

‘Light in that darkness’

Harpist Amy Kortuem releases third album, ‘All Hayle to the Days’

By Amanda Dyslin
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MANKATO — Something about Oliver Herford’s poem, “I Heard a Bird Sing,” stuck with Amy Kortuem since high school when she first read it.

It had such a beautiful message — even during the cold winter months, the darkest time of year, there are signs of hope.

“The tiniest little bird singing in December really can be a sign of hope for all of us,” said Kortuem of North Mankato, a harpist of many years.

So, it was only fitting for her to return to that poem as she sat by herself at composing music. She was just playing around with chords and melodies and came across a pretty little motif. And at that moment, she remembered the poem.

“I heard a bird sing in the dark of December, a magical sound and fair to remember,” the poem goes. “We’re closer to spring than we were in September.”

How perfect, she thought, that the first song she would compose be based upon that poem. Its message was exactly what she had been trying to get across during her annual holiday concerts at Good Counsel Chapel in Mankato. And it was the same message she was hoping to capture on her third album, “All Hayle to the Days,” carols and songs to drive the cold winter away.

“From the holiday concerts I had the material, I had the inspiration, and I had the theme,” said Kortuem, who will release the CD at her holiday concert Saturday night at Good Counsel. “This album fell together really nicely for me. ... I wanted it to have a point and a message and I wanted there to be real substance to the album.”

Since fall of 2003 Kortuem has performed holiday concerts at Good Counsel with the theme of “driving the cold winter away.” Each year people approached her with such positive feedback and began asking her to put the songs on an album.

Kortuem had just released her second CD, “The Harp Her Soul Required,” in July 2003. The CD was a mix of Celtic songs dedicated to Mankato Irishman Jack McGowan, who bought Kortuem her first harp about 18 years ago. That album followed “The Light and the Lady.” So, Kortuem said, she needed a little break before doing a holiday album.

“It’s great to have people love your work so much, but all the creative juices were kind of drained at that point,” she said.

This year just seemed right — a feeling justified by how pleased she was with the final result of “All Hayle to the Days.”

In addition to the first song Kortuem composed, “I Heard a Bird Sing,” she also sings on six of the tracks. Kortuem first sang one song on “The Harp Her Soul Required” and has since become more comfortable with her voice.

“I got very positive comments like ‘Why don’t you sing more?’” she said. “People weren’t happy with me saying, ‘But I’m a chicken.’”

She included vocals on the “Bird Sing” tune, as well. The first verse of the song is Herford’s poem, and Kortuem wrote the other verses.

“The lyrics are so gorgeous I couldn’t just let the tune speak for itself,” she said. “I had to share these lyrics.”

Her regular concert-goers will recognize “The Coventry Carol” and “Deck the Halls” which goes right into “Strike the Gay Harp” on the album. The



Amy Kortuem, who has been playing the harp for years, will perform her annual holiday concert Saturday at Good Counsel

songs are favorites at her holiday shows.

The CD’s theme corresponds with Kortuem’s holiday concert, she said. Everyone must do their part to share their gifts with the world to help drive the cold winter away.

“There really isn’t too small an effort,” she said.

Kortuem’s contribution is to play her harp during the holiday concerts and share her music with the community. She also donates a portion of the proceeds of the \$10 admission charge to VINE Faith in Action, an organization that coordinates volunteers and services to assist people with long-term health needs.