

MUSIC

Group builds on foundation of camaraderie

BY GERALDINE FREEDMAN
For The Daily Gazette

ALBANY — The Mendelssohn Club, celebrating its 109th season this year with its annual spring concert on Friday, is a local choral fixture that is almost as much a men's club as a group of guys who like to sing.

"We have 55 men," said director Jeff Vredenburg. "Some are trained musicians, but most are amateurs who love to sing. Camaraderie is very big."

That sense of togetherness and hearing the group for the first time last year sold Matt Hall on joining.

"I went to a concert and loved it," Hall said. "But I was chicken [about joining]. I'd never sung before. But a friend nudged me."

Actually, Hall had sung in a music class at Catholic Central High School — but at 53, that was a long time ago. And he did "sort of" read music, as he'd taught himself how learning guitar.

After barely a year with the group, he's feeling more comfortable. This concert is his second spring concert.

"I'm getting pretty good at reading music and I like the repertoire," Hall said. "It's been like a change of life. I may approach my church choir."

That's just what Vredenburg likes to hear.

"I'm always looking for singers," he said. "It's an easy audition. They must be able to hold their part and pitch. If they don't read music, I'll put them next to a great singer — the men have very good ears. I tell prospective singers to come to a rehearsal in September and see how they like it."

Old-timers like Keith Austin just go with the flow.

"I sang as a child and joined the club in 1984," he said. "I love singing. I sang all through college and in community theater. I even grew up with the club, as my dad was in it. There were always guys hanging around the house. This is now my turn. I've sung under four directors and am the fifth-long-



AMY LUKE/FOR THE DAILY GAZETTE

The Mendelssohn Club performs under the direction of Jeff Vredenburg at the Albany Tulip Festival on May 12.

Mendelssohn Club

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Friday
WHERE: Chancellor's Hall,
89 Washington Ave., Albany
HOW MUCH: \$20
MORE INFO: 518 428-5382;
www.mendelssohn.org

gest member in the group."

Vredenburg himself is into his second stint as director, which began in 2011. And as good as the singers are, he's always looking to improve things.

"I'm trying to get a better

blend so we're doing more quartets," he said. "It's a challenge, but the repertoire is satisfying. We're also doing more singing in public — in schools, funerals, at libraries, more church benefits, or for Veterans Day. Twenty-five of the guys also sang at the Albany Tulip Festival."

With only one rehearsal a week at the New Covenant Presbyterian Church on Western Avenue in Albany, Vredenburg tries to use the time wisely.

"We're doing more sectionals

to get more precision and to increase the amount of music we can do," he said. "I'm also working on the guys' facial expressions and the phrasing to get things more comfortable. And I have a tech guy come in so they can learn how to work with a mic."

As for repertoire, Vredenburg said he likes to do chestnuts from the last century and new work to keep the guys interested and active.

For this concert, titled "The Joy of the Journey," the program

includes a mix of traditional such as "Colorado Here I Come" and "On the Street Where You Live," to pieces by Purcell, Verdi and Schubert, and some country and folk songs. A new work called "Walking" by Canadian choral composer Mark Sirett, which premiered in 2012, is a particular favorite.

The concert will also feature local jazz vocalist Colleen Pratt and friends, and the 2018 Tulip Queen and her court will be presented.