

Duet of the fates: Local talent takes on new roles for Star Wars

By ELIZABETH KELLAR

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ESTERO — A galaxy far, far away is about to become a lot closer. To Estero, actually.

At 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, “Star Wars: In Concert,” an internationally touring multi-media show that combines film scenes, live narration and orchestral music from all six of the “Star Wars” films, arrives at Germain Arena.

Props and other items from the movies will also be on display, some of which are being exhibited to the public for the first time. Music lovers will be able to see composer John Williams’ original hand-written sheet music for “Episode I: The Phantom Menace.” Actions fans can glimpse authentic blasters, helmets and Jedi costumes.

Providing the narration for the concert is host and emcee Anthony Daniels, the actor known to “Star Wars” enthusiasts as the long-suffering protocol droid C-3PO.

It’s not all tour talent, though: In each city, “Star Wars” enlists a different chorus to perform alongside its 86-person orchestra. In Southwest Florida, it’s the Mastersingers, a 10-year-old Fort Myers-based singing group.

They’ll perform two songs, “Battle of the Heroes” and “Duel of the Fates.”

The group won’t rehearse alongside the “Star Wars” concert orchestra until the day of the performance, which means perfecting their timing and tempo are likely to be their greatest obstacles, said Jim George, the group’s president.

“The challenge to our singers is paying very close attention and concentrating on the music carefully,” George said. “We have no idea about the accompaniment. We will be learning this music without the benefit of accompaniment.”

Still, it’s not a serious concern, George explained – the 60 Mastersingers selected to participate are veteran vocalists, he said.

To further polish their performance, the group also downloaded YouTube recordings to brush up on their “Star Wars” concert savvy, George said. Learning to speak Sanskrit, or at least sounding like they speak it, hasn’t proven to be a problem, either. “Duel of the Fates” is written in the classical Indian language.

“The whole sound track is very unusual, different from what you hear in the movies,” George said. “From a singing sound track, there’s really nothing that unusual.”

There is, however, the knowledge they’re bringing to life the music from one of the

most beloved film series of all time. George confesses to being a fan of the films; C-3PO is even one of his favorite characters. He also likes the sweetly comical droid R2-D2.

“Back in the 70s, when ‘Star Wars’ came out and there was so much emphasis on ‘Star Wars,’ I was caught up in it,” he said. The Mastersingers’ artistic director, Jeff Faux, has two teenage boys.

“They love ‘Star Wars,’” he said. “When I told them I was doing this, their eyes bugged out of their heads.”

Even for non-adolescent fans, there is an enduring attraction to creator George Lucas’ Skywalker family saga, Faux believes. Audiences see the tour as more than a chance to see familiar “Star Wars” clips set to songs, but as an opportunity to experience a live performance of music that has moved them through the years.

“They love the music, they connect to it,” Faux said.

“Star Wars: In Concert” began in January 2009. Its Estero stop marks its return to the United States and kicks off another, 50-city North American leg of the tour. Highlights from the films have been edited together expressly for the tour, and are shown on a three-story-tall, high-definition LED screen, one of the biggest such screens to ever tour.

“The great part is that we’ve had such a great response to the show, both from ‘Star Wars’ fans, who are very critical, to the general public,” said Gregg Perloff, one of the show’s producers.

And since no “Star Wars” show could be considered complete without lasers or lights – from the first, the films were regarded as technically groundbreaking – there’s an ample amount of special effects, too.

“The visuals are extraordinary,” he said. “And people like the show for very different reasons. It’s unbelievable to see a symphony play like that.”

Perloff said the production combines “the greatest scenes of ‘Star Wars,’ the greatest music of John Williams,” and satisfies audiences from ages six to 70. People come because they are die-hard fans of the movies, or because they simply want to do something different on date night.

“It appeals to every cross segment of society,” he said.



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