

Cheshire Singers relive Elizabethan era

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CARLSBAD – There is much beauty in Renaissance madrigal songs, the Cheshire Singers say. The group's performances rely on costumes and drama almost as much as the singing.

The ensemble will present "The 12 Days of Christmas" through December at the Four Seasons Resort Aviara. They will stroll around the promenade, address the audience in Elizabethan speech and sing without accompaniment.

A madrigal is a poem from the 15th through 17th centuries set to music with parts for several voices. Traditionally, each part is sung by one person.

"It's the a cappella – it's the pure voices – that is so beautiful," said Jennifer Kreml, the ensemble's founder, administrative director and contralto.

Madrigals often have bawdy lyrics because they were written by "the man in the street," Kreml said. But the Cheshire Singers downplay that. They sing in several languages and adopt the persona and dress of Elizabethan nobles when they perform.

Kreml, a Carlsbad resident, began the Cheshire Singers two years ago for fun because she loved the music. The project has evolved into a dedicated performance group that, in the past few months, has booked numerous engagements.

Each of the eight singers has a reason for performing.

Kreml is a certified public accountant who grew up in a musical home. She has always been an English history buff, she said while dressed, coincidentally, in a modern blouse with Tudor sleeves. The

sleeves fit tightly from the shoulder to the elbow and loosen into a large bell from the elbow to the wrist. It is believed that Queen Anne Boleyn designed the style in the 1500s to hide her sixth finger, Kreml said.

The group is unusual because of the theatrical aspect in its shows, Kreml said, but she is more a musician than an actor at heart.

Musical director and first soprano Tara Pool, however, said to her the dramatic flair is as important as singing.

"The most precious thing to me as a performer is to be able to look into the eyes of a person in my audience and see they have stepped out of their world and into mine," she said. "It means all their worries have been left behind."

Pool also grew up in a musical home and has performed Shakespeare all her life. She and her mother, alto Susan Abernathy, joined Kreml in January, and Kreml said the mother-daughter pair have helped the ensemble evolve. They are longtime participants in Renaissance festivals and experts in costuming and language, she said.

Each piece of the ensemble's elaborate attire is valued at between \$500 and \$1,500 and can take more than an hour to fasten and lace.

For first baritone Joe Vigil, a Marine who grew up singing in a church choir, low-key engagements such as the caroling are his favorites.

"I like seeing people enjoy the music because I think maybe they have an idea of how I feel when I sing," Vigil said.

The Cheshire Singers will also include modern Christmas carols in their shows from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Dec. 12-14, Dec. 17-19 and Dec. 21-23 at Four Seasons Resort Aviara.

For more information, call Kreml at (760) 434-9276 or go to <http://www.cheshiresingers.com/>.