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True Harmonic Convergence in D.C.

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Classical Movements is based in Alexandria but works mainly overseas, arranging tours by American orchestras and choruses and running music festivals in Brazil, South Africa and central Europe. This weekend, company President Neeta Helms and her cohort will get to show their neighbors what they do for a living, when they bring the Serenade! choral festival to town.

“In the process of taking American groups around the world, we have had so many exchanges and collaborations, and we’ve had a great number of groups that wanted to come to the States,” Helms says by phone from Georgia (the one that gave the world Joseph Stalin, not Jimmy Carter). “So we thought it was time to put together this festival in our own country.

“And of course, Washington is such an important choral center, if not *the* choral center in the United States. So it made total sense to have it here.”

The festival is not just a showcase for the European classical tradition. “Choral music is becoming so international,” Helms says. “There was a time when it was all Handel, Bach, Mozart and such. But now there are so many fantastic composers. And in the course of their tours, so many American groups have started learning Maori, Chinese, South African and Brazilian songs.”

She adds, “We love the mix.”

The inaugural festival will present four concerts at four locations: Friday at the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, with three choruses participating; Saturday at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in the District, four choirs; Sunday at Strathmore Music Center in North Bethesda, six choirs; and Monday at Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church near American University, with all the choruses plus the Children’s Chorus of Washington. All performances are free.

The performances are “a bit of an investment from our side,” explains Helms. “We’ve been really, really busy, and have not had time to find sponsors.” She says the company is paying for travel and accommodations for some choirs but others are paying their own way.

The Strathmore concert is being presented by that venue, cutting Classical Movements’ costs. “That was great gift to us,” Helms says.

The company, which also arranges all the travel for the National Symphony and Baltimore Symphony orchestras, expects the local event to grow in the manner of its Ihlombe! South

African Choral Festival, which went from 11 choruses the first year to 37 the second. Helms is in contact with sponsors who are interested in funding the fest in future years.

During subsequent festivals, she says, “we’d like to have a lot of master classes and many workshops, and make this an educational event.” The company is already planning next year’s run, with choruses from Australia, China and Sweden, as well as a likely performance by Anonymous 4, the female a cappella quartet with a specialty in medieval music.

That festival will likely share one thing with this one: a performance that brings members of multiple choruses together. The finale of Monday’s concert will feature more than 210 singers, conducted by Stanley J. Thurston, founder of the Heritage Signature Chorale.

“It’s been the same year after year, country after country,” Helms says. “Whether it’s two choirs, or three or four or seven, it’s incredible how well different kinds of choirs sing together, and how much they love to sing together. It doesn’t matter what the language barrier is. You can put music in front of people — sometimes they don’t even read music — but they’ll quickly learn it.

“It’s just fantastic,” she says. “It’s part of the reason we do this.”

In addition to the Children’s Chorus of Washington, the festival’s ensembles include Russia’s Konevets Quartet, the Pacific Boychoir, South Africa’s Wits Choir, Botswana’s UCCSA Broadhurst Choir, the Boston Eastern Heritage Chorus, the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus, the Indonesian Youth Choir-Cordana, which includes traditional dancers, and Cadence, a Canadian men’s quartet whose style has been likened to that of the TV series “Glee.”