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RELIGION

Church organ players becoming rare

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GRAND FORKS, N.D. — Churches throughout the world are resonating with the sound of Christmas hymns this time of year, but fewer and fewer organs are playing a role in the music, a music professor says.

"It's a problem," said Lawrence Ritchey, professor of music and university organist at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. "The simple

answer is that there is very little interest in studying organ. But the bigger problem is that churches, in Canada and the United States, have contributed a lot to this over the years because they've lost sight of the fact that you have to encourage youngsters."

Ritchey, who is also organist and choirmaster at All Saints' Church in Winnipeg, said churches must take steps to encourage youngsters to learn the organ.

"It might mean providing some kind of scholarship for youngsters, underwriting the cost of lessons," he said. "But I don't think we can expect anyone to become an organist if they don't get a chance to try. If I never hold a clarinet in my hands, I will never know if I would like to play the clarinet."

He sees hopeful signs when young people are given a chance.

"The interest at recitals that

teenagers have is quite striking," Ritchey said. "It is an instrument that captivates and interests teenagers because of the possibilities of it. It's called the king of instruments because you virtually have an orchestra at your fingertips."

Jon and B.J. Hendricks, twin teens from Stephen, Minn., like that potential. Last summer, they started organ lessons after several years of piano lessons. They

practice four or five hours a week, between school and basketball and other pursuits.

Their teacher is Karen Brolin, who has taught organ for 35 years in several Minnesota communities. She has seen a decline in the number of organists.

The busy lives of the Hendricks twins illustrate why it's difficult for children today to find time for organ.

"I do think the athletics in the schools certainly have cut

into it," Brolin said. "Of course, they don't have the instrument in their homes, and it seems harder and harder to get over to practice. Families are more mobile and often gone for the weekend."

Sue Kerr, one of the best and busiest church organists in Grand Forks, spent her weekends as a teen-ager 30 years ago taking a bus 30 miles to get organ lessons every Saturday and playing in

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Darlene Williams (right photo, center) was one of 6,500 people who attended the 55th annual National Inspirational Youth Convention of the Church of God held Dec. 27-30 at the New Charlotte Convention Center. Rev. Richard Prim (below, left photo), is president of the convention.



PHOTOS/ ANDREA RICHARDS

Below, vendors, along with workshops, concerts and worship services, made the convention a learning experience for many who attended.



Youth convention brings hope

By Andrea R. Richards
THE CHARLOTTE POST

More than 6,500 youngsters poured into Charlotte last week.

Not to attend a rap concert or a Hornets game, but to do something unusual. For teenagers to do this out-of-the-norm activity, some parents would consider it quite rare.

Richard Nelson, 14, journeyed from New York to join the mass movement.

"I just hope to have fun and be the best I can be in the Lord," he said.

Nelson joined a stampede of young Christians who participated in the 55th annual National Inspirational Youth Convention of the Church of God held Dec. 27-30. NIYC is the largest Christian youth convention in the country. About 6,500 people attended the event at the new Charlotte Convention Center.

The theme was "The Battle is the Lord's."

The purpose of the convention is to empower young African Americans, said the Rev. Richard D. Prim, NIYC president and pastor of the Freeman Avenue Church of God in Kansas City, Kan.

"Our church believes in education," he said. "We believe that's one of the keys to fighting the battle that's being waged in America."

Each year, the convention gives 150-200 academic scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2,500. Students are also allowed access to a computer database to search for other available scholarships.

"We have learned that many black kids are not aware of all the funds that are available to them," Prim, 41, said. "Unfortunately, the institutions do not tell them everything. We've learned that

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Sunday School Lesson

The servant's call

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-9

This is a Service Organization," read the sign in front of the church building.

For this congregation these words were more than an empty slogan. A drug rehabilitation center, an orphanage, a nursing home, a lunch-hour Bible study for businessmen, and a halfway house for troubled youth were just a few of the ways these believers had found to meet the needs of people in the name of Christ. When I asked the minister what inspired the church's many ministries, he replied, "We believe that when God calls us, He calls us to serve."

When these believers answered that call, they joined a great host of saints whom God has raised up to accomplish His purposes on earth. Throughout the history of God's kingdom on earth, God has honored His children by inviting them to share in the unfolding of His will. In this text from the book of Isaiah, we are introduced to one who personifies this biblical concept of servanthood.

Abraham, Moses, and David were among important biblical personalities who were referred to as God's "servant" as they performed deeds at His command. In the book of

Isaiah, the term servant is used once to describe the prophet himself (20:3), but most commonly it refers collectively to the nation of Israel (41:8; 44:2, 21; 45:4 48:20). The exiled Israelite nation, as they submitted to God's commands and performed His will, would become a faithful "remnant" (see 46:3) and function as His servant.

In Old Testament times, servants rarely initiated their own positions. Whether in a royal court or the household of a common citizen, those who served were normally chosen or commissioned by their superiors. This explains why in this verse, and in many others, the title servant is accomplished by the term elect or chosen (see 41:8; 44:2). As with the role of being God's servant, being His elect brought with it a balance of privilege and responsibility. For the people of Israel, the privilege consisted of their being selected, lovingly and graciously, from among the nations to be a special people to God. Their responsibility included the challenge of representing the one true God among the nations and of being held to the higher standards expected of such a position. Our relationship with Christ is likewise a position of great privilege and serious responsibility.

In the New Testament, the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit) is described as abiding in the believers as a permanent resident, producing "fruits" of character and service. In the Old Testament, God's empowerment is said to have related to His people in a different manner. It is described as an external force or power that came "upon" individuals to equip them temporarily for some specific service.

In Matthew 12:18-21 the gospel writer tells us what Isaiah predicted of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. This reveals to us another capacity of prophetic literature. It is the power of the word of God to leap beyond its historical, contextual meaning to anticipate the unfolding of God's will in ways that perhaps even the prophet himself never could have anticipated. Not only would Israel serve as God's servant, but, in a deeper and fuller sense, another Servant, One "whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2), would arise to accomplish God's eternal purposes. What God began in creation and continued in Israel was completed through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Other New Testament scriptures reveal that Isaiah's

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Eye on Gospel

The numbers game: Where are numbers? Find me anyone knowledgeable about gospel music that hasn't been asked that question at least a dozen times by someone not so knowledgeable.

Not that I don't understand the question or why to this day it is still so prevalent an issue for those sizing up an industry that for years has thrived by not keeping count, and certainly not giving an account.

There are several schools of thought on the issue of just how that came to be. The first is that the numbers were so low they weren't worth counting. The second was that so much money was being made under the table that those making it simply didn't choose to be held accountable. Last, that the industry hadn't progressed to that level of professionalism.

For a long period of time, gospel could have been found guilty on all three counts. Even now, it is hard to wrangle numbers out of the system. But all that is changing with the conversion of the gospel charts to Soundscan last April. Truth is, despite its long-running and somewhat ill-gotten reputation, gospel has been very good to the people who have served it best and today "the numbers" that

were once all but phantom are anything but shabby. In fact, no matter how you add things up, gospel sizes up rather nicely.

Everyone tends to want to use Kirk Franklin's success as the yardstick. But the real world of gospel has even more success stories. Aside from a million units in combined sales for his self-titled debut and recently released "Christmas" album, Helen Baylor's "The Live Experience," the Mississippi Choir "It Remains To Be Seen" and John P. Kee's "Show Up" (with the New Life Community Choir) all racked up sales in the neighborhood of 200,000 units. Yolanda Adams' "More Than A Melody" and the Canton Spirituals' "Live In Memphis" weren't far behind.

In the last several years, gospel's own perimeters of success have been redefined. Now, a solid hit album is anywhere from 70,000 sales units up. That's up 30,000-40,000 from a decade ago. And while production costs have risen, a hit choir album can still be produced for as little as \$20,000. Just ask William Becton, whose personally financed, has logged sales upwards of 100,000 units since its release in May.

So what do the numbers

mean? First, they say that gospel outsells other genres of music, like Jazz, long thought to be more profitable. Secondly, they bear solid testimony of its true potential. Finally, they confirm a sales trend that continues to spiral upwards. However, what they won't tell you is that unless you understand what it is to speak in tongues, testify and shout hallelujah, the numbers will do you little good. You don't even speak the language.

Briefly: The United Gospel Industry Council has set Feb. 6-9 as the dates for its first annual conference, "Gospel Renaissance '96" at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center in Nashville. The event will key in on the ins and outs of doing business in the gospel industry.

This week's
scripture:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God,"

— Matthew 5:9.