

# Holidays in Washington



## 'Christmas Revels' brings all ages to stage

By **DYLAN REFFE**  
Current Correspondent

What do an 85-year-old ex-CIA agent and an 8-year-old student have in common? They are the “age bookends” to the cast of over 200 who will help put on this year’s “Christmas Revels” production.

The Washington Revels’ flagship performance will be presented eight times at George Washington University’s Lisner Auditorium over the next two weekends. A celebration of the winter solstice, the show features “rousing traditional tunes, seasonal carols, ancient hymns, lush folk songs, familiar Revels sing-alongs,” and more.

The show takes place in mid-19th-century Ireland and on the Atlantic Ocean, where an Irish crew sets forth for a new world and a new hope.

Dick Kovar, the most senior member of this year’s cast, thinks the long-running “Christmas Revels” keeps improving each year. “It gets better every year,” Kovar said. “It’s always fun — always different, but always fun.”

And he should know: This will be his 22nd straight “Revels” production. Kovar, now 85, joined the Washington Revels not long after the group was formed 25 years ago, with the idea of reviving and celebrating cultural traditions through music, dance, storytelling, drama



and ritual.

This year’s cast is almost entirely comprised of amateurs and volunteers, and the show will feature over 100 on-stage performers, including actors, singers, musicians, a teen chorus and a children’s chorus. There are also more than 100 off-stage workers including volunteers in makeup, props, costumes, box office and merchandise.

One of the members of the children’s chorus is Nico Rasi-deMatteis, a student in the French immersion program at Sligo Creek Elementary School. At 8, Nico is the youngest member of the cast.

“He’s been asking and waiting to be in the show since he was 2,” said

Jo Rasi, Nico’s mother, and also the marketing and development director for the Revels.

“Finally I’m old enough,” Nico said, beaming. “I’ve wanted to be in the ‘Christmas Revels’ for my whole life.”

Both Nico and castmate Sasha Vesensky, a second-year member of the children’s chorus, also want to be a part of the Revels team for many years to come.

“I can’t wait to be an adult,” said Sasha. “Because they get all the good roles.”

“Yeah,” echoed Nico. “We’re going to be the leads!”

Nico and Sasha are two of 16 children in the production, who — like the adults in the cast — come from a variety of locations across the region.



Photos courtesy of the Washington Revels

**A cast of over 200 will perform as part of this year’s “Christmas Revels” at the Lisner Auditorium starting this weekend.**

“Our 16 children represent 12 different local schools,” said Rasi, “and we have cast members from as far away as Annapolis, Woodbridge and northern Montgomery County.”

“It’s an incredible mix of community,” said Kovar. “We all love participating and singing for the audience.”

Second assistant director Will Wurzel was once a part of Kovar’s audience. Wurzel first auditioned in 2004 after being captivated by multiple performances of the previous year’s “Christmas Revels.”

“You could feel the love that the cast had for each other,” said Wurzel. “I got an email about a possible audition, and I’ve been a member ever since.”

Since his retirement 10 years ago, Wurzel has also volunteered in the Revels’ office a couple of days a week. And he’s not the only one.

Tom Martella is one of a handful of newcomers to the production,

who, like Wurzel, felt compelled to volunteer after seeing the different shows for so many years.

“The talents and abilities of the cast were a bit intimidating at first,” said Martella. “But I really enjoyed the common spirit the leadership fostered.”

It’s “a very welcoming group, even for a newcomer like me,” he added.

“This is a community of performers,” Wurzel said.

After every show, the Revels exit through the audience and then wait in the lobby, where they take questions and meet their fans.

“I get to be a ham,” Kovar said. “I love to sing, I love interacting with the chorus and the audience, but I really love that I get to be a ham!”

Tickets are still available for many of the performances, and they can be purchased online at [washingtonrevels.tix.com](http://washingtonrevels.tix.com).

### PALISADES COMMUNITY CHURCH

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