



The Savannah Philharmonic Holiday Pops concert, led by conductor Peter Shannon, has quickly become an annual tradition.

GET YOUR PHIL THIS CHRISTMAS

BY LESLEY FRANCIS

Musical powerhouse Monica Dekle moved to Skidaway Island with her new husband, Andrew, last year, and is loving life among the marshes. She is director of music and organist at Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church, a position she has held for seven years, and she is Savannah Philharmonic's chorus master since June of 2014.

The holidays are busy for Dekle, with Christmas services at Wesley and preparing for the orchestra's holiday pops concerts, a treasured local tradition. The chorus sings with the orchestra during the evening performances, and Dekle is responsible for making sure its members are ready to add their voices to a wonderful seasonal musical experience. "Of all the concerts the chorus sings throughout the year, they sing most joyfully at the annual holiday pops concert," she says.

The holiday concerts feature musical favorites for everyone, including traditional tunes,

sing-along melodies, and holiday classics. Dekle says, "We all need a little music – a little singing and ringing through the rafters – during the holidays, and the chorus's happy melodies and bright faces will certainly lift your spirits this holiday season."

She believes that every chorus member treasures the holiday pops performances. "It is a very special time of year for us, and we really experience a joyful spirit that exceeds other concerts. We are singing 'We Need a Little Christmas' twice during each performance this year because of all the horrible events happening in the world at the moment. Music can soothe and heal, and we want to share this seasonal good message with everyone in the audience," Dekle says.



SAVANNAH
PHILHARMONIC
PETER SHANNON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

The Savannah Philharmonic Holiday Pops concerts are set for December 8 and 9, at the Savannah Civic Center. Tickets range from \$10 to \$80. Group discounts are available. For more information, please visit savannahphilharmonic.org.



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Chorus members come from many walks of life and backgrounds, representing all aspects of Savannah's community.

Another treat is a new composition by Robin Beauchamp, a sound design professor at SCAD who plays the trumpet in the philharmonic orchestra. "Robin wrote a new song last year for us, and the chorus is thrilled to be performing his new composition 'Sing We Now of Christmas,'" she says. "Robin is a wonderful musician."

The Savannah Philharmonic has come a long way since its inception nine years ago. Dekle joined the organization in 2012, when she began to play for the chorus and accompany Peter Shannon, Savannah Philharmonic's conductor and artistic director. "At the time Peter was doing everything – conducting a large chorus and the orchestra as well," she explains. "I was so excited to take on the new part-time position of chorus master in 2014. It is exciting to hear the sheer volume of 100 people singing in the chorus. They work hard, practicing at home and rehearsing every Tuesday evening for two and a half hours during the season, from September to May."

Chorus members come from all walks of life and backgrounds. Auditions are held year-round, and the quality of the 100 chorus members is high. Says Dekle, "A good ear and catching on quickly is as important as sight reading."

She is grateful that the Savannah community is so enthusiastic when it comes to vocal and instrumental arts. "It is so exciting to me that thousands of people are interested in attending, supporting and keeping the philharmonic alive and vibrant. This community loves music, and people here are so warm and supportive. It's a great environment for musicians."

"The quality of musicians that we have in Savannah is really very special; such talented people choose to live here," she notes. "For example, Sinisa Ciric, concert master, is always willing to learn new music, which takes extra work and practice; he is a dedicated professional. Executive director Terri O'Neil is the light of this organization. She is such a hard worker. Although she is not a musician, she is well-known in Savannah and gets people excited and involved in the Philharmonic's mission and music."

Dekle, a first soprano who has sung with many choruses, grew up in the small Georgia town of Ocilla. She studied music and accounting at Wesleyan College in Macon, and earned a doctorate in organ

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performance and church music from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. Upon completing her education, she made her home in beautiful Savannah because of her appointment at Wesley Monumental where she plays the organ and conducts. "I love what I do so much, and there is a very high quality of music and staff at the church. Under Rev. Dr. Ben Martin, Wesley preaches and practices 'open heart, open minds, open doors,' and I am thankful that Wesley Monumental is so generous to allow me to spend time with the Philharmonic."

Dekle is passionate about the philharmonic. "I really flourish under Peter Shannon's direction and he trusts me entirely, not micromanaging – and he likes me to conduct," she explains. "He is very supportive, believes in me, and encourages me, which means a lot from such a talented person."

Dekle met her husband, Andrew, because of the orchestra. He is an attorney at Bouhan Fallicant, specializing in civil litigation, employment and corporate law, and bankruptcy. He grew up on Ferguson Avenue across the marsh from the Wormsloe State Historic Site. After graduating from the University of Georgia School of Law, he chose to buy his first home on Skidaway Island in the Marshwood neigh-

borhood. Andrew is a music lover who played the violin in the string ensemble at Savannah Country Day, the Emory Symphony Orchestra, and the University of Georgia Philharmonic. His passion for music led him to serve on the Savannah Philharmonic's board of directors, which led to his meeting Monica.

"Our first date was in June of 2015 at The Public restaurant," Monica says. "I knew within the first hour I would marry him. Andrew says he knew, too. We were engaged within six months and married in 2016 – it is a dream come true. Andrew is a wonderful and sensitive man who appreciates classical music without being competitive about it."

With Andrew living on Skidaway Island at the time, and Monica living in a small historical house in Ardsley Park, they decided to make their marital home on the island. "We love our home," she says. "It is very distinctive - modern, and takes advantage of a marsh view. Of course, its great acoustics are very important to us, and we know exactly where we will put a Steinway grand piano when we can afford it! The quality of life out here – with the Truman Parkway making it easy to get to work and for us to be part of the cultural life of Savannah – is a great blessing."



Monica Dekle



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