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CONCERT

Nations of song fill Strathmore

By Marie Gullard

Special to The Washington Examiner

A choir of 325 blended voices will fill one large concert hall Sunday — and Sunday provides a free opportunity to check it out. Strathmore and Classical Movements co-present an afternoon of international choral performance in the second annual Serenade! Festival Celebration Concert of New Music and World Music.

Nine visiting choirs from seven countries will entertain audiences with the music of their homelands. The countries include Australia, Colombia, Czech Republic, Canada, South Africa, Namibia and the United States, with the Boston City Singers and Minnesota's Minnetonka Chamber Choir taking the stage. Four host choirs from the area include the Children's Chorus of Washington, Fairfield County Children's Choir, Northwestern High School Choir and the Welcome Table Choir.

"The music is so interesting," noted Neeta Helms, president of Classical Movements, a concert touring company based in D.C. "The audience will enjoy the richness of hearing music from all over the world. There will be aboriginal songs from Australia, the Latin beats from Colombia and the leading a capella chorus out of Toronto."

In addition to the world music, Helms' company has commissioned two new pieces of music for all of the festival choirs to sing at the finale. In fact, Aaron Jensen's new work,

ONSTAGE

Serenade! Festival Celebration

- » **Where:** Music Center at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda
- » **When:** 4 p.m. Sunday
- » **Info:** Free, general admission; 301-581-5100; strathmore.org

"We Are as One," enjoys its world premiere Sunday. The second commissioned piece is by Stephen Paulus, a prolific composer of more than 450 works in all genres, some of which are orchestra, opera, chorus, chamber ensemble and concert band.

Conducting this enormous group of voices is Philip Brunelle, an American conductor and organist, who is the founder and artistic director of VocalEssence. Brunelle's impressive background includes conducting such notable groups the BBC Singers, the Houston Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra.

Choir members, in addition to representing their various countries, also range in age from 9 to 80 years old.

"Audiences are going to hear very high-level choral singing; different, exciting and fun music like none other," Helms continued. "We promise them an afternoon where they will hear the glory of the human voice."