

Festival celebrates spirit and joy of Moravian music

In July, Winston-Salem rang with the sounds of handbells, trombone choirs, bands, orchestras and choral groups all celebrating the joy and spirit that is Moravian music.

For an entire week, more than 300 singers, musicians and fans of Moravian music came together for the 25th Moravian Music Festival. Hosted at Home Moravian Church, the Festival saw attendees learn, rehearse and perform dozens of musical pieces featuring Moravian composers from the earliest days of the Unity through today.

An ongoing tradition

The 25th Music Festival continued its ongoing tradition of offering opportunities for musicians and singers at all levels to learn more about Moravian music, practice and hone skills and techniques, and perform with talented conductors and players from around the world. This year's Festival included people from 19 states and six countries.

Festival-goers participated in a wide variety of workshops and learning opportunities. Singers learned and practiced vocal technique to promote healthy and beautiful singing. Composers and arrangers were introduced to modern music software and the music editing and publishing process. For choir directors and worship planners, the Festival offered workshops on inviting youth into singing opportunities, melding contemporary music into worship, music for smaller choirs, worship planning and conducting. Handbell players learned new skills, while those who were just beginning were introduced to this unique instrument. Additional workshops and lectures on composers, music history and more were also offered.

In addition to the workshops, musicians and singers worked with professional conductors and performers. Festival Conductor Dr. John Sinclair, a professor of music at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, led the Festival Choir and Orchestra. Throughout the week, Dr. Sinclair rehearsed a variety of choral and orchestra pieces for performance; in doing so, he helped participants learn new music, perfect their singing of the pieces and provided leadership for the Festival. In addition, he also taught conducting workshops; several of his workshop students led performances during a concert on Wednesday evening.

The Moravian Music Foundation has a long-standing relationship with Dr. Sinclair and the Rollins College music program. Dr. Sinclair served as the Conductor of Moravian Music Festivals since 1999. A number of Dr. Sinclair's students from Rollins College also attended this year's Festival.

On the band side, musicians worked with conductor Chris Wormald, an award-winning band conductor from the U.K. Throughout the week, Chris brought humor and expertise to rehearsals throughout the week, helping to prepare musicians for concerts on Thursday and Saturday.

Other music leaders for the week included Donna Rothrock, associate librarian and assistant professor of music at Salem College, who led the Trombone Choir; Deborah Rice, well-known clinician and director, who led the Handbell Choir; Anne Saxon, director of the children's and youth choir program at Home Moravian Church and Beth Juran, director of children's music at Maple Springs UMC in Winston-Salem, who led the Children's Choir; and Joni Roos, artist in residence at Rollins College, who served as chamber music coordinator. Susan Keck Foster, organist at Home Moravian served as festival organist, and Allen Frank from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania served as assistant band director.

A week of concerts

While learning and rehearsing are major parts of the Festival week, it's the performances that really make the week. Each night, singers and musicians shared their talent and hard work with Moravian music fans through a series of concerts held in different venues around Winston-Salem.

The opening night Festival Lovefeast, with a capacity crowd at Home Moravian, featured singing of favorite Moravian hymns and anthems, along with performances by vocal soloists. A full lovefeast was served by the diners and servers at Home Moravian.

Monday night featured a concert called "Loveliest Immanuel, an Elegant Evening," held at Trinity Moravian Church. The concert included works by Johan Friderich Peter, Christian Gregor, Antonio Rosetti, Christian Ignatius Latrobe and other Moravian composers. Works were sung by soloists accompanied by strings, woodwinds and horns. This concert was the first time several of these works had been performed in modern times.

Tuesday night, festival goers enjoyed a concert by the Salem Band on Salem Square. Wednesday night featured a Moravian Anthem Sing, with pieces by both classical and modern Moravian composers. Several of the pieces were conducted by students in the conducting workshop.

Thursday's concert, held in a full Calvary Moravian Church, featured performances by a large trombone choir and the Festival Band under the direction of Chris Wormald.

On Friday afternoon, the children attending this year's Festival performed at Home Church. The performance was the culmination of a week of music lessons and activities, including making sugar cake, tin candle holders, and visits to local historic sites. That evening, the Festival Chorus and Orchestra, under the direction of Dr. Sinclair, performed a variety of orchestral and choral pieces at Winston-Salem State University. During the concert, the Music Foundation presented its 2017 Moramus Award for "outstanding contributions to American Moravian Music and the work of the Moravian Music Foundation" to Susan Keck Foster.

Prior to each concert (and many other times throughout the Festival), musicians gathered to provide prelude bands. This was the first time many of these Moravians from around the country had the opportunity to play together.

Being a Moravian Festival, each day included worship and devotions. As many in attendance have never experienced the Easter Morning Sunrise Service in Winston-Salem, one morning's worship featured the Easter Morning liturgy, followed by a procession to God's Acre and a "mini" Easter Sunrise service.

The Festival concluded with a Saturday morning Singstunde, including performances by the handbell choir, Festival Band, trombone choir, string ensembles and more. At the close, Nola Knouse, director of the Moravian Music Foundation, invited all those in attendance to the next Moravian Music Festival, to be held in Bethlehem in 2021.

Thoughts from participants

"After having organized some of our brass band and choir rallies in Europe (they last only for three days), I was very curious to have this experience of a week," said Hans Beat Motel, who came with four other participants from Germany. "I think that this festival in Winston-Salem was a great event: very well prepared, with good and interesting music and

professional musical leaders. To have a whole week is really something else than to gather for a short time; it needs your commitment and concentration and the rewards are valuable. Musically, I gained insight in some of the excellent Moravian Music which here in Europe is not very well known, and I hope to get people here interested in this part of our heritage.” Hans sang in the choir and played tenor trombone in the Festival’s trombone choir. He also attended workshops, including one led by Jonathan Sidden on training men’s voices.

“At the festival, I sang in the choir and played handbells,” said Donna Ambler, who also serves as music director for Advent Moravian Church in Bethlehem. “This was a real treat for a music director, as we often don’t get a chance to sing or ring!

“Both directors (John Sinclair, choral director, and Deborah Rice, handbell director) were excellent,” said Donna. “We learned so much and it was a pleasure making music under their tutelage. One highlight of the festival for me was the chance to direct the orchestra and choral participants on the Moravian anthem, *Sing O Ye Heavens*, at the anthem sing on Wednesday evening. I participated in the Advanced Directing workshops led by John Sinclair; seven of us were randomly chosen to direct a piece at the anthem sing. I was nervous, but it was a fabulous experience. Most Moravian music directors do not have an orchestra or a 200+ voice choir to direct!

“Besides making music, another important aspect of the Festival is connecting with the people who come from many different states and countries. All of the participants are like family, whether we knew them for awhile or just met them at the festival. Our faith and love of music binds us together and God’s spirit is evident among us.

“I attended the Festival in Bethlehem four years ago, I couldn’t wait for this one in Winston-Salem and now I’m looking forward to the 2021 Festival!” said Donna. “Not only is there great music-making, but I learn new things each time. It’s a wonderful way for people to see and hear the collection of Moravian music that the Foundation publishes. Thank you to the Festival committee and the staff of the Moravian Music Foundation for all their hard work.”

“This year’s festival was great!” said Matthew Allen, pastor of Olivet Moravian Church in Winston-Salem, who sang tenor in the chorus. Matthew also serves on the Moravian Music Foundation’s Board of Trustees. “Each festival is special in its own way. I

have attended two previous festivals, one in Charlotte and one in Bethlehem. I particularly loved the selection of music for the chorus this year. I really enjoyed the anthem sing on Wednesday and the band concert on Thursday, and my favorite performance was the Friday night concert with chorus and orchestra. I sang in the chorus, which made it special. It was also great to see old friends and catch up as well as meet new people. I am always spiritually blessed at music festivals.

“Music brings me closer to God and it is a rewarding way to express my faith,” continued Matthew. “A whole week of Moravian music fills my soul.”

“Every minute of the Festival brought me blessings,” said JoAnn Cleland, who travelled from Arizona with her cello to attend this year’s Festival. JoAnn’s father, Joseph Schwager, was a Moravian minister, while her mother, Vardis, served on many Moravian boards and organizations. “One moment is etched indelibly in my mind. As we sang ‘Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice’ I looked at little children, teenagers, young parents, strong leaders, aging members and disabled folks, all joining the joyful celebration. After the hymn ended I meditated, marveling that every one of us was being personally led by our Shepherd and Savior, and lovingly accepted into His fold. He holds our past, present and future in His hands. What a wonderful reason for us to unite in rejoicing!”

“John Sinclair offered many techniques for both choral and instrumental music, but always with emphasis on the message. In intriguing ways he and Nola kept us spiritually connected while easing humor into their presentations, a delivery style I want to incorporate more fully into my teaching.”

“The bonding in Moravian friendship still rings in my heart,” said JoAnn. “I cherish the hugs from the Rollins students, the kind greetings of people from my past Moravian life, the sense of Christian community as music drew together musicians from around the country and the world, and the opportunity to raise united praises to our Lord with heartfelt gladness.”

And Margaret Norris of Winston-Salem shared this letter to the Festival planners: “I just need you to know...

“This past Sunday, before the beginning of the Moravian Music Festival, I suggested to my 15-year-old boy that he dust off his tuba before sitting down with the festival band.

“Mom”, he said, matter-of-factly, “I don’t even want to go to this. You just signed me up.”

End of conversation. No pre-practice. At least the boy was going.

As we moved through the week, I noticed...

- He was waking up his older brother to catch a ride to Old Salem—not the other way around.
- He would tell me when all of his practices were. He was making sure he would be there.
- After the first overwhelmed day, he would say things like, “The band director is really funny.” “We’re playing these songs...”
- He energetically shared adventures from the youth afternoon tours.
- On Thursday, he sent a text from Calvary Moravian: “I’m here, Mom”. What? He felt comfortable traveling with band mates independently to the performance site.
- He wanted to arrive early to the pre-performance rehearsal.
- He wanted to wear a t-shirt expressly to irritate his band director (which, by the way, is the highest form of flattery in 15-year-old-boy-land).
- And then, the piece-de-la-resistance: “When is this conference next time? Can I go?”

And so, I sit here, gape-mouthed on this last morning of the festival (with just a little more time before his requested wake-up time. “I want to get to practice early, Mom.”) You all have poured heart and soul into this week. In the process, you have turned my tepid tuba player into an enthusiastic festival attendee. It has exceeded all of our expectations. And I thank you.”

The 26th Moravian Music Festival will be held in Bethlehem Pennsylvania in the summer of 2021.

Include with photos and quotes from MMF survey