

He Granted Life: Choirs shine in Paschal presentation

EASTERN CHRISTIAN CHOIRS PERFORM, CAPACITY CROWD ATTENDS INAUGURAL EVENT AT CATHEDRAL

Bells pealed joyously at precisely 3:00 p.m. Sunday, April 18 as choristers processed into the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Munhall, Pa. to present "He Granted Life: Songs of Pascha." The much-anticipated program featured the host Pittsburgh Byzantine Catholic Archeparchial Choir (PBCAC) and four choirs from Eastern Orthodox churches in the Pittsburgh area.

Metropolitan Archbishop Basil, hierarch of the Byzantine Catholic (Ruthenian) Archeparchy of Pittsburgh sat alongside Metropolitan Nicholas of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA as Archpriest Dennis M. Bogda, rector of the Cathedral welcomed the capacity crowd. Clergy, religious and faithful from a number of eastern traditions filled the pews and loft, awaiting the presentation of each participating choir.

Beginning the program was the Choir of St. Peter and St. Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Carnegie, Pa. (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA), pastored by Father Steve Repa. Director Cynthia Mycyk led the choir in beautiful renditions of beloved classical and traditional Paschal hymns, including four selections from the Paschal Canon and "Christos Voskres" by Turchianov. The colorful and intricate Ukrainian embroideries worn by the members of the choir also added warm visual beauty to their presentation.

The Byzantine Choir of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Pittsburgh, Pa. (Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America), where Father

John Abdalah is Dean, then gathered in the presentation area in front of the iconostasis. The choir's music was composed by members or modeled after Byzantine Chant melodies of Mitri el-Murr, (1880-1969), the Protosaltis (first cantor) of the

One by one, the audience arose in their pews, moved to tears of joy at the magnificent sound of nearly 100 voices of different traditions singing as one in prayerful harmony.

Patriarchate of Antioch, who was the first to write troparia in Arabic in Byzantine notation. Dramatically dressed in black, the six young singers, under the direction of Stephen Esper, filled the Cathedral with an intriguing, prayerful sonority as they sang in ancient chant style extolling the glorious Resurrection.

Metropolitan Nicholas, accompanied by Father Robert Buczak of St. Nicholas Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church in Homestead smiled and nodded with approval as director Andrew Talarovich, Jr. led the St. Nicholas Church Choir to the presentation area. Attired in classic white and black, the 20 men and women presented a jubilant program of Paschal and liturgical music, expertly sung in a variety of

languages and styles, from English and Church Slavonic to Serbian and Greek. Director Talarovich invited the audience to join in and sing some of the more familiar tunes, which they did with joy and enthusiasm.

Very Reverend Father Paul Suda, Dean of St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral (Orthodox Church of America), Allison Park, Pa., took the podium to introduce his church's choir, directed by Mrs. Larice Nescott. Father Paul reminded Metropolitan Basil that in 2011 the Gregorian and Julian calendars will once again coincide for the Feast of the Resurrection, and joked, "start planning!" It was evident that the St. Alexander Choir enjoy sharing their faith and traditions via their well-rehearsed and resonant voices as they sang four-part arrangements by Glagolev and Balakirev, and various renditions of "Christ is Risen" in English, Slavonic, Serbian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Arabic, and Greek musical styles.

The Archeparchial Choir was the final group to perform their songs of Pascha. Led by director Darlene Fejka, the PBCAC, comprised of parishioners from 20 different churches of the Archeparchy, presented a flowing program of hymns and praises, beginning with the "Hymn of the Resurrection" from Paschal Matins. The 35-member choir also sang troparia of the Paschal season and several arrangements of "Christos Voskres - Christ is Risen" with their usual passion and exuberance, concluding their portion of the program.

Director Fejka then invited all choirs to gather in the performance area to sing an Eastern Christian repertory

standard, "The Lord's Prayer" by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The reaction was profound. One by one, the audience arose in their pews, moved to tears of joy at the magnificent sound of nearly 100 voices of different traditions singing as one in prayerful harmony.

In response, Metropolitan Basil addressed the congregation, thanking them for attending, and commending each choir and their directors for their inspired performances. Metropolitan Nicholas also offered words of thanks and commendation. Following the reading of an excerpt from the Paschal homily of St. John Chrysostom by Metropolitan Basil, the combined choirs sang Dmitriy Bortniansky's "Blessed Be the Name of the Lord" and offered "Many Years" following intonation for blessings by both Metropolitans.

The program concluded with a resounding simple-chant version of "Christ is Risen," sung in the vernacular of each participating Church. A hospitality reception, hosted by the Archeparchy and coordinated by the Cathedral, immediately followed at the Cathedral Center. Choirs and attendees - including many clergy and religious - socialized and enjoyed a buffet of hors d'oeuvres, desserts and refreshments.

Pascha will be celebrated by both Catholics and Orthodox on April 24 in 2011. Plans are in the works to set a mutually available date for an encore presentation of the glorious songs of Pascha. ■

*Photos pages 6-7
Michael Haritan Photography*



Attendees and participating choirs of "He Granted Life: Songs of Pascha" listen to the presentation by the choir of St. Nicholas Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church.

page 7 photos, top to bottom, left to right:

- Metropolitan Basil addresses participants and attendees.
- Pittsburgh Byzantine Catholic Archeparchial Choir performs.
- Combined performance of all five participating choirs.
- Metropolitan Nicholas offers greetings.
- Byzantine Choir of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral entrances the audience.
- Combined choirs sing "The Lord's Prayer."
- Cynthia Mycyk directs the choir of St. Peter and St. Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church.
- Larice Nescott leads the St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral Choir.
- Father Paul Suda at the speaker's podium.
- Stephen Esper (*center*) directs the Byzantine Choir of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral.
- PBCAC Director Darlene Fejka.
- Combined choirs sing "Blessed be the Name of the Lord."
- Cantor and Director Andrew Talarovich (*front left*) leads the choir of St. Nicholas Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church.



HE GRANTED LIFE

SONGS OF PASCHA



Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Munhall, Pa.
Sunday, April 18, 2010



Michael Hartman Photography