

Boogie Downton

Bach Society of Dayton presents the Music of *Downton Abbey*

By GARY SPENCER

Often times classical music performances can be pretty standard fare—you walk into the concert hall or recital space, take your seat, the orchestra or chamber ensemble plays, audiences clap—it doesn't leave much to the imagination. But this coming Sunday the Bach Society of Dayton (BSD), a performing arts organization that prides itself on thinking outside of the box, is doing its best Monty Python by presenting "something completely different" in the form of a theatrical music program loosely based on PBS's hit TV period drama *Downton Abbey*.

"I saw an article about it on the Chorus America website and thought it could have a great draw in our area, given the huge popularity of *Downton Abbey*," says Dick Hattershire, treasurer and development director of the Bach Society of Dayton. "Our Bach Society Board agreed."

For those unfamiliar, *Downton Abbey* is an Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning British-American historical drama based in the early 20th century that debuted in the U.S. in early 2011 about a British aristocratic family and how major historical events during that time period impacted their lives and British society in general. As a reflection of the time period that the show takes place, *Downton Abbey* was often sound tracked with turn of the century choral and classical music to striking effect. While a concert program centered around music heard on the show or of the time period wasn't the brainchild of the Bach Society of Dayton, Hattershire was similarly intrigued at the possibility of doing such a show in the Gem City.

"Much as we might like to, the Bach Society can't lay claim to the idea of The Mu-

sic of *Downton Abbey*," Hattershire confesses. "That honor belongs to Dr. Matthew Mehaffey, music director of the Oratorio Society of Minnesota. In 2014, he and his wife were binge-watching episodes of *Downton Abbey*. His wife loved the storyline, characters and music and he got to thinking about how much great English choral music existed around that era that is not often performed. He selected the music and the first performance sold out."

The Music of *Downton Abbey* program contains 13 pieces of music featuring works by composers such as Handel, Edward Elgar, Sir Hubert Parry and Gustav Holst among others. While several of the compositions selected may seem obscure to even seasoned classical fans, Hattershire saw this as an opportunity to bring such pieces of music out of the mothballs and give them some airtime in a live performance setting to show audiences that not all great pieces of classical music were written by the likes of Beethoven or Mozart.

"It is consistent with the Bach Society's approach to programming," Hattershire explains. "Of course we're hoping that people will be attracted to something new, especially given our goal of diversifying our repertory: to perform 'new' music in addition to baroque and earlier styles. 'New' music can also be older music that's new to most people, and I'm reasonably sure that several of these pieces will be in that category."



Tenor Jeremy Winston will perform in the Bach Society of Dayton's show the Music of *Downton Abbey* May 15 at Kettering Adventist Church

The musical selections will be aided by a pre-show talk from the creator of The Music of *Downton Abbey* Matthew Mehaffey as well as narration and performers from Dayton's Human Race Theatre Company in order to bring the spirit and context of the *Downton Abbey* TV show to life live on stage.

"Oratorio's version had some narration between numbers to help the audience understand the significance of each succeeding piece and we thought that could make a great collaboration with The Human Race Theatre Company," Hattershire says.

The Music of *Downton Abbey* show will be presented live onstage at The Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church, a venue that Hattershire and the Bach Society of Dayton believes is an ideal place to take in this unique show or any other performance by the BSD for a variety of reasons.

"It is a large, comfortable space with excellent acoustics, and has one of the best organs in the state of Ohio," Hattershire says. "It is ADA compliant, and the church staff and members value our use of the facility as part of their commitment to community outreach."

Offering unusual productions like The Music of *Downton Abbey* to audiences in Dayton fits right in with what the Bach Society of Dayton is all about and the music they perform year in and year out.

"What makes the BSD special and unique is that we perform a wider variety of choral music than any other choral organization in the Miami Valley," Hatter-

shire explains. "There is a huge body of excellent choral material that was originally composed for choruses and orchestras of a more moderate size and were performed that way by their composers. Through our performance standards we are able to better convey the composer's intent. Without the Bach Society, audi-

ences across the community would have little chance to hear this wide range of masterworks."

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Bach Society of Dayton presents *The Music of Downton Abbey Sunday, May 15* at Kettering Adventist Church, 3939 Stonebridge Road in Kettering. Showtimes are

at 4 and 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$10 for students 13 and over, and free for children 12 and under. For more information please visit bachsocietyofdayton.org.



Actress Christine Brunner as Millicent



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