

FALL 2012

# Soli Deo Gloria

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSIC MINISTRY AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN NASHVILLE

## Welcome to Soli Deo Gloria...

Through the summer, as we have begun our work on Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, I have been reminded again of what a privilege it is to revisit this master work of the choral canon. The great American conductor Robert Shaw called *Elijah* "an absolute miracle of a piece." The first performance of the work, conducted by Mendelssohn himself, took place on August 26, 1846, before an audience of two thousand who had packed into the Birmingham [England] Town Hall. It was an unprecedented success. Music historian John Bawden writes that "no less than four choruses and four arias were encored, and the applause evidently bordered on the hysterical."

Mendelssohn recounted the experience in a letter to his brother. "No work of mine went so admirably the first time of execution, or was received with such enthusiasm by both the musicians and the audience," he wrote. The London Times's music correspondent was even more effusive. "The last note of *Elijah* was drowned in a long-continued unanimous volley of plaudits, vociferous, and deafening," he reported. "Mendelssohn...descended from his position on the conductor's rostrum; but he was compelled to appear again, amidst renewed cheers and 'huzzahs.' Never was there a more complete triumph; never a more thorough and speedy recognition of a great work of art." *Elijah* is without a doubt the crowning glory of Mendelssohn's spectacularly successful career as a composer of the sacred oratorio.

We will perform *Elijah* February 3, 2013, at 2:00 p.m. with the Nashville Symphony and

baritone soloist John Kramar. (Some of you will recall Mr. Kramar's wonderful portrayal of the title role with us in 2004). The other *dramatis personae* in *Elijah* (the Widow, the Youth, two Angels, Queen Jezebel, Ahab and Obadiah) will be performed by our wonderful sectional soloists. We are truly blessed with a choir of talented volunteers and professional singers.

Mendelssohn was an ardent admirer, performer and explorer of the music of J.S. Bach, so it is quite fitting that we couple these masterminds to highlight our 2012-2013 concert season. Bach's Christmas oratorio, written in 1743, is actually comprised of six separate cantatas describing the days of Christmas celebrated in Bach's time: the birth of Christ on the 25th, St. Stephen's Day on the 26th, St. John the Evangelist's Day on the 27th, New Year's Day, the Sunday after New Year's Day and the Feast of the Epiphany. We will perform excerpts from the first, third and sixth cantatas. Other music for this concert, entitled "Ornaments of Grace," will include the music of Mack Wilberg (his stunning arrangement of *I Saw Three Ships on Christmas Day*) and the music of Gounod, Handel, Tchaikovsky and, of course, the annual choral sing-along.

Regular rehearsals for the Sanctuary Choir begin on Wednesday, September 5, at 7:30 p.m.

See you there — we've plenty work to do!

— Raphael Bundage

## FALL MUSIC SCHEDULE

August 29, 6:00 p.m.  
Fall Kick-Off Dinner

Wednesday rehearsals begin  
September 5

December 1, 7:00 p.m.  
Nashville Chamber  
Singers

December 9, 4:00 p.m.  
Christmas Concert

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

— Ephesians 5:19-20

Come, let us anew our journey pursue, Roll round with the year, And never stand still 'till the Master appears. His adorable will let us gladly fulfill, And our talents improve, By the patience of hope and the labor of love.

— Charles Wesley

# Beckerath Shows She's Still Got the Stuff

AGO 2012, the national biennial convention of the American Guild of Organists, was held in Nashville, July 1-6, bringing 1500+ organists and music lovers to Music City. The week was packed with workshops, concerts, worship services, business meetings and the opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones.



First Presbyterian was chosen as the location for Ahreum Han's performance on Friday, July 6. Due to the convention's size, she played the 50-minute program twice (1:45 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.), and 700 attendees were shuttled in the 45-minute break to a corresponding concert at Brentwood United Methodist Church. Ms. Han, a young Korean-American organist educated at the Curtis Institute and Yale School of Music, came to the convention as a relatively

unknown performer. Uniquely paired with the Beckerath Organ at First Presbyterian, she brought stunning performances of her 'powerhouse' program. At both performances, the convention attendees leapt to their feet and applauded loudly — yes, this is unusual behavior for organists, especially on the final afternoon of a week-long convention.

Special thanks to Sam Cooper, Raphael Bundage and Music Committee chair, Lindsay Ison, for their administrative support; Susan Kirby for advance prep and directional signage; Bekah Caruso for organizing the volunteer greeters; Daphne Garey and the custodial staff for support and a timely hardware store run; Viera Efflerova for her work with the Milnar Organ Company and care of Ahreum during the week; Milnar Organ Company for their work to make the Beckerath sound its best; and Nick Bergin for his support on the day of the concert. Special thanks to the volunteer ushers and greeters who were your representatives and the face of FPC to the convention: Bill & Bekah Caruso, Bill & Shelley Alexander, Kevin Howard, Don Fisher, Susan Wall, Lily Cooper, Janet Thomas and Don & Weeza Swain.

The opening festival worship service was held at First Baptist Church and began with 30 minutes of music honoring the convention's distinguished composer Craig Phillips, currently Director of Music at All Saints Church, Beverly Hills. He's a local musician made good — he pursued his early musical studies at the Blair School of Music before heading to college and eventually earning a doctorate from the Eastman School of Music (and was Raphael's classmate there). You may recall that FPC commissioned Craig Phillips to compose the choral anthem for Todd Jones's installation at FPC.

During the opening festival service, Anna Carter Florence, professor of preaching at Columbia Theological

Seminary in Decatur, Georgia “(and judging from her one-liners a budding stand-up comic) said she was thrilled to address a gathering in which the organists were in charge. She meant that as a compliment to church musicians who, as artists, routinely expose their innermost emotions in order to express what it means to be human. That, as always, is a risky endeavor.”<sup>1</sup> The hymn-singing of 1700+ organists and guests was out-of-this world!

Daphne Garey and the Nashville Chamber Singers were the first voices heard in public performance at Belmont's new concert hall, in the former Belmont Heights Baptist Church. Daphne and her low B-flat began the Thursday afternoon concert with a commissioned choral piece. They moved next to a four-movement commissioned work by Rosephanye Powell based on the Lamentations of Jeremiah, written for chorus, chamber orchestra and organ. The composer provided the narration. Nashville Chamber Singers took on the challenge of a newly-commissioned piece and presented a well-prepared, sensitive performance. We're so proud that NCS, directed by Angela Tipps, is part of the FPC concert series again this year. Congrats to our Belmont friends on their extraordinarily handsome new concert hall!

Prior to convention week, our former organist Douglas Murray won a spot in the finals of the National Competition in Organ Improvisation (NCOI). On Tuesday of the convention, the finalists competed at Belmont United Methodist Church, where Douglas earned the 3rd place award and a monetary gift. This was his first effort in the national competition. Congratulations, Doug!

As a post-convention event, Parker Ramsay, son of our FPC members Carol McClure and Wes Ramsay, performed at St. George's Episcopal Church. His organ recital included the world premiere of a commissioned piece by Diana Burrell, *Phos*, written for organ, cello and percussion. (Michael Barone, host of NPR's *Pipedreams*, was seen in the audience). Parker returns to King's College, Cambridge, for another year as organ scholar.



# In the Loft



On August 7, I spoke with Dolores Dennard about her involvement with the music program at First Presbyterian Church. Dolores has been singing with the Sanctuary Choir for about 12 years, and it was a joy to hear about her many musical experiences. Here are some highlights from our conversation:

**NB: What brought you to singing, and who has influenced you?**

**DD:** My family, especially my father and his brothers, sang. We sang as a family, and I sang in school. We memorized hymns in grade school, so that's when I started singing church music. We lived in a small town in New Mexico, and my grandfather would lead hymn sings in the small community around us on Sunday afternoons.

**NB: Could you name some favorite anthems and hymns?**

**DD:** I could name some favorites, but my taste depends on what time of the year it is, or even the day. I like that our choir has such a varied repertoire — classical music, spirituals and so on. I also have lots of favorite hymns, *Amazing Grace* is one.

**NB: What is your most memorable experience of singing in the choir at First Presbyterian Church?**

**DD:** When I went to the Friday night Tenebrae service during Holy Week, I said to myself, "I've got to sing in the choir." So I joined after that. I was very impressed with the first concert I sang. We work very hard on those, and I think every one of the concerts has been wonderful. Some of our trips have been great as well — especially the one to Scotland.

**NB: How does singing relate to your spiritual life?**

**DD:** We can go several ways with that. I feel that it's important to have not only the beautiful words of the music, but also the fellowship experience of singing in the choir. The fellowship of other Christians is important to my own spiritual life, and I get that from choir. Being able to sing along with all these beautiful voices is very special.

— Nick Bergin

Continued from previous page

I was honored to serve as the convention's co-coordinator and a member of the convention's executive committee. We had a marvelous Nashville steering committee that worked for six years, beginning with the bid for the national convention and still continuing as bills for the convention are settled. I've learned so much about the strengths of my local colleagues and what the combined efforts of committed people can create when aimed toward a goal. It was an honor that FPC and the Beckerath were chosen for the convention; this was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me. Many convention attendees stated that we "saved the best performer and the best organ for last." Many thanks to all of you for your support as we danced on a national stage!

— Rhonda Swanson

<sup>1</sup> Quoting John Pitcher, "ArtsNash," August 10, 2012.



**Sanctuary Choir:** United in commitment to serving Christ through music, this adult choir sings at 11:00 a.m. each Sunday and presents special programs with an orchestra throughout the year. The Sanctuary Choir will be presenting a Christmas concert with orchestra on December 9, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with the Nashville Symphony on February 3 and a Broadway dinner show, "With a Song in my Heart," on March 1. Rehearsals are Wednesdays, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. and the conductor is Raphael Bundage.

**Sanctuary Chorale:** The Sanctuary Chorale, singing at the 8:30 a.m. worship service, welcomes all who love to sing and who will be committed to attending Wednesday rehearsals and Sunday worship. You will find the Sanctuary Chorale to be a great place to participate in the leadership of worship while singing a wide variety of musical styles. Rehearsals are Wednesdays, 6:15-7:15 p.m., and the conductor is Keith Moore.