

Life & Leisure

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

Pursuing something of substance

World-class choir's story is one of devotion and inspiration

BY SUSAN H. LANE

Special to the Times-News

The story behind "Singers to the Glory of God," the literal translation of "Gloriae Dei Cantores," is almost as inspiring as the music they sing.

The choir, one of the finest in the world, will perform selected ancient, traditional, classic and modern pieces in a concert to be held in Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 28.

How did a small, basic church choir that simply wanted some music for their church services become a world-class choir that was eventually invited to open the 900th anniversary of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice?

The answer is as surprising as it is interesting.

In the early 1970s, a group of Christians who wanted a life of religious devotion coupled with life in the everyday secular world formed the nucleus of a small community in the town of Orleans in Cape Code, Mass.

Unique in its commitment to ecumenism, the group included brothers and sisters of the monastic tradition, but it also embraced other secular members from different denominations as well.

This diverse group found a common ground for its worship services in a



COURTESY GLORIAE DEI CANTORES

Gloriae Dei Cantores — "Singers to the Glory of God" — one of the finest choirs in the world, will perform ancient, traditional, classic and modern pieces in Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 28.

place that most people would never think to consider: the early church liturgy of the third century.

Add to this a deep and abiding love for the sacred music of all centuries, and you have the nucleus for The Community of Jesus, the simple yet meaningful name which they have chosen for their community in Orleans, Mass.

At the heart of this community sits the Chapel of the Holy Paraclete, where the magic of music is lived and breathed and, best of all, performed.

It is here that community members who are in the choir come to worship

and practice together every day. That they take their commitment to music seriously is obvious in the finished product.

Their repertoire includes early church music, including Gregorian chants, and then wings its way over centuries and continents to embrace Renaissance, Baroque, classical and romantic music, as well as a representative collection of Russo-Slavic pieces and American works such as the early Shaker folk melody, *I will Bow and Be Simple*.

Christy Haig, a lay member of the group, has been with the choir since its inception. She and other choir members see their role as ministers in song.

"We are seriously committed to what we're doing,"

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Group represents various faiths

■ CHOIR

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Concert organizers said the spirit of the evening reflected the commitment of the choral union, to promote "peace, understanding and harmony ... through the gift of singing." Participants said the unique partnership of the ecumenical celebration of sound was "refreshing," and they encouraged future visits to Central Florida.

"Our group is ecumenical in that we represent a variety of Christian faiths," said Community of Jesus Sister Maria Jackson, second alto. "The idea is to bring communities together through music with a focus on the divine."

Ms. Patterson said a trip to the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s was a "thrilling experience" for the

choir, and an education in faith and international musical fellowship.

"The people were wonderful," she said. "Their faith was tempered by government policy, but while they couldn't sing outwardly, they could sing at home."

The director said the singers received a particularly warm response from seven concert audiences with the singing of the Lord's Prayer in Russian.

"The experience and fulfillment of song is part of our mission," said Brother Mark Bushnell, second tenor and trombone musician for the group. "Music unites, and it has the unique ability to reach people on spiritual plateaus that are sometimes tough to approach in conversation. We never know what might happen through our concerts, but it is a pleasure to bring faiths alive through song."

Church Choir Sponsors Trip

By Ellen Hendrickson

On Sunday afternoon, February 26th, 30 singers, spouses and friends of the River Hills Community Church Choir boarded vans and traveled to The First Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, N.C., to hear The Gloria Dei Cantores a world class American choir. Their vision is to promote peace, understanding and harmony among peoples of different nations and cultures through the gift of singing.

The concert opened with a Fanfare featuring herald trumpets from their Brass Ensemble followed by selections of Gregorian chant. This choir is one of the few in the world to be critically acclaimed as masters of the Gregorian chant. The sounds emanating from these 40 singers were technically pure as well as spiritually full. The *Hodie Christus natus est* by Giovanni Bassano is set for two choirs: a trio of female voices (sung from a side balcony) and answered by a four part motet choir. The acoustics of the very gothic Presbyterian church made this and the *Magnificat* by Gabrieli, the other polychoral piece, simply outstanding!

The Choir presented a Sowerby anthem "An Angel Stood by the Altar" as well as a Samuel Barber piece showing

their diversity of style. The concert ended with "Let All The World in Every Corner Sing", a majestic and colorful setting of George Herbert's hymn, written for choir, brass, tympani and organ. After a ten minute standing ovation the choir returned to sing a Russian version of "The Lord's Prayer". It was so deeply inspiring, people were moved to tears.

This choir makes its home in Orleans, Massachusetts, and sings weekly services of Holy Communion and traditional Anglican Choral Evensong. Concerts are given throughout the year and under the direction of Elizabeth Patterson, the choir has toured 22 countries in Europe and North America. Thousands of lives have been touched by their music—the universal language of the heart.

It was a special evening for all but most especially for Marge and Win Reese whose son, Nathanael sings in this choir and plays in the Brass Ensemble. Musical talent runs in this family since Marge and Win are members of the RH Church Choir and their daughter, Cyndy is a member of her church choir on Long Island. Marge had a birthday this weekend as well, and what a wonderful celebration it was with friends and family and extraordinary music!

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Concert unites two faith communities

Matthew R. Gomez

ORLANDO

Two cathedrals, two faiths; 40 voices raised in praise. The musical mathematics on a Feb. 21 night in Orlando combined entertainment and ecumenism for a spiritual sum of unity and grace.

Gloria Dei Cantores (Singers to the Glory of God), an internationally-acclaimed American choir, performed for interfaith audiences at The Cathedral Church of St. Luke (Episcopal) and St. James Catholic Cathedral a choral music concert unique in design.

"The idea of one concert in two cathedrals is a joy to experience," said Benjamin Lane, cathedral musician at St. Luke's. "The downtown cathedrals have shared our resources and liturgies at a number of events, but this is the first jointly-sponsored concert ever attempted."

The concert offered selections of Gregorian Chant, brass ensemble and a compilation of sacred music by composers Leo Sowerby, Orlando di Lasso, Dominick Argento and others. The choir repertoire, according to reports, encompasses Anglo-European, Russo-Slavic, and American composers from the 11th to the 20th century.

Gloria Dei Cantores, a Cape Cod, Mass. based choir, has toured 22 countries in Europe and North America under the direction of conductor Elizabeth C. Patterson.

The Orlando concert was arranged



MATTHEW R. GOMEZ/TFC

Director Elizabeth C. Patterson acknowledges applause Feb. 21 at St. James Cathedral at the completion of the Gloria Dei Cantores in Orlando.

through the music ministries of St. James and St. Luke's, and presented by the Central Florida Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

Three earlier dates at churches in Bradenton, Neptune Beach and Sarasota provided the heart of a 10-stop North American Gateway Concert Tour for the group.

The singing began at St. Luke's. Choir members, musicians, and audience then moved at intermission in a diagonal procession across Jefferson Street down-

town. The break in the action and the shared musical surroundings of a city block provided acoustical challenges for the artists, but the performance was well-received.

"It keeps us refreshed," said Brother Richard Cragg of Orleans, Mass. "New environments, new acoustics helped bring the voice alive again halfway through the performance. I was just glad my throat didn't dry on the walk to St. James."

■ CHOIR, A12



Gloriam Dei Cantores, the Community of Jesus' professional choir, performed Dec. 5 at Rockefeller Center in New York City.

Gloriam Dei Cantores Premieres New Work at Rockefeller Center

Gloriam Dei Cantores, the Orleans-based Community of Jesus' professional choir, performed Dec. 5 at Rockefeller Center's tree lighting ceremony in New York City. The choir premiered "A Christmas Garland" by New York composer Bruce Saylor and accompanied Luther Vandross in Marcus Miller's new arrangement of "O Come All Ye Faithful."

Televised live in three states by WNBC, the ceremony was hosted by "Today Show" host Katie Couric and featured the New York City Rockettes and Disney's Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

Under the direction of Elizabeth Patterson, Gloriam Dei Cantores has toured 22 countries, sings in 16 languages and rehearses daily.

In 1990, Gloriam Dei Cantores was the first choir in 70 years to sing sacred music on the concert stage in Russia. In 1991, the choir performed Christmas and Advent television programs for the BBC. In 1992, the choir was the first artistic group from the Western world to visit Albania. In 1993, it recorded five CDs and conducted its third North American tour. In 1994, Gloriam Dei Cantores opened the 900th anniversary celebration of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice.

The choir sings weekly services and annual concerts in the Chapel of the Holy Paraclete in Orleans. It has appeared on radio and television in the United States and abroad and has produced 19 digital recordings, including three Christmas albums.