

NEWS RELEASE

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USM Choir Headed to Italy for Study-Abroad Opportunity to Perform For Pope Benedict XVI

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— Some performers go an entire career without a chance to perform for a Papal audience. For eight members of the University of Saint Mary community, that chance becomes reality in early 2006. The eight members of the University of Saint Mary chamber singers will embark on a 10-day music and prayer pilgrimage throughout majestic Italy. The pilgrimage includes a stop in ancient Rome for an once-in-a-lifetime performance for Pope Benedict XVI.

The 10-day pilgrimage combines the choral singers of Saint Mary with Benedictine College. The combined 30-person choir departs December 30 for Italy and is scheduled to return January 8. The proposed performance for the Pontiff is scheduled for January 6. The group will travel from Milan, to Rome, Venice, Assisi and then back to Milan—all within 10-days.

“This is just an amazing study abroad opportunity for our performers. The educational experiences are endless,” Dr. William Krusemark, chair of the fine arts—music department, said. He will lead the group that includes Ryan Harris, Hollie Becker, Adejola Tucker, Jesan Barnes, Katherine Gooden, Matthew Lockwood and Taylor Gillespie.

This trip will be unique for Krusemark, though. While he will continue to lead the choir, he will do so as a performer and not as a director. In fact, Krusemark has several solo performances throughout the trip as well. He said the group plans to sing a cappella pieces, in the Roman tradition, and some American spirituals. Some of the pieces include “Ave Maria,” “Exulte Deo,” and “O Admirabile Commmercium” and each piece had to be cleared with the Vatican prior to the trip. Krusemark said he’s looking forward to the art, and history that majestic Italy has to offer. A former professional Lyric Opera performer, Krusemark has traveled across the globe, but has never been to Italy.

“I’ve taught music and art for many years. I’m excited about the art, the history Rome has to offer,” he said. “This is a great cultural opportunity for us.”

One of the key members of the USM chamber singers is senior Ryan Harris. For Harris, the trip symbolizes a whirl-wind year. Earlier this year, Harris spent the summer months singing for an exclusive light-opera theatre company in Cape Code. Performing before the Pontiff should equal that experience.

“I like traveling a lot. Just to be in Italy—the Catholic Mecca—is just extremely exhilarating. I can’t wait,” Harris said. Performing with Krusemark will also be key for Harris. The duo has performed together, but this one will be special.

“A lot of the times, I feel like I can feed off of him,” Harris said. “That comes out in my singing—it sort of raises me to a new level.” When I first came [to Saint Mary], Dr. Krusemark was a teacher,” Harris continued. “Now, he’s become a friend and a mentor.”

Krusemark and Harris each will play a vital role during the performances. Krusemark is scheduled to lead two solos, “Loving Lamb” and “Psalm 23” while Harris will perform excerpts from “Ave Maria.”

Call 913-682-5151 extension 6460 for details about the USM fine arts—music department or the pilgrimage to Italy.

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