

GREECE

Fisher ready to hit the right notes

Alan Morrell

Roland Fisher must feel a bit like the guy who succeeded Arthur Fiedler.

Fiedler was conductor of the Boston Pops for nearly 50 years. Fisher is the new director of the Greece Choral Society, following Ralph Zecchino, who led the troupe for 44 years.

OK, so the Greece Choral Society isn't exactly the Boston Pops. But still, that's quite a legacy.

"I'm thrilled and honored," said Fisher, a music professor at Monroe Community College who goes by Rollo. "It doesn't matter what age group people are from. People who join this ensemble love to sing ... I'm not one to make, shall we say, major changes. I'm willing to work through the transitional period."

The Greece Choral Society is one of many musical groups that make up the Greece Performing Arts Society, which serves as the organizational and fundraising end of the arrangement. Zecchino helped found the Choral Society in 1970; his wife, Sandy, was the longtime piano-playing accompanist.

One of Fisher's tasks will be to beef up the numbers. The choral society has about 63 volunteer members, less than half as many at its peak. Fisher pitched some interesting ideas during the interview process, said Karen Pearson, a member of the selection committee.

Fisher mentioned an "Adopt the Choir" idea, in which the Greece Choral Society would affiliate with a high school or college group, she said.



MIKE BRADLEY

Roland Fisher is the new director of the Greece Choral Society.

He mentioned smaller groups of performers visiting nursing homes or churches, Pearson added. Fisher even floated having "Singing Valentines" on Valentine's Day.

Those ideas, of course, have not been worked out. For now, Pearson said the committee was impressed with a number of Fisher's qualities in leading the choral group.

"The phrases that popped up most often were his calm style and quiet enthusiasm, and we felt that he was a good communicator," said Pearson, who lives in North Greece. "He's personable, he's flexible, and he's very patient."

He's also not from Greece, but Pearson said that isn't a problem. Fisher moved to the area in 2009 and lived in Greece the first 3 1/2 years. He

and his wife, Amy, moved to Irondequoit a year and a half ago; the family includes 3-month-old son Declan.

"We have singers from as far away as Sodus and Holley," Pearson said. "I don't think it's an issue."

Fisher, 38, is less than half the age of Zecchino, who was 80 when he stepped down earlier this year. Fisher lived all over the country before landing here; he grew up in Atlanta, got his bachelor's degree from Indiana University, his master's degree from the University of Central Florida and his doctorate (in choral music education) from Florida State University.

Fisher taught music in Florida public schools for five years. He was director of the Celebration

(Florida) Community Chorus and a member of the choral society in Lakeland, Florida, for four years. The teaching position at MCC brought the Fishers here.

"It's very unusual for a director to stay with a group for 40-some years," Pearson said of Zecchino's tenure. "We asked (Fisher) if he planned to stick around a while. He said he did."

At MCC, Fisher is essentially the director of choral activities, he said. He hasn't sung in any ensembles since getting to the Rochester area, and said he missed the community choirs.

Fisher's portfolio includes performing with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra and singing in a Christmas concert that Fisher said included the last performance of

crooner Mel Torme. Those performances were while Fisher was with the Indiana University Singing Hoosiers. Fisher also taught in Ireland as part of his master's degree program and has taken MCC students to Carnegie Hall.

Music aficionados might recognize the names of conductors Fisher has befriended, including the late Robert Shaw, who led the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, and André Thomas, Florida State's director of choral activities.

So no, Fisher said he isn't intimidated taking over the reins for the Greece Choral Society, even with its longstanding reputation and active and avid community membership.

"Numbers don't scare

TO LEARN MORE

The Greece Choral Society performs at community concerts throughout the year. The next performance will be a Veterans Day show Nov. 11 at Greece Athena High School's Performing Arts Center.

The Greece Concert Band, another musical troupe under the Greece Performing Arts Society umbrella, also named a new director recently: B.J. Comer of Perinton.

More information about the Greece Performing Arts Society is available at www.greeceperformingarts.org.

me," he said of the size of the troupe. "The bigger the better."

As for Rochester's weather, well, Fisher said he and his wife have gotten accustomed. They already have several Rochester winters under their belts since moving here from Florida.

"When I tell people where we're from, we always get the same response: 'I hope you like snow,'" Fisher said. "The second thing they say is, 'It's not that bad.' My wife and I love the four seasons. People forget, in Florida it gets too hot for months to go outside. We have embraced the winter, shall we say."

Choral society members and their audiences will embrace Fisher, Pearson said.

"He said he has an eclectic repertoire," she said. "I think he'll rejuvenate the group. We'll all miss Ralph ... (but) it's exciting to have a new director. This will be an excellent fit."

Alan Morrell is a Rochester-based freelance writer.