

ORANGE COUNTY
CATHOLIC

VOICES JOINED IN SONG

2023 PUERI CANTORES SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA YOUTH CHORAL FESTIVAL AND MASS

BY ROSALIA RIPULLO 4/4/2023



DAVID BALL CONDUCTS THE DIOCESE OF ORANGE CHILDREN'S CHOIR DURING THE 2023 PUERI CANTORES SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA YOUTH CHORAL FESTIVAL AND MASS CELEBRATED ON MARCH 11 AT ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY IN SILVERADO CANYON. PHOTO BY IAN TRAN/DIOCESE OF ORANGE

St. Michael's Abbey shone from the inside out as the Children's Choir representing the Diocese of Orange and 18 additional school and parish children's and youth choirs from across Southern California joined voices at the 2023 Pueri Cantores Southern California Youth Choral Festival and Mass celebrated in March.

Organized by the American Federation of Pueri Cantores (AFPC), the national student choral organization of the Catholic Church, the March 11 festival marked the 18th year this event has been held in Southern California.

This year's gathering featured a number of Orange County choirs including St. Cecilia Catholic Church Youth Ensemble, Holy Family Choristers, St. John Paul II Polish Center Children's Schola, St. John the Baptist School Choirs, Mission Basilica School Choir, St. Michael's Abbey Schola and Serranade. Many youth choirs from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Diocese of San Diego also traveled to Orange County for this special event.

The festival and Mass were part of the American Federation Pueri Cantores 2023 festival season, which includes 14 choral festivals across the country. At each festival location, hundreds of singers from different schools and churches around the region unite as one combined choir for a day of worship and singing of the beautiful music from the Church's rich historical repertoire.

The festivals are the culmination of months of preparation from the individual choirs and are led by nationally recognized Catholic conductors/educators who engage and inspire the choristers, bringing the music to life.

This year, 315 young singers and their choir directors filled the pews of St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado Canyon. With guest conductor Melanie Malinka at the helm, they rehearsed this sacred music with the combined choir to then lend their voices to the 3 p.m. Mass celebrated Fr. Edmund Page.

Overseeing the event was Orange County-based program director, Kathleen Prina of AFPC.

"The mission of Pueri Cantores centers around educating and evangelizing young singers across the U.S. through the medium of sacred music, aiding them in growing their faith and rooting them ever deeper to the Church," she said.

Prina added, "These festivals are an opportunity to introduce our young people to the power and beauty of sacred music, and through them, enrich the lives of their families and communities."

Accompanying the combined choir on organ and collaborating with conductor Melanie Malinka was Christ Cathedral's organist and head of music ministry, David Ball.

Ball also brought the Diocesan Children's Choir to participate in the festival.

"Before these festivals, each choir prepares the pieces for months in advance," said Ball. "While hearing one choir sing a piece, there is something extra special – extra impressive, about experiencing hundreds of young singers coming together raising their voices in prayer."

Ball regularly conducts the Children's Choir at the Cathedral, so he can attest to the many hours each choir spends to prepare the young singers.

As for the culmination of the annual event, he said, "It's a completely different, unique experience both for the listener and for the singers."

Thanks to the Abbey's reverberating acoustics, the experience was magical.

"Romanesque architecture with its rounded ceiling and full length add vibrancy and life to music," said V. Rev. Chrysostom Baer of St. Michael's Abbey.

"When we chant, there are always several seconds of echo."

Nationally and internationally, Pueri Cantores has succeeded in bringing together youth choirs and uniting their young voices in cathedrals and historic churches of the Catholic Church. Pueri Cantores believes that encounters with sacred music can have a

profound and lasting impact on the lives of young people. In addition, Pueri Cantores offers resources and educational opportunities for conductors to bolster their knowledge and training. To learn more, visit www.pchoirs.org

Last year, the Diocese of Orange hosted the regional Southern California festival at Christ Cathedral. Founded in 2016, the Diocesan Children's Choir of Orange complements the Diocesan Adult Choir.

Through these choir groups, the liturgical musicians represent people from the entire Diocese of Orange.

According to Ball, "the children's choir is a perfect way for young singers from all over Southern California to be able to sing for Diocesan events for our bishop in our beautiful Christ Cathedral."

Any young person who loves to sing is invited to join, he said.

