

CHURCH MUSIC INSTITUTE 2016 FESTIVAL OF CHURCH MUSIC

BY MARGARET EVANS



Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas, Tex.

If you had wandered into Dallas's Meyerson Symphony Center on the evening of November 6, you would have found a colorful spectacle—460 or so church choir members in their choir vestments assembled on the stage, the choral tiers, and the front loge and dress circle seating areas, six brass and timpani players, an organist way up high, and a conductor. It was the Festival of Church Music presented by the Church Music Institute.

To prepare for this event, these choir members, representing 26 church choirs from Dallas, Richardson, Plano, Bedford, Arlington, Bonham, Forney, Grapevine, Paris, The Colony, Tyler, Denton, Hurst, Flower Mound, and Fort Worth, had met for two rehearsals earlier in the fall. Then they had a marathon rehearsal in the Symphony Center on Saturday, November 5. They were led in making music on this weekend by Bob Chilcott, conductor and composer, from England, and Mary Preston, organist.

After a welcome by Charlotte Kroeker, executive director of the Church Music Institute, and an invocation by D. Newell Williams, the president of Brite Divinity School, the Festival opened with Preston playing John LaMontaine's colorful "Even Song" that showed off the softer stops of the Meyerson Center's Fisk organ. The



Choristers ages 10, 12, and 90

massed choir began by singing Handel's "Zadok, the Priest," in a remarkably clean and rhythmic presentation. The program continued with Britten's "Jubilate Deo," Farrant's "Lord, for Thy Tender Mercy's Sake," and Shaw's "With a Voice of Singing." It included four works by Chilcott: "Morning Has Broken," "Be Thou My Vision," "Mid-Winter," and "Thou Knowest, Lord." Then North America was represented with Alice Parker's "Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal," Ryan Murphy's arrangement of "O Love, That Will Not Let Me Go," and Robert De Cormier's arrangement of "Let Me Fly" with baritone soloist Jeffrey Snider. (The anthems had been selected by the directors of the various choirs.) The program included three hymns in which the 900 or so listeners were invited to join. It ended with a

blessing by the Rev. Richard Culp of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Denton, and a stirring performance of Widor's Toccata from Symphony V by Preston.

In the course of the Festival, special plaques were presented to Preston for her service to church music, as stated, "Faithful servant of the Creator whose musical artistry has given beauty to the world through music," and to Chilcott, "One of the most widely performed choral composers in the world whose sacred compositions give integrity to worship."

Many additional people helped with funding the event, providing logistics that made everything seemingly move exceedingly smoothly, and providing various social aspects to the Festival.

One of those in the "congregation" loved participating in the hymn singing, and said it was one of the most worshipful and transcendent experiences of a lifetime. It seems everyone left the Meyerson Center excited and happy, having heard or performed in a wonderful evening of music making.

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