

REMARKS ON CATHEDRAL MUSIC FOR THE NCA 9/28/00

In 1901 the Peace Cross was placed on the hillside just east of St. Albans Church. Thereafter, every "good weather" Sunday afternoon in a natural hollow called the amphitheater, just below the church, prayer services were held. United States Marine Band members played and the people sang hymns. Sermons spoke of the hope for a great church to be built on the hill someday. Some people believed that for the National Cathedral School for Girls, had already been founded, its (Phoebe) Hearst Hall built (1900) for the classes already underway. The Harriet Lane-Johnston Building (1904) was next to rise and house the cathedral choir school, the Saint Albans School for Boys.

The first music of the cathedral was the singing of a choir walking on a hill toward a beginning. The choir was there to be a part of the laying of a foundation stone. It was there to celebrate and partake of a commitment, and the people sang of hope for the future and belief in God.

That choir numbered several hundred. It was the combined singers of many Washington Churches, and it processed and sang at noon on September 29, 1907, on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels.

The congregation of several thousand and the United States Marine band , all joined in the highest musical praise to God's glory.

Music is woven into the cathedral, into the stones of its fabric as well as its worship. Someone once said of a cathedral that it was "frozen music". Indeed, you can almost "hear" the delicacy of the tracery, the soaring of the arches, the powerful theme of the west facade. This is quite true, but because it is never "heard" by everyone in the same time and key, it is pretty hard to just "pitch" in and sing it together.

Once the Bethlehem Chapel was opened in 1912, and an organ was installed, Edgar Priest, who was already the Organist and Master of the Choir, moved in with his singers trained in the four-centuries old Anglican tradition of church music. The music of Wesley and Stanford, Purcell, Byrd and Tallis, was heard in the services. The people listened, and then sang the familiar hymns in that resonant, beautifully arched place. With the English stained glass glowing at the matins or evensong hour, all felt the joyful reassurance of being close to the heavenly city.

They felt then as we do now that cathedral music in such a space stirs thoughts and raises spirits. It has two great powers: the power to instill a mystical quietude with searching intimacy, and

the power to overwhelm and shake with emotion. It sounds the gamut between the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and bridges heaven and earth

The Anglican music tradition of well-trained choirs of men and boys providing liturgical support for all Sunday and week-day services remains strong. The late Dr. Paul Callaway became organist and choirmaster in 1939, and I joined him to assist in 1942. We were to work together for the next thirty-four years, training choiristers, playing and conducting music for thousands of services, as well as for hundreds of other events both in and outside the cathedral. We worked with many other musicians in Washington and beyond. We were a team. Our talents were complementary and we sensed each other intuitively.

When Paul retired in 1977, I continued, with the able assistance of Douglas Major, and in 1988, turned over the leadership to him with satisfaction. He is our most able fifth Organist and Choirmaster.

Perhaps the greatest influence of cathedral music over the years has been the building process itself - the slow growing of the space and beauty. More voices and organ were needed as the transepts broadened and the nave lengthened from 1950 until 1976. The Cathedral Choral Society, formed by Paul in 1942,

grew from 80 voices to two-hundred. Orchestras hired to accompany the large scale of its repertoire were expanded., The rising arches of the nave silently demanded that the cathedral music should be as commanding as the "frozen music" of the flying buttresses.. And, the organ had to grow with the building.

The Great Organ built by Ernest M. Skinner and installed in 1938 was considered to be a crowning achievement of American organ building. It was superbly voiced to fill the length and breadth of the one-hundred-and-fifty-foot long Great Choir, side chapels, and the north transept. It had seventy-eight-hundred pipes. In 1957 the console (keyboards and control center of the organ) had worn out completely, and the cathedral was just at the beginning of the first large expansion of space since 1938 - addition of the South Transept and additional height and two more bays of the Nave. It was time to begin planning the organ for the future, and so did Dean Sayre order it.

The job that was before us was to envision and specify the organ that would someday be needed to "sound" the completed cathedral from east to west and north to south; to design and build the new console that would control the future, finished instrument; and to lay out the time frame to propose, fund, plan, and complete such a project. All of that was to be accomplished

by cathedral people, under cathedral management.

A consortium was formed that lasted for thirty-three years. Some members were on the staff, some chief advisors, technicians, and others of special abilities were attached for the space of time needed to see particular work improved upon or new work added. The whole grand scheme, now 10,800 pipes, was completed in ample time for the Consecration in 1990. The cathedral organ today is not the work of one company or a committee, nor any individual. It is the result of a continuing and changing consortium whose uniquely gifted members accepted the excellent work of those before them, and enlarged and created upon that foundation, knowing it to be a responsibility worthy of their finest efforts.

In 1962-64 as the Gloria in Excelsis tower grew, the addition of the fifty-three bell Kibbey Carillon and the ten-bell ring above it increased the making of music in both dimension and kind. The ringing of the peal changes could be heard for a couple of miles downwind, and the melodies of the carillon could be the softest of sounds or the most jubilant. And so, as the growing building demanded more music-making facility, it was added generously, wisely, and in good proportion.

The music of the cathedral was never created to be a "mission" to the city of Washington, yet, without intention, a grace and a pattern formed in the nation's capital. The font of music at the cathedral irrigated the city for the seedlings that would become the Washington Opera Society, the Choral Arts Society, and the many fine singing groups that gladden singers and listeners all around the area. The music flowed out of the transepts to summer concerts. It played for dancers in the crossing and carilloned and pealed from the Gloria in excelsis tower.

The music also spills out of the hearts and voices of thousands of young people in visiting choirs from all over America who come to sing preludes. Guest organists and instrumentalists play recitals. The students in our own schools were singing spiritual songs in their chapel services here before the Foundation Stone was laid, and have continued to do so ever since.

The cathedral music has washed like great healing seas over the aroused emotions of storms of people who came to the cathedral during the sixties and seventies. In sorrow and outrage they protested civil injustice and decried war. On those occasions all of the cathedral resonance sounded, and the music of the people was a part of it; and all of the bells and organs were heard, along with the guitars and folk singers who sang songs not in the Anglican tradition. But that was of no matter, for the cathedral's

invisible, spiritual power caused the people to sing and clap, and then join hands and sway back and forth, intoning great hymns of conscience and impressive resolution . And the massive stone columns seemed "to move", and to sing, "Dona nobis pacem"—
Grant us thy peace.

The newest change to enrich our tradition of cathedral music is immeasurable. In churches throughout the Anglican Communion, girls and women have been added to the music making — ~~not just sprinkled in among the boys, or Sunday school~~ choirs, but formed as choirs with separate identities and responsibilities, and equal liturgical leadership. Bruce Neswick is our first cathedral musician with that job. He is worthy. Alleluia and, Amen say I.

The music of the cathedral is born of human occasions. People rejoicing, mourning, inspired, laughing. Responsive to the human need for harmony and spiritual refreshment, its music fills the cathedral with warmth and ever expands the fabric beyond its parameters.

Music and cathedrals can never be "frozen". Love of God and song are too much in the human heart to be static.