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FOR THE LAWSONS, MUSIC IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

 JANIE MAGRUDER ♦ MARCH 25, 2024

Keith, a tenor, sings in the West Chandlerbased Arizona Cantilena Chorale, chairs its board, and is Dad to JD, a chorale baritone, and Katie, an alto/mezzo-soprano and the board's secretary. Keith's wife, Nan, is treasurer and the nonprofit's go-to for pretty much everything. The Lawsons and other Cantilena singers will perform for the first time at Mesa Arts Center next month.

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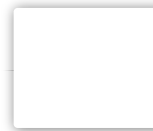
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"Love Waltzed In" is scheduled for 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 13, in MAC's Piper



Cantilena).

But one important family member, whom Keith says was the most talented vocalist among

his clan, won't be there. His first wife, Loretta, the mother of JD and Katie, died in 2004 of inflammatory breast cancer, shortly after her 40th birthday.

Rest assured, Loretta is alive in their memories, and in their music.

"Mom would be thrilled that the three of us are still singing together," said JD, of Tempe. "I

do think about what it would be like if she were here singing with us, because I know she would love to be a part of it."

The history of a musical family

Keith and Loretta met as students at Corona del Sol High, and she went on to attend Mesa Community College, taking voice lessons and singing in a community chorus. After marrying in 1984, the outgoing Loretta, an alto/mezzo-soprano, and the quiet Keith began their lives, singing duets at church, joining various choirs, and

eventually starting a family. Firstborn JD loved when his mother sang "Baby Beluga," a tune he sings to his son, Jonathan, 3. JD was a ready performer, Keith said.

"He would come home from kindergarten and say, 'I learned a new song today, and I want you to sit down on the couch, and I'll sing it for you,'" he said. Katie arrived about three years later, and was partial to "La La Lu" from "Lady and the Tramp," especially the part about the pink cloud.

The family's home was filled with piano music and singing, and the kids, with Katie in a carrier, often tagged along to their folks' rehearsals. "Loretta and I had so much fun in

singing groups and practicing on the piano," Keith said. "I feel like the kids looked up and said, 'That looks fun, I want some of that.'" They got it: JD and Katie grew up singing and playing cello and flute, respectively, in their schools, including in Dobson High's choirs, orchestra and marching bands.

But in 2000, Loretta was diagnosed with an aggressive type of breast cancer and given 18 months to live. She kept on for four years, always remaining upbeat for her family.

Over 20 years, the group's 25 members have performed more than 50 concerts, from Broadway tunes and Puccini's "Messa di Gloria" to opera and "Video Games Live," and in more than nine languages, from African dialects to Russian. A highlight was inviting students from high schools in nearby cities to join in a performance of Handel's "Messiah" at St. Mary's Basilica in Phoenix in 2022.

"We wanted to give young people who sang in high school and had a lot of fun, but didn't see any possibility to continue this endeavor,—the opportunity to sing at a high level, with an orchestra," Keith said. When Thye retired last year, Dr. David Schildkret, recently retired as ASU's director of choral activities, was installed as Cantilena's artistic director, joining Dr. Robert Mills, ASU music professor and vocal coach/accompanist for its Lyric Opera.

At the MAC concert, world-renowned pianist Russell Ryan will join Mills in fourhand piano compositions, the "Liebeslieder Walzer," by Brahms.

The health benefits of live music

Listening to music — especially live music — is good for you, according to Cantilena alto Wendy Janzen, who has a master's degree in flute performance. She cited recent developments in cognitive neuroscience that show: The brain is jazzed by music, according

to a Harvard Health blog. Music activates nearly all of the brain, from the auditory cortex in the temporal lobes near your ears and the parts involved in emotion, to a variety of memory regions and the motor system. Music can help strengthen those networks involved in well-being, learning, cognitive function, quality of life and happiness.

The only other way to trigger as many brain networks at once is participating in social activities. (A two-for-one: Attend a concert with friends.) Just being in a concert venue can reduce stress by decreasing the release of cortisol and other stress hormones. You may experience a lowering of your heart and respiratory rates and blood pressure, too, researchers say. The excitement of attending a live performance can prompt your brain to release endorphins, which essentially turns off pain. Walking to and from the venue, jumping up and down during the show, and dancing to your favorite songs — all good exercise.

Live music can produce a sense of connection and community, beneficial to

Music takes you back in time to when you first heard a song, and helps you relive those times. Coincidentally, the Arizona CantilenaChorale's April 13 concert program includes the Beatles' "All You Need is Love" — my high school class song.

