

TALENT KNOWS NO AGE



PHOTOS BY MIKE BONNER/STAFF

Justin Addington leaves Broome High School every day during his free period to practice playing the organ at Ben Avon United Methodist Church, where he's in charge of music.

An ear for music

BEN AVON: Church choir director, organist juggles the job with high school

Justin Addington was 6 when he first dreamed of playing the organ. Every Sunday at Cannons United Methodist Church, he'd wait until services were over to visit with organist Margaret Wyatt, knowing she'd help him play a hymn.

"My favorite hymn was 'The Old Rugged Cross,'" the 17-year-old Broome High School senior said. "She'd play and point to which pedal for me to push."

By the time Addington was 15, he played the same organ during early services on Sundays at the Cannons Campground church. Before that, when he was still in middle school, Addington filled in at several smaller Methodist churches for organists who wanted a day off.

"That's what I always wanted to do," Addington said, sitting in front of the keyboards of the Allen organ he now plays each Sunday at Ben Avon United Methodist Church. "I did those early things without pay."

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Addington says he often plays by ear, a talent that's been fostered since he was a small child.

fill the empty sanctuary of the church this week, it was easy to forget Addington has only four years of training.

"I play a lot by ear, which is my problem," Addington said.

But his ability to hear a hymn or anthem and then play it as well as if he were reading the notes is testament to his innate musical talent.

"The choir has to sing stuff I know,



GARY
HENDERSON
UPSTATE JOURNAL

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Teen music director enjoys his role, values church's closeness

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because I lead and play at the same time," Addington said.

Addington plays a big role: He's the church music director, a job that requires him to not only choose the hymns the con-

gregation will sing, but also to be in charge of the 12-member choir.

"Adults are surprisingly OK with it," Addington said. "I think they know it's the bigger churches that get the people with music degrees."

Whether it's a chapel or a cathedral, most people agree the music makes services more meaningful. And Addington seems to understand the significance of the job.

Each day, Addington leaves Broome during a free period and heads to the church to practice on the organ. It's somewhat like an hourlong recital played to empty pews.

On a recent morning, the young organist spent part of the hour working on the difficult Toccata Symphony No. 5 by Charles-Marie Widor.

Addington, the youngest member of Spartanburg's American Guild of Organist chapter, has a demeanor that makes him seem older.

"I don't join youth groups (in the churches)," Addington said. "I relate to older people better. I'd rather be talking to a group of senior citizens."

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ed Methodist churches, said Addington is "gifted far beyond his years."

"(Justin) has done an amazing amount of work since he came there," Hyder said. "People want to get on board with programs he starts."

Addington's first job as a paid music director was at the historic Liberty United Methodist Church. He turned 16 his first day on the job.

While he says the people in both churches where he has served as music director are "super," Addington laughs when he recalls the trepidation on the faces of Liberty's choir members at his first practice session.

"They had a look on their faces that said, 'We're going to learn something from this child?'" Addington said, smiling. "Two of the women left before choir practice was over

and came back carrying a birthday cake."

Addington is multitalented musically. He also has a beautiful singing voice. And he's a pretty good actor, as well.

Addington, one of the brothers in the recent Spartanburg Little Theatre production of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," has played roles in 11 other shows at the playhouse. He also was cast in the role of Billy three years ago in the Converse College production of "On Golden Pond."

Not surprisingly, Addington is not left with much time for Broome's extracurricular activities. He recently gave up the marching band.

Addington, a Beta Club member, does not plan to major in music when he enters college next fall. Instead, his goal is to teach history. He also is considering a major in elementary education.

While Addington relishes his role in church music, it's not a job he would want to do full-time, nor does he have ambitions of working for larger congregations.

"I never want to move into a big church," Addington said as he sat on the organ bench and shuffled through sheets of music. "I love the closeness and nearness of the people here."

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Teen-age choir director juggles job at church with school work

By Gary Henderson
HERALD-JOURNAL

SPARTANBURG — Justin Addington was 6 when he first dreamed of playing the organ.

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The teen also sings and acts. Addington, one of the brothers in the recent Spartanburg Little Theatre production of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," has played roles in 11 other shows. He also was cast in the role of Billy three years ago in the Converse College production of "On Golden Pond."

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