

STAFF PHOTOS BY TIM KIMZEY



The United Methodist Church choirs of the Spartanburg District performed "Testament of Praise" at Twitchell Auditorium at Converse College, Sunday afternoon. The mass choir and orchestra consisted of volunteers from 18 area United Methodist Churches. The concert celebrated Charles Wesley, the co-founder of Methodism, who wrote more than 7,000 hymns.

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United Methodist concert honors Charles Wesley

By ALICE LANG
For HJ Weekly

On the evening of Sunday, June 8th, Twitchell Auditorium rang with the sounds of hymns by Charles Wesley whose picture hung from the huge pipe organ at the back of the stage.

Participating in the concert were 170 choir members and a 30-piece orchestra from 18 United Methodist churches of the Spartanburg District which includes Cherokee and Union counties.

It was the first time that local United Methodist choirs have collaborated in an event like this.

"Last year was Charles Wesley's 200th birthday. There were a lot of national and international celebrations, but here in Spartanburg not much was

done. I thought it was a shame, so even though it's a year later, we're still going to celebrate," said Choir Director Justin Addington.

Addington is a music teacher at Cowpens Middle School. He has been leading the choir at Trinity United Methodist Church for one year.

"Charles Wesley and his brother John Wesley founded the Methodist Church. John was the preacher and Charles was known for writing hymns," said Addington.

The concert was entitled "Testament of Praise," and featured six pieces of Charles Wesley's text set to music arranged by composer Joseph M. Martin.

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would preach out in a field. John Wesley said that a tree stump was his favorite pulpit. I think it

is very important that the style of music reflect not only the formality of our denomination, but

also the real down-to-earth character of the Wesley brothers," said Addington.

The first piece, "Voices of Praise," was a traditional style hymn with a glorious, royal tone. The trumpet, played by Melissa Horn, seemed to lead an imaginary procession of angels into heaven.

"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" was set to the familiar tune of "Morning Has Broken," and featured the strings and woodwinds and soloist Kelly Moore.

The third selection, "Thankful for Our Every Blessing" had a distinct folk flavor. It showcased some a cappella singing by the choir which illustrated their remarkable harmony throughout the shifting between major and minor keys.

"A Call to Service" featured a military march music style and exhorted listeners to follow the Lord by reaching for the things above.

In the fifth selection, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," women and men sang separately in parts, their voices swelling to a sweet and delicate refrain carried along by the woodwinds repeating the melody.

The final piece entitled "And Can it Be?" returned to the traditional hymn style. The repeating refrain was: "That my God should stand for me?" The hal-lelujahs floated to the rafters and sent chills down listener's spines.

It was a magnificent ending and the audience rose for an extended and well-deserved standing ovation.

In June of 2009, members of the group choir will be going on a Wesley Performing Tour of England.

"We have found a tour company that will let us perform in all of the historic sites significant to the Wesley brothers. It will be a wonderful thing for us to see and touch the heritage," said Addington.