

From the Benches 2004

There were some new aspects to this year's "Summer at the Tabernacle" programs of the Mt Gretna Bible Festival. For one thing, there were fewer of them. For the two Core Weeks, the number of programs was reduced significantly. There were worship services on the three Sundays as usual, but during the week, programs were scheduled only on Wednesdays.

The Program Committee, recognizing the fact that musical programs draw the largest crowds but that "Christian spiritual renewal in a unique Victorian setting" also requires a ministry of the word, selected the programs carefully.

The **Sacred Orchestra with Dave Stahl** opened the Core

Week programs with an exciting mix of sacred music played in Big Band style and stirring words of witness from members of the orchestra. Rodney Miller's arrangement of "How Great Thou Art," sung by Robin Work, brought the program of worship through music to a magnificent close.

Worship on the following Sunday was also musically led, with the **Wing and A Prayer** praise ensemble from the Mt Gretna UM church. The nine men and women who comprise the group did not take up as much room on the stage as did the Sacred Orchestra, but they filled the Tabernacle with their songs and spoken words on the theme of "Revival," which appropriately enough included a service of holy communion served by Pastor Janet Steger of the Mt Gretna United Methodist church.



The third Sunday of the Core Weeks brought **Dr Kirby Keller** to the pulpit. Listening to Dr Keller speak made it easy to understand why he choose to return to the classroom and continue his teaching efforts rather than remain as president of the Evangelical School of Theology. This service also brought us a familiar musical name as **Michael Kohler** shared his singing talent with us, accompanied by his mother, Mary Ellen, son and widow of Dick Kohler, who for twenty years served as pianist for the Bible Festival.

Although you may have noticed many changes in the Bible Festival this year, one of the things that did not change was the Core Weeks' finale: the annual **Massed Choir** concert. Directed this year by Fred Rice, the volunteer singers gave one of their finest performances. One of the most frequently heard comments after the program was, "I knew all the hymns they sang," said with great enthusiasm.

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One of the more obvious changes was the lack of evening speakers throughout the Core Weeks. The two Wednesday evening programs combined music with message in ways that were quite different but equally forceful. On the first Wednesday, **Dr Darrell Woomer** conducted a **Hymn Festival** titled "Hymns of Heaven" with commentary about changing Biblical perspectives on the concept of Heaven. Soprano Lana Walmer, accompanied by Tom Herald on the Celtic harp, provided special music, and Don Zechman, playing the organ that was so unexpectedly given to us a year ago, accompanied the audience for the enthusiastic singing of the familiar Hymns of Heaven, led by Dr Woomer, whose closing comment was "This has been so much fun we should do it more often." And in this case his wish has been granted; he'll be back next year.

The second Wednesday evening of the Core Weeks is one that will not soon be forgotten. It was an evening when tornadoes touched down in the Harrisburg area, and torrential rains made rivers and lakes of the walkways and parking lots in Mt Gretna. So serious were the warnings that many residents sought shelter in Fellowship Hall of the Mt Gretna church. But all that was only the sideshow; it passed rather quickly and was soon forgotten under the spell of **Christyan Seay** and the spirituals he sang for us. "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" never sounded so sad and lonely as when he sang it under the soaring Tabernacle roof. And the beautiful soprano voice of **Amy Yovanovich** flowed over the audience in healing, renewing melodies.



Mostly Sunday Evenings

Sunday evening programs have developed into mostly musical programs, and this year began quite early in June. The early programs were a mix of old and new, blending first time

performers with long time favorites.

Still Simple Gifts, a group of singers and instrumentalists who favor folk tunes and instruments, have pleased Tabernacle



audiences on more than one occasion; their concert opening the 2004 Bible Festival was no exception, although cold and damp weather made us think more of March than of June. Their mix of 16th century tunes, English hymns, "camp songs" and Shaker tunes was perfectly at home in the Tabernacle.

The following week the **Keystone Capital Chorus** did a demonstration of the differences between male chorus singing and barbershop harmony. Words can't describe it, but the ear can recognize it. Their program offered mostly male chorus arrangements intermixed with some light entertainment and barbershop harmony. It ended with a rendition of "Auld Lang Syne" that rivaled Guy Lombardo's, followed by an encore of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" that was all vocal but had us looking for hidden trumpets.

Then came the **New Holland Band** playing their rousing mixture of patriotic and religious music. They usually manage to include something especially appropriate in their programming, and this year, in honor of Elisabeth von Trapp's second appearance in Mt Gretna, the Band and their soprano soloist delighted us with a medley of familiar tunes from "The Sound of Music."

Sunday evenings were not exclusively musical. After all, the early Campmeeting programs featured preaching morning, afternoon, and evening, although musicians soon began to participate in the programs. This year the Rev. **Bob Kettering** led a service of words and music, singing a number of duets with his wife. His theme was God's Grace, and he used the



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story of soprano Jessye Norman quieting a rowdy crowd in Wembley Stadium with the hymn, "Amazing Grace" to drive home his point. And the very next week, the evening program was a worship service in the **Taize** style, featuring quiet reflection and prayer.

On the first Sunday evening of the Core Weeks, the **Lebanon County Choral Society**, provided a vocal counterpoint to the Big Band style of The Sacred Orchestra, which had led the worship in the morning.

One week later **Bob Troxell's** "Lively Goin' to Church Music" followed a generalized order of worship through a typical church service, demonstrating how various styles of music have been incorporated into the worship experience.



Elisabeth von Trapp

Highlight of the "Sunday evenings" was actually a Saturday evening, the Saturday when **Elisabeth von Trapp** returned for an eagerly anticipated second appearance at the Tabernacle. More than 600 people came out to



enjoy the warm personality and the marvelous voice. Choosing a favorite song from her wide ranging program is impossible because once she has sung a piece it becomes your favorite. Many folks were listening for Elisabeth's settings of the Robert Frost poems, and "The Road Not Taken" did not disappoint. The tune and the voice were perfectly matched to the thoughtful, wondering, accepting qualities of the text. How appropriate Elisabeth's voice is for the Tabernacle setting! And how that voice blended so perfectly with Tom Herald's harp accompaniment.

The August Sundays

August brought tornadoes and rain, but it also brought some of our favorite programs. **The Susquehanna Chorale** provided Music for a Summer's Evening, nicely balanced between religious songs (Amazing Grace and the Ave Maria were outstanding) and traditional American folk tunes.

The following week what may have been the largest audience of the season came to listen to the **Brandywine Celtic Harp Orchestra**. The harmonies of a dozen harps have to be heard to be believed, and once heard will scarcely be forgotten.

As has become traditional with the Bible Festival, the final program of the season is played by the **Lancaster Brass**. The program this year was aptly titled, "The Best of the Lancaster Brass," opening with a special arrangement of "Just a Closer Walk with Thee", a New Orleans funeral tune. This was followed by the national anthem. They included the Shaker hymn tune we know as "The Lord of the Dance" and then played some American jazz as well as a medley of Sousa marches. The exuberant personalities of the players add a huge measure of enjoyment for the listener, and when they concluded the program with "The Saints Go Marchin' In", dedicated to Edna Mae Budy, the roof nearly came off the Tabernacle.

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Partners in Ministry - Thru September 30, 2004

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Our Tabernacle Cat

Over the years, we have witnessed many visitors to our Tabernacle from God's vast creation. Occasionally bats have flown through in their nightly search for supper; dragonflies and meandering butterflies by day and graceful moths flirting with the lights by night. Fireflies flit glowingly around the edges and silently shine as they pass through this house of worship.

From time to time chipmunks and squirrels scamper up and down the aisles. One very friendly yellow Lab would roam about, quietly greeting worshippers with an inquisitive nose and wagging tail.

One summer a barn owl took up residence by day among the struts and trusses overhead, departing each evening on his nocturnal hunting trips. However, the most frequent visitors have been of the feline variety. A few years ago a large, burly, orange cat named Rusty regularly roamed through the Tabernacle during services; during the heat of the day, Rusty napped on a bench in the cool interior.

Recently the most frequent and friendly visitor has been Lady Lynette, a plump tiger cat who purrs loudly and loves to have her belly rubbed. Her attendance pattern suggests that Lady Lynette prefers music to preaching. She enjoyed Elisabeth von Trapp's rehearsal from the front bench. Music seems to be so much her thing that she wandered among the ranks of the singers during the Massed Choir concert, moving silently (thank goodness!) to the strains of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Greeting both audience and performers at Christyan Seay's program of spirituals, Lady Lynette shared the stage with them, gazing fiercely at the pianist before leaving the stage and settling down, in the front row, on Phyllis Herald's lap.

Albert Schweitzer once said, "One of the evidences of God's great love for mankind is that He gave us both music and cats." If that is true, then we have been truly blessed, with both music and cats so much at home in the Tabernacle.

Tom Herald



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Something New

An unusual but very welcome thing happened in this year of change. As the Bible Festival programs were being planned requests for inclusion on our schedule were received from not one but two groups who were going to be in the area. They had heard through friends that the Mt Gretna Tabernacle was a wonderful venue for singing and would like to perform for our audiences. Needless to say, we were very pleased to be able to accommodate both requests.

The first group was the a capella choir from **Westminster Presbyterian Church** in Charlottesville, Virginia, who treated us to a lovely program of classical sacred music. The second group, from Pine Level, North Carolina calls itself the **Young Disciples** because they are all in the high school-junior college age group. Every summer they go on tour, bringing contemporary Christian music and witness to their audiences. Singing with a taped accompaniment the forty-five young voices provided an entertaining and inspirational evening.



Gretna Memories

Bible Festival time in Mt Gretna is clearly a time for remembering, as well as a time for worship and spiritual renewal. Just look around at any of the programs, and notice how many people are shaking hands and hugging and saying, "How are things with you?" And when people talk to each other at Bible Festival programs, it is not only about the programs, or the Tabernacle that they talk. They also recall days at Camp Mt Gretna, studious mornings and playful afternoons during Summer Assembly, or the evening vesper service, sung with candles aglow in the Tabernacle.

And it is not only the more or less "local" people who attend the programs whose memories are so compelling. Every year the Bible Festival receives contributions from some very distant places, places like Montgomery, Alabama, where Ken and Susan Haupt now live. Mrs. Clyde Habecker, Susan's mother, tells how Susan and Ken met at Camp Mt Gretna and then worked together in the camp kitchen while they were in college. After graduation, they were married; Ken's military career took the couple to many bases around the world, but his last duty station was near Montgomery, so they have settled down there. Ken runs a university bookstore and Susan, after working for her Annual Conference, has "retired" to part time work as her church secretary.

Mrs Habecker says that she thinks there were as many as four couples who met the way Ken and Susan did and eventually married each other. What a great issue of Good News From Gretna it would make if we had those stories! And there is a contributor from Tucson, Arizona; we wonder how she got there and what her Gretna memories are.

But you needn't be far away to have some cherished memories of earlier days at Gretna. There is the famous story of the thunderstorm that nearly washed out one of the Massed Choir concerts, and Tom Herald's tale of the chipmunk that fell into the soup -- literally; the chipmunk was removed and the soup was served to the campers, and apparently no one got sick.

If we had enough information, we could add a "Gretna Memory Moment" to some of the Bible Festival programs, as we did this summer. Send your memories for sharing to us at PO Box 408, Mt Gretna, 17064.

Musical Outreach

It seems hard to get away from music for very long when one thinks about the Bible Festival. While we look forward each year to the program featuring a massed volunteer choir because of the spiritual quality of the music and the excellent blending of voices, there are other aspects to the Massed Choir program that are not so obvious.

Many of the singers feel that the rehearsals and the performance are exciting and valuable learning experiences, as well as being times of good fellowship and opportunities to share interests in music and church.

Another aspect that many of us never think about is that copies for all the parts must be made available to the singers -- often by purchase from commercial sources. And what happens to all of that music after the concert? For one thing, it gets sorted out, song by song. The process often begins on the front benches of the Tabernacle immediately after the conclusion of the program, but it requires much tender loving care to keep the multitudinous pieces of paper in the kind of order that is required if they are ever to be found again.

The Bible Festival is truly fortunate to have in Esther Mefferd a dedicated "tender loving caregiver" for the music. Esther, with help from Pastor Janet Steger of the Mt Gretna church,

has actually cataloged it all, and stored it safely on the second floor of the Tabernacle's "back room," where it fills the sixteen drawers of four filing cabinets. "I spent more than two months in the back room," Esther says, "but it was worth it. We have from 60 to 100 copies of each piece, with arrangements for men's voices, women's voices, and mixed groups. There are even handbell parts for some of the music." While the music is largely familiar tunes, "sacred classical" is the category Esther gives it, it is not "old" in the sense of being an arrangement from long ago. Some has been published as recently as 2003.

The significant thing about all this is not so much that the music is easily accessible, but that it is available on loan to other church choirs. The only requirement is that it be returned in good condition. The choir of the Ono UM church has used these materials rather extensively, and the Cornwall UM church has used some. Esther would be happy to hear from other choirs who would like to save some money on their music budget. The Bible Festival does not impose a fee for the use of this music. A catalog of all the titles in the music library is available from Esther Mefferd (PO Box 66, Mt Gretna, telephone 964-3123) or by calling Pastor Janet Steger at 964-3241.



Handbell Concert



The Bell Choir Story

For twelve years, a Handbell Festival has been a staple of the Bible Festival. Douglas Smith, music educator and director of the bell choir at St Paul's UMC in Elizabethtown, would bring together five or six handbell choirs and lead them in concert in the Tabernacle. Two weeks before this year's concert, Doug was tragically killed in an automobile accident.

The Smith family felt that it was important to hold the concert, which was dedicated to Doug's memory. A director was located who was willing to step in and conduct the program as selected and arranged by Doug Smith.

Kermit Junkert, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Schulmerich Carillons, Inc., and the Artistic Director of the Philadelphia Handbell Ensemble, was scheduled to attend a handbell festival in Canada. When our situation was explained to him, Junkert graciously agreed to fit the Mt. Gretna program into his plans. The entire ensemble, the separate choirs, and several

individual ringers treated us to spectacular sounds and performances.

The concluding piece was a very emotional one. It was Doug's last composition, a fantasy on the hymn, "Immortal, Invisible," and had been commissioned by Tom and Phyllis Herald as a tribute to the memory of Carl Ehrhart for his strong leadership in the Bible Festival. The piece was impressively conducted by Doug's daughter Leah, and a sense of what it meant to the family can be found in Mrs Smith's note of appreciation: "Thank you for allowing the Bell Festival to continue. This has been a very difficult time for us and hearing Doug's last piece one more time was so important to us." She also expressed her appreciation and thanks for what she called "the incredible donation" to the scholarship fund. (The free will offering at that program amounted to \$1521 and was donated to the fund for the twin daughters' education.)

