

Cary Community Choir: A Timeless Tradition

BY MARY FRANCES CASSIDY



Imagine 170 singers, with only three weeks to prepare, performing one of the most celebrated works in classical music to a packed audience. No small undertaking — yet on Sunday, December 7, 2025, the Cary Community Choir will once more rise to the occasion as they gather together for the 55th time, bringing George Frideric Handel’s oratorical masterpiece “Messiah” to life.

Established in 1971, the choir combined approximately 50 singers from several local church choirs, led by the musical directors of the Cary Methodist, White Plains, and First Baptist churches. They gave their first performance at the Centennial Sunday worship service held at the Cary High School football stadium as part of the events held celebrating Cary’s centennial. Considering the choir’s success, the directors decided to bring them together once again for a more challenging piece, deciding on a Christmas performance of Handel’s “Messiah.” The concert subsequently became an annual tradition, rotating among various local churches in order to reach a wider audience, across different congregations and communities.

Directed today by conductor Pepper Choplin (only the third director to have led the choir since its inception), the Cary Community Choir now comprises about 170 voluntary members. This significant growth over the years rendered rotating among churches for their performances

to be impractical, as neither the larger choir, nor the ever-increasing size of the audience could be accommodated.

Westwood Baptist Church, located on Westhigh Street in Cary, was ultimately selected as the choir’s performance venue. This decision was based not only on its seating capacity of nearly 1,000, but as choir board member Nancy Canterbury describes, “its magnificent acoustics, perfectly suited for choral music.” Canterbury, a retired project management professional, has been an active member of the choir for five years. Leveraging the leadership skills she honed throughout her career, Canterbury serves as a volunteer with a number of organizations across the Triangle and is especially passionate when discussing her role as the choir’s fundraising chair. “As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization,” she explains, “we rely heavily on community donations and grants from the Town of Cary. These funds are essential for covering operational expenses such as the orchestra, several professional soloists, advertising, programs and other general costs. While singers are not required to pay dues, we strongly encourage donations to help us meet these expenses.”

Canterbury credits Director Choplin with elevating the choir’s performance quality dramatically and “taking it to the next level.” The original “Messiah” rehearsal schedule consisted of three meetings in the weeks leading up to the