

Reflections...

*By David Mellnik*

I first met Charles Gatwood as a child at the Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly in Black Mountain. There he impressed on the youth of North Carolina the values of singing well, singing music that stands the test of time, and gathering people together from various backgrounds and beliefs and simply make something beautiful together. It seems natural that he would play an important role in forming the cooperation of churches which has become the Cary Community Choir.

When the time came for him to retire as Director of CCC, he and Kay Struffolino asked if I would step in. They were keen in their desire that the tradition that had been established in this community continue to flourish and grow. It is a tradition, not simply of singing a great piece of music each year, but singing it as a cooperative project of the Cary Community and not devolve into a single church's program. That is what makes this choir so unique: that even in a time of political and theological division, this community would come together each year and sing Messiah.

The orchestra which plays tonight is practically the same orchestra that played 18 years ago. They have returned year after year, often despite other performance opportunities available to them, to be an important part of this great tradition. They have been very gracious to me in my leading them. It was especially trying for them during my first performance. I perspired a great deal and about half way through the concert, I had to remove my glasses because a layer of salt had formed on the lenses and I couldn't see the music. They were on their own, though I continued to occasionally wave the baton.

The members of the Board of Directors have consistently worked throughout the year to develop a vision of what the Cary Community Choir could be. In the past 18 years they have incorporated, sought out consistent sources of funding, and navigated the twisting road of growth. Their efforts underpin the foundation of this choir's success. They have been a tremendous support to me, especially during trying times. The most memorable being their encouragement for me to direct following the death of my father three weeks before the performance in 2003. It has truly been an honor to work with these folks.

These singers gather each November from nearly 30 churches over 4 counties. They strive for excellence together, but most importantly, they come as an expression of their love of God, this music and this community. They return year after year. Some have never missed a performance, and many have participated for over 30 years. They have ranged in age from early teens to late 80's. The overwhelming majority of them are volunteers in their church choirs. Their singing is a testament to the level of musicianship represented throughout the worshipping Cary community.

We come from high church backgrounds and small country churches. Were we to try, we would not be able to agree on worship style, dogma or theology. There is no creed that would unite us save one – that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the core of why we sing and strive to continue the tradition established 48 years ago by a handful of church musicians

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