

Music
By Carol Abrahamson

From the beginnings of the Methodist Church, music has always been an important element of worship. John and Charles Wesley were prodigious hymn writers, whose hymns inspire us to this day. The Methodist Hymnal was created long before First Church was established in Lawrence. As was the custom in those days, the Methodist Hymnal of 1854 had no music, only text. The congregation usually knew the hymn tunes that fit the meter of the text. In 2004, our church uses three different hymnals with many different styles of hymns. Occasionally, words without music will be projected on a screen...shades of 1854.

Over the years and as musicians were available, the organ, piano, and other instrumental music became part of the long tradition of Methodist music. More recently, drums, guitars, and bells began to augment music in worship. Different styles of music began to be associated with particular worship service. Currently, the first and third services use the pipe organ, piano, and bells. The middle, or midmorning, service is planned by a worship team which consists of a "praise band" and designated singers to lead the congregation in singing.

Excellent musicians have served our church well in the last 50 years. Among them, many students and faculty of the University of Kansas music programs have participated in the planning and creation of our music worship. Some left our church for professional music careers. Others wrote or arranged music which our choirs were privileged to perform. Mitch and Jan Todd served First Church as youth directors during the 1990's but expanded their ministry to writing and singing their own lively contemporary songs during our services. We're grateful they shared their talents with us for a while before they graduated from seminary and took their own churches.

The music directors who have served First Church these past 50 years include:

1949-61	Gerald Carney (member of the KU faculty)
1961-62	John Hanson
1962-63	Robert Schaff
1963-67	Frank Purvis (now retired Junior High music teacher, current member of the Chancel Choir)
1967-69	David Bezona
1969-76	Hubert Carson (died during a church service, chancel piano was given in his memory)
1976-77	Ann Carson (wife of Hubert and public school music teacher)
1977-79	Don Frueh (employee of Reuter Organ)
1979-82	Phil Orlando (KU doctoral student at the time)
1982-83	Perry White (KU faculty member)
1983-85	Rob Reid (KU master's student)
1985-89	Beth Brabant-Norris (KU Ph.D. voice student)
1989-93	Joel Panciera (KU Ph.D. student, now at Boston Ave. UMC in Tulsa, Oklahoma)
1993-01	Rob Reid (back for a Ph.D. in choral conducting at KU)

2002-03 Sara Wentz (choir member, musician and FUMC staff), and Elizabeth Mulkey (choir member and public school music teacher)
2003-current John Paul Johnson (Director of Choral Music at KU)

Mid-morning worship music is currently led by Greg Hildenbrand and assisted by various musicians. Bennett Griffin has acted as percussionist consistently since the inception of the mid-morning contemporary service. Others assisting as of the Fall of 2003 include...

During the summer, as West Campus is being developed, outdoor worship has been conducted. Informal music, usually with guitar, has been an important part of these services.

For the last 40 years, Dan Abrahamson, church organist, has served as Chancel Choir accompanist for all but two of the directors and continues to serve in that way. His part in the development of our 4-manual Reuter pipe organ can be noted in the chapter entitled, "Our Pipe Organ". During 2004, an artistic series called "The First Annual Dan Abrahamson Concert Series at First United Methodist Church" will be conducted to honor Dan's 40 years of service.

In 2004, choir member Ken Pine celebrates 50 continuous years as a choir member. He was recognized with letters of celebration during the fall of 2003. Besides singing bass, Ken has chaired the music committee in the past and currently acts as choir librarian.

A variety and number of choirs and music programs have existed in First Church at various times during the last 50 years. Elementary age singers, have charmed us when a choir director for the age was available. The most long-lasting name for this age group was Angelus Choir; more recently XTreme Sound. There have been choirs for preschoolers as well. In decades past they were Cherubs; more recently Sunshine Singers. Currently, church music is taught children during Sunday Night Live sessions. Happy Chimers, a bell choir of developmentally disabled adults, performed under the direction of Shannon Renner, when she was a music therapy intern during the 1990's. Celebration Ringers, a bell choir of adults, has provided consistently high quality music for services since the bells were purchased in the 1980's. During the 1980's a flashy Youth Bell Choir astounded the church. Lady Belles, affectionately known as the Shady Ladies, older women with an interest in bells, still meet together to play just for fun and for an occasional performance. Happy Friends Adult Fellowship sings in church at least twice a year. These groups have been led by both volunteer and professional staff. Many names of volunteers are lost to memory; but their contributions were remarkable. All have contributed to the richness of worship music at First Church.

The Chancel Choir has shared a variety of major choral works through the years. Often that information has been lost from the written records. However, according to Dan Abrahamson's partial notes, major works have included the following:

Amahl & The Night Visitors	G.C. Menotti	1999 (with KU)
Cantata #150	J.S. Bach	
Ceremony of Carols	B. Britten	2002
Chichester Psalms	L. Bernstein	1982
Christmas Cantata	D. Pinkham	1992
Creation	F. Haydn	1993
Dona Nobis Pacem	R. Vaughn Williams	1997
Festival TeDeum	B. Britten	
Gloria	F. Foulenc	1978
Gloria	J. Rutter	1991
Gloria	A. Vivaldi	
Hodie	R. Vaughn Williams	1979
King David	A. Honegger	
Laud To The Nativity	O. Respighi	1987
Magnificat	J.S. Bach	1984
Mass in Ab	F. Schubert	1994
Messiah	G.F. Handel	1990
Missa Solemnis	L. vonBeethoven	2000
Peaceable Kingdom	R. Thompson	1969
Requiem	M. Durufle	1981/1989
Requiem	G. Faure	1992
Requiem	W.A. Mozart	1986
Seven Last Words	T. Dubois	2001

On June 7, 2004 some members of the First Church Chancel Choir will join more than 200 Civic Choir and KUChoral Department singers to perform the Durufle Requiem under the direction of John Paul Johnson at Carnegie Hall in New York City. During Rob Reid's second tenure, our choir performed the Mozart Requiem in Lied Center with the Plymouth Congregational choir and the Lawrence Civic Choir.

The music program is always evolving. Until Rob Reid's second tenure, the position was only part-time. The last half of Rob's time with us was as fulltime Minister of Music. However, after Rob left, the transition period led the church to re-institute the part-time position. Our current part-time director of music leads the Chancel Choir and Celebration Ringers and assists with worship planning and other music projects in the church as they arise.



Ph

A
ng

R

De