An Oakwood University Presentation

The Aeolians

2012 Fall Concert | December 1, 2012
Oakwood University Church
5:00 pm
The Aeolians of Oakwood University was originally organized in 1946 by Dr. Eva B. Dykes. Since its inception, the choir has traveled widely, touching the hearts of both young and old with their inspirational singing. Subsequent conductors include: Mrs. Joni Pierre-Louis, Mr. Harold Anthony, Dr. Jon Robertson, Dr. Alma M. Blackmon, Dr. John Dennison, Dr. Ricky Little (a former Aeolian), Dr. Eurydice Osterman, Michele Cleveland, Lloyd Mallory, Julie Moore, Norman Crazy, Dr. Wayne Bucknor (a former Aeolian) and presently, Jason Max Ferdinand (a former Aeolian).

Directors have made considerable contributions over the years. Under the direction of Dr. John Dennison, the Aeolians performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and received flattering reviews. Under the direction of Dr. Alma M. Blackmon in 1973, the group was propelled into national and international prominence with the performance of over 200 concerts in the United States, Bermuda, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, and Canada. Performances at the 1980 General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists in Dallas, Texas, led to an invitation from the Polish SDA Church in Warsaw, Poland, to tour that country.

Motivated by the desire for international performances, the Aeolians competed successfully in a nationwide contest to become Friendship Ambassadors for the USA. Under the sponsorship of the Friendship Ambassadors Foundation of New York City, the choir toured Romania (1981) and Great Britain (1983).

Aeolian concerts present a repertoire of choral music which ranges from the Baroque era to the twenty-first century. The Aeolians moreover are an authoritative exponent of Negro spirituals and Work songs which express the yearnings of their forefathers to be free. This is demonstrated in their early album of Negro spirituals, “Oh Freedom” (1974), which sold over 10,000 copies.

Under the God-inspired direction of Jason Max Ferdinand and accompanied on the piano by Dr. Wayne Bucknor, Chairperson of the Music Department of Oakwood University, the choir has placed “first” two years in a row (2010 & 2011) in the iSing HBCU Challenge hosted by Reid Temple AME Church in Lanham, Maryland. In December 2011, they were presented with the keys to the City of Huntsville, with December 3rd being a day named in their honor.

In January 2012, as part of the Russia-US Bilateral Presidential Commission on development of cooperation between Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama, the Aeolians were invited to sing in Moscow, Russia, at the Moscow International Performing Arts Center under the patronage of the US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul. God used this choir in a mighty special way.

Topping off a stellar 2011 - 2012 performance season, the Aeolians competed at the 7th World Choir Games held in Cincinnati, OH. On their first-time entrance to these competitions, they earned gold medals in all three categories of entrance and the overall championship for the Spiritual category.

This choir has been truly blessed and for this they are thankful.
In August of 2008, Mr. Ferdinand returned to his alma mater Oakwood University to take the helm of the celebrated choral program there. He directs the world renowned Aeolians.

Mr. Ferdinand is married to the former Koretta Samuel and they have been married for nine years.
Praise the Lord, Hallelujah
Hallelujah (From the Mount of Olives)
Alleluia
Ludwig Beethoven
Randall Thompson

Praise the King of Heaven
How Great Thou Art
Psalm 57
Arr. Dan Forrest
John Tebay

Give Us Peace
Da Pacem Domine
He Gives Me Joy
John Purifoy
Arr. Tom Fettke

Bible Stories I
Didn’t It Rain
Joshua
Arr. Donald Dillard
Arr. Norman Luboff

Tribute to Living Composer
Steal Away
Amazing Grace
Arr. Diedre Robinson
Arr. Diedre Robinson

Bible Stories II
Signs of the Judgment
Daniel, Daniel, Servant of the Lord
Arr. Mark Butler
Arr. Undine Smith Moore

Christmas Spirit
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
Joy To the World
Arr. Greg Jasperse
Arr. Frank Kuykendall

Some Things We Have Not, Because We Ask Not
Take It To the Lord in Prayer
If I Can Help Somebody
Adapted by Nolan Williams
Arr. Nathan Carter

FINALE
If you think that our performance begins on the stage, you’re wrong! This is where it really begins – right here, in this rehearsal. Put your game face on – right now!”

— Aeolian alum Jared Rosborough, choral conducting grad student, Georgia State University, to his fellow male choristers

It Almost Didn’t Happen. Jason Max Ferdinand admitted it. So did Wayne Bucknor.

Wayne: “We did not know about this thing (World Choir Games) – or the huge significance of it – until this May, just weeks ago.”

Max: “Had I known, I would’ve started preparing them for it, at least starting right after Moscow (January).”

It’s a question of: “Who are we anyway?”

In its first-ever international choral competition the Aeolians, the lone choir from Alabama and Seventh-day Adventism, won three coveted prizes.

1. The first prize for Ear Training of New Music.
2. Second prize in the Contemporary Music category.

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The un-familiar landscape and the politics of being new- and late-comers to international competition.

According to the Adventist News Network: “Earlier in the summer the Ateoles’ participation, with Mordecai-like reasoning, Esther 4:14: “For if you keep silent at this time, . . . And who knows whether you could learn something, here.”

Aeolians’ participation, with Mordecai-like reasoning, Esther 4:14:

“Ay, that we may think to melt our individual yet corporate iceballs of uncertainty:

• 15,000 choristers, comprising
• 362 choirs, representing
• 64 countries and 22 U.S. states, competing in
• 23 different musical categories, performing in
• 5 competition venues, throughout
• Music-saving Cincinnati – the home to Kathleen Battle, Rosemary Clooney, Doris Day, Idey Brothers, Drew and Nick Lachey and 98 Degrees, Peter Frampton, Antonio “L.A.” Reid and us baby boomers’ black-and-white TV fixture, Roy Rogers! – The first time this event is being held in North America, and facilitated by

“Hey, guys: we don’t have a whole lot of time; start warming up – y’know, speaking in tongues” outside our rehearsal doors, ready to intone, on cue.

But when we sing, don’t stand with your back to the world, but approach the world stage, to politically polite applause.

The first selection, “Seven-Fold Amen.”

The second selection, “The Holy City.”

The third selection, “The Holy City.”

Sung to normally-uproarious church throngs who egg on both Maestro Max and his Musicians into thrice-repeated chorus refrains to end this otherwise “speaking in tongues” outside our rehearsal doors, ready to intone, on cue.

The first selection, “Seven-Fold Amen.”

To witness such a wonderful event, which I will cherish for years to come.

Our un-paid/un-scholarshipped/summer-break-aborted Oakwood choristers nonetheless initiated greening their a cappella adversaries with high-fives, as all were shuttled in and out of holding-to-rehearsal-rooms-to-soundcheck-auditorium under the ever-clipped-board, stopwatching police lest the assigned volunteers; and

... As well as added a highly-recommended entering freshman, Chad Lupoe from Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy’s choir.

Finally, for the contemporary music category. Max decided to resurrect “Glorious Dawning,” from an Aeolians 2008 CD project – but this Aeolians group had never sung it.

But how to learn this un-earthed song as well as still perform their now-mathedalled standards for world competition, at the 23rd hour?

According to the Adventist News Network: “Earlier in the summer break from school, the group practiced new songs for the competition individually. They later held group rehearsals remotely using Google+.

The third selection, “The Holy City.”

At rehearsal sites, walk-talkie and clipboarded, smiling volunteers would politely take our choral competition into, say, “Mayflower III,” reminding us all of the rigidly-timed 30-minute practice room dicta, as we’d politely usher our choral competitors into, say, “Mayflower III,”

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All 62 members met for a final rehearsal at the university campus the weekend before the competition.”

Advancing to the Battlefield, and eyeing the Competitors

Now, boarding a chartered bus at 4:00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 10, for an eight-hour pilgrimage into an international abyss, Oakwood’s eight-part harmonists manned-up to battle, with logos and pianissimos, their highly-experienced, competition-honed opponents.
The now-enthused patrons rose to their feet, ending their “freshman orientation” to our trademark Oakwood Sound with an uproarious ovation. “We nailed it,” beamed Dulan, punctuated with his clenched fist.

“Remember,” he eyeballed them, “the Levites were all males – so, who needed – just God! (Although, as the upcoming Andrews singers’ role, using the 2 Chronicles 20 account of King Jehoshaphat’s foursome was quick, focused and decisive, they did not miss the Clemmons to join their WCG gift-shopping spree. Because this herself a seasoned vocalist and formerly a juried competitor from her Norris, the Executive Director for Advancement & Development, choirs that win this thing each time,” assessed OU newcomer Ms. Kisha better. “But we still need to have a uniformed look – just like the other No Thursday competitions? Good. Therefore, no formal attire? Even more. As the choir opened with ‘Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,’” as he hummed and gummed the three verses and chorus. “That’s right, the men. We, brothers,” motioning with a hand-sweep to the female Aeolians, huddled in prayer across the room, “we must lead our women into battle – for the Lord.”

Everything was now different. Very different. Before the stopwatch returned, we quickly changed into our new world-stage uniforms: our various sky-blue, dark-blue, orange, green and white World Choir Games t-shirts – different colors, but one singular mindset: glorify God through His giftedness in us.

At the Concert called Friendship

Ironically, Thursday’s Friendship Concert at Washington Park was directly across from the Cincinnati Music Hall, the site of our third and final gold medal competition, against 15 competitors . . . on Friday the 13th. Mere handles to be leaped.

As the choir opened with ‘Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” a disheveled, gaunt and soiled bandana-wearing aged Blackman, upon hearing the song, snapped to attention, extended his arm in a late-60’s Black Power salute, and counseled the young black children seated between us, “Stand up! That’s the Black National Anthem,” as he hummed and gummed the three verses and chorus. For a moments-away mini-concert for a VIP outdoor-reception at the Theodore M. Berry International Friendship Park.

The air was totally electric, but I at once had to be very careful: I was subject to be electrocuted because I was crying so hard. The World Champion Aeolians of Oakwood University had arrived, Aha! And everybody knew it. Instantly. Simultaneously. The Holy City.

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“Remember,” he eyeballed them, “the Levites were all males – so, who sang the melody/soprano, alto, tenor and bass? That’s right, the men. Sometimes a good chance, they reasoned, to dress-rehearse and iron out some SSAATTBB kinks.

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The air was totally electric, but I at once had to be very careful: I was subject to be electrocuted because I was crying so hard.
The combined laidback/beachchair-and-a-brew and after-work Happy Hour crowd cranked up to its feet with thunderous applause. “You with this group!” an older black woman asked me. Yes m’m’am, I am. “Then, let me hug YOU!” While the black chairs and Amen-ed and thank-you-Jesus-ed the white wood andclapped unabashedly, shaking their heads at one of their rarely-sung 1892 hymns spanned with such precision and, yes, color.

Thank you, Henry Leck.

The recording industry succeeds by applying this triangular maxims: see them + hear them = buy them. Therefore, we “From Russia With Love” DVD hawkers didn’t need to “hawk” at all; we simply and silently held high the somber-blue DVD cases. Instantly – well, within seven minutes – crumbled and/or freshly-minted $20 bills consumed all of the 18 DVDs we brought to the Concert called Friendship.

“Where’s Oakwood University again?” “It is an all-black school!” “Seven days what?” “I got cousins there in Huntsville.” “Where y’all singin’ next!”

And “Simply marvelous” “How can I order that DVD?” “Is it an all-black school?” “Where’s Oakwood University, again?” “Is it an all-black school?”

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Away from our immediate families, Max and I each honed in on the perfect anniversary/birthday gifts, spelled G-O-L-D. Times two.

After Vilroy ushered us in hurriedly to a sumptuous lunch buffet at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherlands Plaza Hotel, we zoomed off to our Musica Contemporanea battlefield and our 20 competitors, back at the Masonic Temple.

The latter were singers hastily assembled by Jeremy Winston, a former Aeolian with Max and now an accomplished choral director at fellow UNCF school, Wilberforce University in Ohio. His 17 choristers, the Sunday Night Singers and the Jeremy Winston Chorale.

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First, and fist-pumping and cheering with all the pent-up fortissimo and streaking down from the nose-bleed seats in the rafters, and running right, with its trademark, “Come on down!” central aisle, in what appeared to be a remake of TV’s “The Price is All attention – people, still and video cameras, overhead Arena and a cacophonous noise erupted.

I instantly riveted my cell camera to the rear of the Arena, from where a dove descending upon its newly baptized Candidate – as were those since their founding in 1946, none were as heaven-sent – as like a monotone words spoken with a clipped accent: “The Champion in category 18, Spiritual, with 93 point 38 points – “

For all the divine lyrics that Aeolians have sung across the eight decades Forgive us, but our attention now fast-forwarded past the Honorable Mentions, Bronzes, Silvers (where Jeremy’s group just picked up another medalion, with a 72.63, and the Sunday Night Singers, too, nabbed a silver with a 76.13), and on to the Gold (where director Dr. Augustan Hill just received humbly a gold for Dennard).

...And maybe even a bit higher, more ethereal.

Hmmm... two HBEs awarded and now re-seated, ...the Sunday Night Singers relocated to Silver, ...maybe, just maybe –

For all the divine lyrics that Aeolians have sung across the eight decades since their founding in 1946, none were as heaven-sent – as like a dove descending upon its newly baptized Candidate – as were those monotone words spoken with a clipped accent: “The Champion in category 18, Spiritual, with 93 point 38 points – “

She paused for just a millisecond, that seemed like a millennium, tilting her head down and finished, “The Aeolians of O – “

And nothing else was heard.

I instantly revved my cell camera to the rear of the Arena, from where a cacophonous noise erupted:

All attention – people, still and video cameras, overhead Arena and klieg lights – traced those strides to the rear of the main floor’s wide central aisle, in what appeared to be a remake of TV’s, “The Price is Right,” with its trademark, “Come on down!”

Streaking down from the nose-bleed seats in the rafters, and running and fist-pumping and cheering with all the pen-up foracism and allege they could muster came Max’s Marauding Minstrels.

• First, the males bee-lined it to the larger center-stage victory standled by Eric Samson, carrying and waving that now-unfurled U.S. flag.
  • Then, the female Aeolians made quite a spectacle, running barefoot while gathering up their floor-length formal gowns in one or both hands; 
  • Next, “singing Levine” Richard Martin followed, swinging his white “terrible towel” in lassoing circles above his head; 
  • Several singers deftly sprinted forward while capturing both sights and sounds with smartphones, hand-tethered at arm’s length – and all the while cagily dodging quickly-scattering professional camerapersons;
  • Ingrid Ennis and Diedre Robinson kept pace successfully with these Olympic singer-turned-sprinters, and finally
  • Alum baritone Kayus Dare, “cheered up” the rear, sporting his ‘ol school high-top black Converse All-Stars!

While all the attention focused on victory groups’ center platform, Eric detoured to the smaller stage and encircled Ferdinand in the flag, then sandwiched himself between the World Spirituals Champion Maestro and the Manager, all of whom now fix their teary eyes on the Stars and Stripes now being hoisted mechanically in the rear, illuminated now by a single spotlight and celebrating singularly America’s gift to the world of spirituals: the Aeolians of Oakwood University, ... Huntsville, ... Alabama, ... USA, ... and now, The World.

As the entire audience stood with these now “Gold-olians” and sang “The Star-Spangled Banner,” for the first time in my life, this slave descendant wept unashamedly and un-apologetically while singing – “O’er the land of the free, EE...” as the soprannas modulated into the Orion on that last word’s new last syllable, ...

I laid for every Aeolian alum trailblazer; every Financial Aid Clearance stamp-ee; every Student Dining Hall sack-lunch maker; for the countless choir bus trips; every professor granting makeup exams for touring choir members; and for every sacrificing parent, music teacher and nameless/facless village-person who made this victory stage moment come true.

Now, I understand first-hand those quadrennial Olympians’ tears atop the three-tiered gold medal stands, when their national anthem is played. 

The finest, most enduring sight following the national anthem was seeing Richard Martin bear-hugging his flag-draped director and swinging him around in one revolution, like some weightless Raggedy Ann doll.

Eric then selflessly handed off to Kayus the Championship Trophy – an elegant 14-inch, bud-shaped cup adorned with a musical staff – who lifted it high above his head, for a photo opp.

And with a few closing words, the Seventh World Choir Games came to an end.

What a finale.
13 “Principles of Excellence” according to the Aeolians

GOD - Keep Him first. Let Him lead.

PRESENCE - Make yourselves known wherever you go but remember to be humble.

IDENTITY - Know who you are and what you represent.

VISUALS - Be visually appealing. Smile.

ENERGY - Keep the music energized with your diction and movement.

COHESIVENESS - You must gel together as a group. Be on one accord.

CONNECTIVITY - Learn to connect with each other inside & outside of choir settings.

MATURE - Remember that there is a time and a place for everything.

VULNERABILITY - Be malleable. Let the Holy Spirit use you.

POSITIVITY - Encourage one another. Have a positive attitude.

KINESTHETICS - Don’t be lazy! Keep it moving (spiritually, musically, physically, and mentally).

CONFIDENCE - Be sure that when you do your best, God will do the rest.

PROFESSIONALISM - Be professional. You represent God, OU, & your family.

AWARENESS - Pay attention. Be responsible for yourself as well as your fellow choir members.

TRUST - You have to trust your leader, section, and fellow choir members.