

Grammy Award-winning music educator, choir to join Saxon Singers in concert

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The Saxon Singers, a new, all-male choir at Alfred University (AU), will take to the Miller stage along with two invited men&s choirs for a festival of men&s voices Saturday, Nov. 1, beginning at 7:30 p.m. The program is open to the public free of charge.

Grammy Award-winning music educator Kent Knappenberger and The Westfield Ape-Men and AU alumnus Chaz Bruce&s group Exit Sign from Rochester will join the Saxon Singers for the evening&s program. The concert will feature an eclectic selection of music including folk, pop, musical theater, gospel, and contemporary classical.

The Saxon Singers will perform works written for four-part men&s chorus. Each of the visiting groups will perform a solo set and then all three ensembles will combine for two Irish songs and “Southern Cross,” by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

Seventeen “Ape-Men” out of a larger 30-35-member ensemble from Westfield Academy and Central School will perform at Alfred. The group&s director, Knappenberger, “student taught” with Luanne Crosby, AU professor of voice and chorus and director of the Saxon Singers, in 1987 and replaced her at Westfield when she left in 1989 to pursue graduate studies. He was most recently selected as the inaugural recipient of the Grammy Music Educator Award.

“Kent is one of the best and most unique musicians I know. When he student taught with me, the kids fell in love with him. I knew that if anyone could take the program at Westfield and continue to make it grow, it was Kent. I felt extremely confident and comfortable leaving a position I had held for nine years in his very capable hands,” said Crosby.

Exit Sign, a four-voice, male a cappella group is directed by Bruce, AU Class of 2008. Bruce teaches music and theater at Rochester University Preparatory Charter School for Young Men in Rochester.

While an AU student he played football (actually still holds some records), held major roles in a number of theater productions, studied piano and classical voice, and sang with the University Chorus. His spontaneous video of the song “Happy,” which he recorded at University Prep, went viral on the Internet and earned him a spot on a local TV news broadcast. Exit Sign has also performed on a local news station and has sung the National Anthem in the Blue Cross Stadium, Rochester.

Ensembles from Westfield High School under Knappenberger&s direction have been featured at several NYSSMA Winter Conferences and the 2013 NAFME All-Eastern Conference. They have performed regularly in their home community as well as on a concert tour of northern California.

The Westfield Academy and Central School Men&s Ensemble, "Ape-Men" as they are commonly known, was begun in 1991 to help foster the young male identity as "musician/singer." The ensemble members are in grades nine-12 and annually number 30-35, which is approximately 30 percent of all young men in Westfield High School. They are currently preparing for their upcoming performance at the Rochester Convention Center as part of the NYSSMA Winter All-State Conference.

No young man is ever turned away from this group and within it there are individuals in all stages of vocal development from unchanged voices, new singers, emerging voices to students who will be preparing for college auditions. The Ape-Men have become a well-respected organization in the Westfield school community. Many of the young men in the group are also featured as instrumentalists in their performances.

One quarter of the Westfield Academy and Central School population is currently enrolled in elective general music classes and approximately 40 percent are involved in choir and band.