

## Entertainment

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### As Longmont Chorale marks 75 years, accompanist Karen Main celebrates group's outreach

By Quentin Young Longmont Times-Call  
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Karen Main has been an accompanist with the Longmont Chorale for nearly 30 years. The chorale will celebrate its 75th anniversary with its rendition Handel's Messiah on Saturday, April 28, at Niwot High School. (Lewis Geyer/Times-Call)

LONGMONT -- The day after a recent concert by the Longmont Chorale, a group of Chorale members attended the memorial service for a longtime member. They honored him by singing at the service. For Karen Main, one of the singers, it was a moving experience, and it exemplified the essence of why the group exists.

**What:** "75 Years of Hallelujahs!", a concert by the Longmont Chorale, featuring members of the Longmont Symphony Orchestra and soloists Kara Guggenmos, Julie Simson, Scott Anderson and Gary Hubartt.

**When:** 7:30 April 28

**Where:** Niwot High School, 8989 Niwot Road

**Cost:** \$12 to \$16

**Info:** [longmontchorale.org](http://longmontchorale.org)

"For some people, that meant more than doing the concert," she said.

Main knows better than most what the Chorale is all about. She joined the group in the early 1980s and has served as its accompanist ever since. The Chorale has been celebrating its 75th anniversary this season, and as the group remembers its history and considers its future, Main is one of the members with the most first-hand knowledge of its recent past.

Main learned to play piano as a child. In high school she found herself helping just about anyone who needed an accompanist, such as for student singing contests. She studied voice at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She intended to have a double major, including one in piano, but she disliked some of the rigors of piano study, especially the required use of a metronome, so she dropped it.

In the early 1980s, the Longmont Chorale's then director asked her to join the group. He knew her abilities well enough to forgo an audition.

"So, I went and did it, and I just stayed on," Main said.

Chorale members in those days were in it mostly for fun, and expectations were limited, Main said. It's different

today.

"Now it takes a real commitment," Main said, citing, for example, the Chorale's firm rehearsal attendance policy.

The Chorale performs a variety of music, from sacred works to show tunes, and Main said she enjoys it all. But that's not what she likes most.

"It's the people in the group that make it," she said.

When she thinks of the standout moments during her time with the Chorale, she thinks not of concerts but of meaningful episodes from the organization's community outreach program. One day she was with a Chorale contingent that visited a local assisted living facility, and Main was touched to see the residents' reaction when the group performed the 1940s song "Sentimental Journey."

"Suddenly



Artistic director Scott Hamlin introduces the next number during the Longmont Chorale's "Diamond Anniversary Favorites" concert Saturday evening March 17, 2012 at Niwot High School. Saturday's performance was the third concert in the chorale's anniversary series. The fourth and last concert of the season will be "Messiah-75 Years of Hallelujahs!", with the Longmont Symphony, 7:30 p.m., Saturday April 28, at Niwot High School. (Lewis Geyer/Times-Call)



Tracy Cravens,  
Courtesy photo.  
Albert James  
organized the  
first concert that  
led to the  
formation of what  
today is called  
the Longmont  
Chorale.  
(Courtesy photo)

they were alive again," Main said. The song brought the residents back to their youth. "It was a blessing to us."

On another occasion, a group went to the hospital to surprise a Chorale member's wife, who was a patient. It was Valentine's Day, and the group sang love songs to her.

"She said, 'I couldn't have asked for anything better,'" Main said.

These are the moments she cherishes, but playing concerts isn't bad either.

The Chorale's next concert, on April 28 at Niwot High School, caps its anniversary celebration. It will feature members of the Longmont Symphony Orchestra and soloists Kara Guggenmos, Julie Simson, Scott Anderson and Gary Hubartt. On the program is Handel's "Messiah."

The "Messiah" is the work that the group, under the leadership of Albert James, first formed to sing for Easter in 1937. The group in its early days was known as the Messiah Chorus, then the Longmont Community Choir, and its organization was less formal than it is today. Ray Harrison, who led the Chorale in the latter 1980s and today serves as associate director, is credited with strengthening the organization and initiating its modern era. It was under Harrison that the Chorale established itself as a legal nonprofit.

Harrison had moved to the area from southern California, and he was surprised by the vitality of local music groups. He was "dumbfounded" by the accomplishments of the Longmont Symphony Orchestra, and the Chorale also impressed him. He approached its then leaders about doing more with the group.

"I said, 'It seems to me there is a really great opportunity, and there seems to be a niche here,'" Harrison said.

He has since watched the Chorale continue to grow. But he appreciates that the group, now under artistic director Scott Hamlin, has remained a community-based, non-audition organization.

"I think that's a real plus for our community," he said. "And the chorale performs at a really high artistic level. That says something about the Longmont community in general."

The chorale next year will do something it's never done before: take its act on the road. In June 2013, members of the group plan to perform in England, Ireland and Scotland.

As the Chorale continues to evolve and meet new challenges, Main looks back on its history with pride.

"A lot of businesses haven't been around 75 years," she said. "I think that's kind of a landmark."