challenging times

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2 Upcoming performances by the Brattleboro Concert

3 Choir focus on optimism and community

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4 TEXT BODY:

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5 "Thy Coming Morrow Will Be Clear and Bright," is the  
6 theme of the Brattleboro Concert Choir's next performance,  
7 Saturday, Jan. 31, at 2 p.m. and Sunday, Feb. 1, at 4 p.m., at the  
8 Latchis Theatre.

9 The Concert Choir is the oldest performing ensemble of  
10 the Brattleboro Music Center.

11        “Usually, a concert program starts in one of two ways for  
12      me,” said Dr. Jonathan Harvey, the Concert Choir’s music  
13      director, who holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in conducting and  
14      music history from University of Connecticut. “Either it begins  
15      with an idea that I then find music to fit, or, as in this case, it  
16      begins with a particular piece that I build a program around.”

17        He said the starting point for this concert was Marques L.  
18      A. Garrett’s 2022 piece, “My Heart Be Brave,” a setting of a poem  
19      by early 20th-century poet and Civil Rights activist James Weldon  
20      Johnson, which speaks to the necessity of courage in the face of  
21      oppression, cruelty, and darkness.

22        “The poem was written by a Black man in the post-  
23      Reconstruction United States,” Harvey continued, “in the form of  
24      a Shakespearean sonnet.” Harvey continued. “Garrett then takes  
25      that poem and effectively communicates ideas of fear and hope  
26      — it feels tailor-made for our moment in history.”

27        Harvey said that what resonates most strongly for him  
28      about the piece for him is the sense of hard-won hopefulness, so  
29      he built the program around that idea, around music that  
30      considers the future in that light.

31        “I think it’s important for a performance to be deeply  
32      informed both by the origins of the work and by the expectations  
33      and needs of an audience in today’s world,” he said.

34        “Communicating those ideas to the performers is an ongoing  
35      process. I’m lucky to be able to work with the Concert Choir  
36      every week, so that we can gradually build the meaning together,  
37      both through musical technical devices and through discussions  
38      of meaning.”

39        Harvey said communicating those ideas to an  
40      audience is tougher “because we have less time together,” he  
41      continued. “I writes notes for the concert program to help  
42      illuminate the music, he says, and I always speaks from the stage  
43      during performances.

44        “But I also think that what the music means to me  
45      doesn’t necessarily need to align exactly with what the music

46 means to the other musicians or to the audience," he said. "That  
47 ambiguity and flexibility is one of the reasons that music is so  
48 powerful."

49 In addition to directing the Concert Choir, Harvey is  
50 music director of the Brattleboro Camerata. He is also ~~A~~associate  
51 ~~P~~rofessor of ~~m~~usic and ~~D~~irector of ~~E~~choirs at Fitchburg State  
52 University.

53 Although Harvey enjoyed music all through elementary  
54 and secondary school, he didn't set out to be a professional  
55 musician.

56 "It was only as an undergraduate student that I started  
57 believing people who told me that music-making was something  
58 I should consider pursuing as a career," he said. "By the time I  
59 finished undergrad, I had been a teaching assistant for both  
60 orchestras and choirs. I had won the college's concerto  
61 competition and played the ~~C~~oncerto in F ~~m~~inor for ~~B~~bass  
62 ~~T~~uba and ~~O~~rchestra~~C~~ by Ralph Vaughan Williams. And I was  
63 headed to grad school in conducting. My fate was sealed."

64 Harvey has conducted all kinds of ensembles, but he  
65 finds the voice particularly interesting for two reasons.~~it~~

66 "First, the voice can carry text, which adds an entirely  
67 different and fascinating expressive layer to vocal music," he said.  
68 "Second, voice is the ultimate egalitarian musical opportunity —  
69 almost everyone can sing, and your instrument is always with  
70 you."

71 According to the Brattleboro Music Center, more than 70  
72 years ago, violinist and conductor Blanche Moyse envisioned a  
73 community chorus of local voices performing celebrated choral  
74 music. She directed the group for decades. Susan Dedell became  
75 the choir's music director in 1989. Harvey succeeded her in  
76 2018. He founded the Brattleboro Camerata in 2021.

77 "The difference between these two groups is primarily  
78 size and repertoire," he said. "Concert Choir is a large group that  
79 sings music of many different styles, and has a tradition of high-  
80 quality performance of adventurous programs, often including

81 new music. For example, in our next concert, we'll be performing  
82 music in four languages, across 400 years, and about half the  
83 pieces are by living composers.""

84 "Camerata, ~~on the other hand~~ in contrast, "is a smaller  
85 group that specifically focuses on music from and inspired by the  
86 Renaissance era," he said. "As a consequence, singers in  
87 Camerata need to be relatively strong sight-readers and must be  
88 comfortable holding their own part."

89 That's not to say, he added, that Concert Choir members  
90 can't do that.

91 "Concert Choir is filled with tremendously accomplished  
92 musicians," he said, "many of whom currently sing in Camerata  
93 or have done so in the past."

94 The most complicated and important part of conducting  
95 an ensemble, Harvey said, is helping the singers grow in their  
96 understanding of the music.

97 "Some of this work is accomplished by the music itself,"  
98 he said. "The pitches, rhythms, and syllables allow singers to  
99 form their own personal relationship with a piece. I also provide  
100 singers with an extensive set of resources, including practice  
101 tracks, texts and translations, multiple recordings (if they exist),  
102 and contextual information about the composer and the piece.

103 "Then throughout the rehearsal process, many  
104 discussions of musical meaning take place," he said, "whether in  
105 the form of brief one-on-one conversations, organized  
106 discussions, or written communication. So I try to help, but I  
107 don't feel the need to control the musicians's relationship with  
108 the music. It's also an individual process for every singer."

109 As a choral conductor, Harvey operates from three core  
110 values.

111 "I want the music to feel fresh and immediate, no matter  
112 when or where it was written," he said. "I want the musicians to  
113 feel safe to make mistakes and take risks. And I want the shared  
114 humanity of all performers and audience members to be at the  
115 center of my musical decisions. I'm always trying to do better."

116 While Harvey sees supporting local arts as an essential  
117 act of citizenship and communal interdependence, his more  
118 immediate goal for the audience at this concert is the experience  
119 of hope.

120 "Not a facile optimism," he said.

121 "A clear-eyed and hard-won sense that we as humans  
122 are capable of addressing the challenges that we face together,"  
123 Harvey added. "Cumulatively and individually, I hope the  
124 pieces on this concert help audience members process the  
125 challenges and complexities of our current moment."

126 The Brattleboro Concert Choir, which is open to all  
127 singers, seeks new members twice a year, and especially invites  
128 BIPOC singers and singers of all gender identities. The spring  
129 session begins Wednesday, on Feb. 4. Interested singers should, as  
130 soon as possible, contact the Brattleboro Music Center at 802-  
131 257-4523 or at [info@bmct.org](mailto:info@bmct.org).

132 Both Brooks Memorial Library and Putney Public Library  
133 have offered two free passes to BMC concerts. Each pass allows two  
134 persons to attend a concert for free, with the requirement that  
135 tickets be reserved at BMC a week in advance.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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136 Nancy A. Olson is a freelance writer living in Putney.

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