



## SOLSTICE SOUNDS

Music from folk rock to opera can ward off the December blues

The skies may have been sunny so far this month, but let's face it: It's been a dark and stormy year, and given our usual winter weather, the gloom is likely to remain with us for a while.

So as we approach the Winter Solstice, let's party! On Sunday afternoon, Dec. 17, at the Hult Center, the **Eugene Symphony** is the backing band for **Cirque de la Symphonie**, one of the circus/aerialist acts that emerged in the wake of that other big Cirque phenomenon. Unlike that show, this one tours mid-sized markets in the U.S. and abroad with colorful, spectacular acrobatics set to classical music. This time of year, of course, that means seasonal tunes like those ever-ebullient dances from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* ballet, "Sleigh Ride" and more.

Portland singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist **Robin Jackson** was once a mainstay of Portland's own circus/vaudeville/opera outfit, *Vagabond Opera*, as well as **MarchFourth!** marching band, before embarking on a solo career a few years ago. He's also guested with Gogol Bordello and The Decemberists. His distinctive vocal style, somewhere between Phil Ochs and Rufus Wainwright, manages to be both warm and breezy. He's playing melodic folk rock from his engaging new album, *Dark Stars*, at Sam Bond's Friday, Dec. 15.

One of Portland's most entertaining holiday shows is coming to Eugene on Saturday, Dec. 16, when the **Portland Gay Men's Chorus** brings its "Most Wonderful Season" program to First United Methodist Church. The award-winning 150-voice chorus knows all about cultural oppression, so instead of focusing on a single religious tradition, this concert presents songs celebrating not only Christmas but other seasonal holidays such as Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice and the New Year. And there's more than just singing — expect costumes, dancing, lights and more.

The Christmas myth is many things, but one of them is a resurrection story, which should resonate with fans of **Eugene Opera**, which just arose from its most recent near-death experience.

Its New Year's Eve opera, Rossini's 1816 *The Barber of Seville*, also has some here-and-now resonance, with its story of a powerful older man trying to coerce a much younger woman into an abusive relationship. Spoiler: After innumerable comedic hijinks, disguises and, er, close shaves, it all works out OK in the end as Rosina winds up with her true love, thanks to help from the titular barber.

Eugene Opera's cast mixes a pair of Met vets (baritone **Malcolm MacKenzie** and mezzo **Heather Johnson**) with local stars **Jake Gardner**, **Bill Hulings**, recent arrival **Craig Phillips** (the New York Polyphony singer now at the UO) and more, all conducted by **Andrew Bisantz**, who's added the title of artistic director to his EO portfolio.

Maybe the triumph of true love over sexual predation will get 2018 off to a better start than the year it's replacing. ■

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