

San Diego Union-Tribune  
March 15, 2017  
Pam Kragen

## **MiraCosta orchestra, choirs tackle epic 'Carmina Burana'**

MiraCosta College Symphony Orchestra: "Carmina Burana"  
When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 18. 3 p.m. Sunday, March 19.  
Where: MiraCosta College Concert Hall, 1 Barnard Drive, Oceanside  
Online: [miracosta.edu/buytix](http://miracosta.edu/buytix)



Branden Muresan conducts the MiraCosta College Symphony Orchestra in Oceanside. (Alex Karvounis / MiraCosta College)

Thanks to movie trailers, TV commercials and the Internet, Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" cantata might be one of the most-familiar but least-known works in the concert repertoire.

Conductor Branden Muresan hopes to shed a little more light on the Orff masterpiece this weekend with two performances at MiraCosta College in Oceanside.

"Carmina Burana" is best-known for its three-minute finale "O Fortuna," a cacophonous mix of chanting choirs, pounding drums, clashing cymbals and cascading trumpets that's been used repeatedly — and often amusingly — in films with battle, supernatural and religious themes.

But most audiences aren't familiar with the rest of the hour-long piece, what it's about and how devilishly difficult it is to produce. Muresan, 43, said he's been fascinated with the work ever since he first heard it on a television show when he was a high school junior.

"I just fell in love with the power and the intensity of the movement and was fascinated by history behind it," he said.

Orff based the scenic cantata on 24 of the 254 poems in the *Carmina Burana*, a collection of stories and poetry collected by church scribes in the Middle Ages.

Muresan said the poems Orff chose to musicalize focused on what he calls "the wheel of fate." There are sung poems about the joys of life, including rowdy bar-room songs, as well as tales of sadness and loss. The ominous sounding "O Fortuna" is a dark premonition that man's unhappy fate is sealed.

The work is huge in scope. Not only does it require a full orchestra with expanded drum section and two pianos, it also requires a full adult choir and a children's choir.

The piece requires skilled performers at all levels, because the music is so challenging. Muresan said he feels the 80-member MiraCosta College Symphony Orchestra, which he started at the Oceanside community college seven years ago, is finally ready for the challenge.

Muresan earned degrees in violin performance and conducting from San Diego State and since then has taught music at Grossmont, Saddleback and MiraCosta colleges. He also leads the Southern California Philharmonic and Long Beach Ballet orchestras.

The MiraCosta College Symphony Orchestra was created in 2010 as a home ensemble for its new state-of-the-art concert hall. The audition-based orchestra includes volunteer players from middle school age to a flutist in her 80s. There are also a few professional players who receive an honorarium.

Over the years, Muresan said the orchestra has grown in size, from 26 to 80 players, and in musicality. That skill level is important for "Carmina Burana."

"The music is tremendously challenging," he said. "Because of the notation style he used, the written music is different than it sounds. It's constantly changing meters and tempi and doing very difficult gyrations. You have to have a very controlled orchestra to keep up with the rhythmic challenges in the piece."

The Latin choral sections will be performed by 75 to 100 singers from the MiraCosta and Palomar college choirs, as well as a 30-voice children's choir of the North Coast Singers.

To pull all of the elements together, Muresan has been planning the production for 18 months. He is also working with MiraCosta's audio-visual team to create English translation supertitles that will be shown on a screen over the stage during performances.

Muresan said he's been awe-struck by the sound of the orchestra in the concert hall during rehearsals and he expects this weekend's performances to be magical for players, singers and audience.

"It's an amazing experience and very unique," he said of the rehearsal process. "I've been conducting community orchestras since 1998 and it's so rare to hear a piece like this come together the way it has."