

CATHOLIC + SAN FRANCISCO



Performers at the 2015 Northern California Pueri Cantores choral festival included the St. Mary's Cathedral Choir.

150-plus Children Sing in Sacred Music Festival at Cathedral

March 25th, 2015

By Valerie Schmalz

More than 150 children from as far as Los Angeles and Monterey joined with children from St. Mary's Cathedral choirs for a daylong Pueri Cantores music festival March 14, continuing a Vatican music tradition begun in 1944.

The day of intensive music training led by a professional choir director culminated in a 5:30 p.m. Mass celebrated by Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone.

Archbishop Cordileone praised the singers, choir directors, parents and festival organizers for "instilling right worship of God."

"They are looking to do their very best and to bring their gifts to God during the course of the Mass," said Richard Robbins, the choral director who led the Pueri Cantores rehearsals and conducted the children singing during the Mass. "We have the kids for one day. We work really hard."

"I like singing," said Sophie, 9, who came to the festival with the San Carlos Cathedral Children's Choir of Monterey. "We get to sing different songs and we get to sing verses."

Pueri Cantores or children singers in English is the official student choral organization of the Catholic Church, said Jan Schmidt, executive director of the American Federation Pueri Cantores which organized the March 14 event. Pueri Cantores is designed to instill a love of God and of sacred liturgical music, Gregorian chant and modern liturgical music, Schmidt said. "A desire to sing is the only requirement!" the website, pcchoir.org, states. Plainchant, Renaissance, Baroque, Romantic, and Modern liturgical music set within the rich tradition of the Catholic Church are part of the repertoire, according to its website. Young people of all faiths and beliefs are welcomed.

The students are invited to participate in a papal Mass Jan. 1, 2016 with Pope Francis where thousands Pueri Cantores students are expected to sing, she said.

Robbins, who is director of choral activities at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, leads two festivals a year for the American Federation Pueri Cantores. About 10 festivals, which include a day of rehearsals

and a Mass with children's choirs who come together for the first time that day, are held throughout the United States annually.

The students arrive already familiar with the music and prepared by their choir directors, and they have only three one-hour sessions in which to rehearse together, Robbins said. "They put together all the music for the Mass and all of the music for the preludes. It is really an amazing task," Robbins said. Most of the participants this year were from grades 5-8, but a few were younger and a handful of high school students also participated.

The American Federation Pueri Cantores Northern California Choral Festival and Mass included three choirs associated with St. Mary's Cathedral, as well as the Trinity Prep Choir from Napa, and choirs from Monterey, Santa Cruz, Stockton, the East Bay and even Los Angeles.

Local participating choirs were the San Francisco Archdiocesan Children's Choir and the Saint Brigid School Honor Choir, directed by Dr. Christoph Tietze, which are based at St. Mary's Cathedral and the Golden Gate Boys Choir, directed by Steve Meyer. The Golden Gate Boys Choir is officially headquartered in Hayward but rehearses every Monday evening at the cathedral and frequently sings there.

In the last 10 years, the festival has alternated between St. Mary's Cathedral, Mission Dolores Basilica, St. Joseph's Cathedral in San Jose, and the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, Tietze said.

"Pueri Cantores chooses good music for its festivals. The music is well suited to the liturgy, beautiful, and always challenging," said Tietze, who noted another benefit is the children have a chance to meet children from other choirs. "The directors chosen for the festivals are nationally known artists who work well with children. My singers, and I also, always learn something new at these festivals."

This year the participating choirs, in addition to the ones associated with St. Mary's Cathedral, were: Christ the King Pueri Cantores, Los Angeles; Holy Cross Church Youth Choirs, Santa Cruz; Immaculate Heart of Mary Youth Choir, Brentwood; St. George School Choir, Stockton; and San Carlos Cathedral Children's Choir, Monterey.

For more information, pcchoirs.org.

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- See more at: http://catholic-sf.org/news_select.php?newsid=22&id=63376#sthash.d54pjf86.dpuf