## VPO Closes Holiday Season With Concert **At The Sharon**

Special guests will perform at the orchestra's Holiday Celebration concert at 7 p.m. Dec 17 and 18.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND Daily Sun Senior Writer

The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra bids farewell to

2024 in a symphony of sound. Just as The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra's performance of "The Messiah" opens The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts' holiday season in The Villages, the orchestra's annual "Holiday Celebration" concert closes out the year. This year's performance will feature special guests Mark Antonio de Villiers, Marcella Richardson, Norman Lee Schaffer, Sean Stork and Ali Molnar. It also happens to be the final concert of the orchestra's 21st holiday season.

"Music is a language that brings great memories of hope and love, especially during this time of year," said maestro Pasquale Valerio, music director of the VPO. "We relive those memories through the traditional songs prepared for the December holidays."

The concert will once again ■ be hosted by Stork, a baritone who has performed in the Holiday Celebration for more than 10 years. He not only stars in the concert each year but does many of the arrangements as well.

Some of Stork's favorite

arrangements include "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year," which he said is like all of Christmas packed into one song, and "The Chanukah Song," which was inspired by a rendition Molnar, a lyric soprano, did on the piano. Now, Molnar sings Stork's arrangement during the annual Holiday Celebration.

'That's a special moment for me — that I get to sing the song Sean arranged with the orchestra," Molnar said.

In addition to Chanukah Song," Molnar's other holiday favorite is Amy Grant's "Grown Up Christmas List." She's loved it since childhood.

Both Stork and Molnar hope that audiences appreciate the immense talent of their fellow performers and how much work they put in each year to bring shows like the Holiday Celebration to life.

"I hope they take away the peace and joy of the show, Molnar said. "I hope people get the chance to relax and feel peace and joy, which is hard to come by these days."

Like Stork, Richardson also is a longtime guest performer. She is president of the VPO's board and is one of The Sharon's legacy acts. Last year, some of her most memorable songs included Amy Grant's "Breath of Heaven," which is written from the perspective of Mary before she gives birth to Jesus, "The Christmas Waltz" and Irving Berlin's White Christmas.'

Richardson feels the Holiday Celebration gives The



said. "I think we're really

longing for that now — longing

to experience those traditions

like when we were kids. I hope



Norman Lee Schaffer. above, and Marcella Richardson, left, performed during The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra's Holiday Celebration concert in 2023 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Both will return for this year's performance.

Daily Sun

feeling in people."

Garden Worship Center and

Photos by Rachel Govola,

Senior writer Taylor Strickland these concerts spark that can be reached at 352-753-1119, Schaffer, pastor of The ext. 5334, or taylor.strickland@

thevillagesmedia.com.

prosperity."

a prominent country gospel singer, charmed audiences last year with his wit and neverending parade of sequined suit jackets. He sang Elvis Presley's "Blue Christmas" and "I Believe in Christmas," which is an

original song from his newest album, "That's My King."

Both songs will be part of the

enor de Villiers returns to

■ The Sharon's stage, taking

the place of classic crooner Mark Raisch. He will once

again be singing "Winter Wonderland" and "I'll Be

The program includes

24 holiday songs in total,

including an audience-led

sing-a-long of "Silent Night."

Showtimes are at 7 p.m. Dec. 17-18 at The Sharon.

For more information

and performers, go to

thevillagesentertainment.com

or thevillagesphilharmonic.

"We are delighted to

present this program, which

includes wonderful holiday

pieces that have accompa-

nied us throughout our lives,"

Valerio said. "We wish you a December full of love and

concert

Home for Christmas.'

Tickets are \$40 and up.

about the

upcoming program as well.

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Villages a sense of tradition.

"Hopefully, it brings back

that Christmas spirit we seem

to be missing nowadays," she

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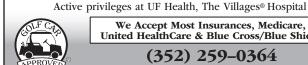
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