

The Bellingham Chamber Chorale Presents Rachmaninoff's "All Night Vigil"

by Osa Hale

The Bellingham Chamber Chorale (BCC) is a musical staple of Whatcom County. For years, the men and women of the chorale have worked to give their community the gift of world-class music. Their selection spans generations and cultures, with a common theme: quality. The BCC's upcoming concert, a powerful rendition of Sergei Rachmaninoff's "All Night Vigil," fits nicely into this tradition.

The "All Night Vigil" is nothing short of monumental. The piece has been praised as the height of musical accomplishment in both Rachmaninoff's life and the Russian Orthodox Church. It is directly inspired by the Russian Orthodox all-night vigil ceremony, and as such, features texts including the Vespers and Matins.

The all-night vigil ceremony traditionally lasts three hours, celebrated mainly on the eves of major liturgical feasts. The concert will be approximately an hour long. Rachmaninoff's piece contains fifteen movements. Though the piece is part of a larger movement to set Russian Orthodox liturgy to music, and influenced by the work of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff's music stands alone, mainly thanks to its complex beauty and the composer's passion. Reaching high critical acclaim, it was also one of the composer's favorites: Rachmaninoff actually requested that the fifth movement be played at his funeral.

The "All Night Vigil" is a perfect piece for the Bellingham Chamber Chorale to



Founded in 2003, the Bellingham Chamber Chorale is made up of both Whatcom and Skagit County musicians.

perform: musically intricate and emotionally powerful. It has been described as quite challenging to master, something that the chorale seeks out, having dazzled the community in the past with the quality of its performances. The "All Night Vigil" is sure to be no exception.

"Rachmaninoff's 'All Night Vigil' is perhaps one of the great sacred choral works of the 20th century, a masterpiece of Russian Orthodox liturgy and music as it incorporates chants from different schools and original compositions by Rachmaninoff," said Rico Romano, the executive director of the Bellingham

Chamber Chorale. Romano, who sang the song with the chorale in 2008, says the music had a powerful effect on the audience and singers alike. "I must say that it invokes images of dark spacious cathedrals with soaring ceilings, candle and incense smoke, clergy and laity in prayer. Having sung it once, it always has a centering and calming effect on me every time I hear parts of it."

The "All Night Vigil" is a natural fit for the Bellingham Chamber Chorale, which has a tradition of performing a diverse repertoire for its small community. People who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church have a chance to have a gorgeous experience that is catered to their faith and culture, and community members outside of the church can enjoy a new and incredible musical experience.

The chorale will be performing Rachmaninoff's piece in two different churches, adding to the exquisite holiness of the music. The first performance will take place on Sat., March 14 at 7:30pm, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Bellingham. The second performance is scheduled for Sun., March 15 at 3pm, at Salem Lutheran Church in Mount Vernon. Tickets will be \$20 for general admission, while senior citizens get in for \$15, and students can snatch up a ticket for the low price of \$5. Tickets will be available online through Brown Paper Tickets, or can be picked up at Bellingham's Piper Music, Village Books, either location of the Community Food Co-op, or at Time Keepers in Lynden.

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