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Choral music celebrated at cathedral festival



One of the many choirs from around the region performs at the New England Pueri Cantores festival held at the cathedral April 9. Courtesy photo

BOSTON -- Nearly 100 young voices from Catholic parishes all over New England filled the resonant nave of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross with the music of the faith at the 4:30 p.m. Mass on April 9, as the Archdiocese of Boston hosted the New England Pueri Cantores choir festival.

In the homily of the Mass, celebrant Father Jonathan Gaspar praised the children for their dedication and service to the liturgy.

The Pilot

Get the Catholic Perspective

"The beautiful music means nothing if it does not glorify God and if it doesn't make us all a bit more holy -- sanctified. What we do here today, what you young people have been doing all day in preparation for this Mass, is also meant to prepare us, all of us, for heaven, the eternal liturgy of worship and the Lamb," said Father Gaspar.

"And so we thank you, young singers, for helping us to prepare for heaven by hearing the voices of the angels here on earth. We ourselves have seen and heard, just as St. John did, what heaven looks like and sounds like. May our singing, our praying, and all of the sacrifices that we unite with this one perfect sacrifice on the Altar bring God the glory due His name, and may it bring us the grace to become holy by our participation in these Sacred Mysteries," he continued.

Pueri Cantores, the official international student choral organization of the Catholic Church, is headquartered in the Vatican and includes 40,000 singers in 37 countries. In January, about 2,000 Americans participated in the International Congress of Pueri Cantores in Rome, singing at a special concert for Pope Francis at Masses in the Vatican and surrounding regions.

The Boston festival featured choirs from parishes in New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and included St. John the Evangelist, Canton; the Choristers of St. Adelaide, Peabody; the Schola Cantorum of St. Paul's, Cambridge, St. Mary's, Norwalk, Conn., Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Hampton, N.H.; and the newly formed St. Nicholas Schola Cantorum from St. Joseph's Cathedral of Manchester, N.H.

Paul French, conductor of the renowned William Ferris Chorale and music director at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Chicago, served as the guest conductor, leading a full day of workshops and rehearsals which culminated

The Pilot

Get the Catholic Perspective

with a Prelude Concert and Festival Mass. Dr. Jonathan Wessler, assistant organist at St. Paul's, Cambridge, accompanied the entire festival and Mass, and cathedral organist Leo Abbott treated the participants to a postlude on the historic Hook and Hastings pipe organ in the cathedral gallery.

"It is just so exciting to bring together such a large number of young people to learn the hymns, chants, and sacred music of our Catholic tradition, from Praetorius to Mozart to the finest composers of our generation," said Michael Olbash, the director of the Choristers of St. Adelaide's, who also serves on the Board of Directors for the American Federation Pueri Cantores and has organized similar festivals around the country.

"This is an experience that Catholic students remember for a lifetime," he continued.

According to organizers, the next New England Pueri Cantores festival is scheduled to take place on April 29, 2017, and their goal is to include at least 300 Boston-area participants next year. The festival is open to all Catholic parishes and parochial schools, grades 4 to 12, and professional development credits are available for teachers who bring their school choirs. More information is available at www.pcchoirs.org or by contacting local coordinator Michael Olbash at olbash@post.harvard.edu.