Epiphany in Tarpon Springs

Once again, the Community of St. Nicholas in Tarpon Springs put new life into their yearly Blessing of the Waters.

A Friday rehearsal was required and was attended by about 40 or more choir members. Tarpon’s techie, Terry, made last minute adjustments to the sound system and dragged Joanna away from directing to check the balance in the Cathedral.

As dawn broke in Tarpon Springs on Epiphany, there was a fog heavy with the salt scent from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, making one inhale as deeply as possible on this day of the Blessing of those Waters. Arriving at the Cathedral at about 7:30, the police were just finishing their security checks and the world was awakening to another of God’s perfect days.

This year as for the last two years, the choir was antiphonal. The choirs were augmented by visitors from the Chicago Diocese and our fellows from the Metropolis of Atlanta.

After an hour of warmup and logistics, we filed into the cathedral during Orthros. A fairly large contingent from New Port Richey came, an advance guard for the upcoming SFGOCM conference in July. Hierarchs, priests, deacons, psaltes, altar boys, media people, choir, dignitaries, representatives from the Greek military and congregation packed the Cathedral. Metropolitan Alexios chanted his unique rendition of the Doxology in 6/8 time and all of the pomp and glory of Epiphany was under way. Click here for a video!

Click here for a video of the choir and divers descending the stairs to Spring Bayou!

Afterwards, the choir and psaltes formed the procession to Spring Bayou and the choir lead the world in alternating “Osi Eis Christon” (“As Many as have been Baptized”) and “En Iordani” (“In the Jordan”) joyously all the way during the procession.

After the blessing by His Eminence (Click here for a video of the Bayou, boats and Archbishop Dimitrios chanting!), the cheering crowd paused for a second and applauded the white dove representing the Holy Spirit as it rose above Archbishop Dimitrios, who then climbed back up the steps from the Bayou and blessed the divers as they prostrated before him for his blessing. Then in a flash they sprinted to the water and in no time at all they had hoisted the diver (was it Michael or Chris Kavoukles?) who found the Cross upon their shoulders to bring him for his personal blessing from the Archbishop. Click here for a news video of the dive.

After the crowd on the Bayou broke up, some went to Craig Park, adjacent to the Bayou, for a glendi, some went to the Sponge Docks bearing Michael or Chris (?) on there shoulders and many later went to the Epiphany Ball, an annual event held at the new cathedral hall.
Epiphany In West Palm Beach

Every year for about 10 years, the Orthodox churches of South Florida have held a Pan-Orthodox Blessing of the Waters, usually in West Palm Beach at St. Catherine’s Greek Orthodox Church, located across the street from the Intracoastal Waterway.

When His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios was a Bishop, he had us organize this event, with the intent that it be Pan-Orthodox. It is always held the Saturday following January 6th so that His Eminence can preside.

The clergy has always had representatives from the OCA, the Antiochians, a Bulgarian, a Serb, Russians, Ukrainians and priests of other nationalities as well.

Through the years we have striven to share the musical experience with the choirs of the other ethnic jurisdictions. For the last three years, Jackson King, the choir director at St. George’s Antiochian church in Coral Gables has directed a choir of mostly Greeks but yearly adding more Antiochians and Slavs. For the sake of ease, we have sung the Kevin Lawrence liturgy in English. Although the tunes are unfamiliar to our Slavic brothers and sisters, they join in with a hearty feeling of fellowship and lend their musical expertise to the experience.

On Friday night, we had a cramming rehearsal with members of the Greek choirs, St. George’s and St. Phillip’s Antiochian choirs, St. Nick’s and Sts. Peter and Paul’s choirs. While waiting for the choir to assemble, Father Andrew Maginas buzzed off to the airport to pick up His Eminence, both arriving just as we were gathering in the parking lot. Here is a picture including Priscilla Rivera, Choir Director of Sts. Peter and Paul OCA in Miami, our Margaret Sarafoglou, Father Elia Shaloub of St. Mary’s Antiochian in West Palm Beach, and Tom Kistler, Choir Director of St. Nicholas OCA in Fort Lauderdale.

His Eminence seemed very pleased at our musical dedication and our spirit of Pan-Orthodox brotherhood.

This year the weather was perfect. Jackson’s a capella choir came through with flying colors and he added a couple of Slavonic chants as well, which were well received.

The crowd was probably over 1,000 people in the hall at St. Catherine’s and after the Cross was retrieved (almost immediately), the crowd went inside to discover that suddenly the rows of seats had been replaced by tables set with tablecloths and centerpieces. A choice of delicious lamb shank or chicken, manestra (orzo), Greek salad and rizogalou (rice pudding) were prepared by the parishioners at St. Catherine’s and inhaled by the appreciative attendees.

The next day, by the ordained at St. Andrew Greek Church, the new priest at St. Andrew Greek Church in Kendall, a suburb of Miami. St. Andrews, Father Eudokimos-Martin, a native of England, was introduced to the clergy and congregation from South Florida in attendance.

Many of the pictures of the hall to the termination of the feast are viewable at by clicking here!
Editor’s Note Regarding the Need for Choir Directors

Several parishes from the Carolinas to Florida, Louisiana and everywhere in between, through attrition of one form or another, have lost their choir directors and therefore the choir has become inactive. If you know of a church in the Metropolis who needs a choir director, please let me know and I will publish the parish name and the contact.

The problems go beyond the choirs and are multi-sourced: sometimes the local Board doesn’t want a choir, sometimes the local priest has been at odds with the choir or the director or maybe the community doesn’t like the idea of a “xenos” directing the choir in our church. The all-time biggest problem we have is that the kids do not want to participate. It isn’t “cool” to sing in a church choir, much less one that outsiders are not even sure is Christian.

What about a new crop of Psaltai? Occasionally one hears of successful training of a youth as a psalti, but generally we have no domestic crop of psaltai. How can we get young folks interested?

Let’s brainstorm this one! Notable Notes is a great forum for sharing ideas and plans, yet no one has used it for that as yet.

Resources

Here is a link to the updated and re-designed website of the Greek Sacred and Secular Music Society. It features much of Desby’s works, and also those of Zes, Bogdanos, Maragos, Cardiasmenos, Gallos, and others. The site features both liturgical and folk music.

- Tom Lappas, President of the Society (http://www.gssms.org), announces that for anyone who purchases folk music liturgical music, he will give a discount of 10% if you purchase a minimum of 5 pieces of music in any combination.
- Priscilla Rivera, the premier Orthodox musicologist of South Florida and choir director at Sts. Peter and Paul OCA Church in Miami (see her picture on page 2), sent along a couple of wonderful links for us: http://www.synaxis.info/psalom/index.html and http://anaphorapress.com/music/music-notes/orthodox-music-resources-and-links/. One is the most thorough internet listing of pan-Orthodox chant resources I have encountered and I hope that you enjoy it as much as I did.

St. John’s Choir in Tampa will be having a “mini.-conference” on the weekend of February 23 & 24.
The Liturgy of Peace under the direction of Chris Kypros will be the focus of the weekend. Anyone interested in joining us please contact St. John's Church for detailed information by calling (813) 876-8830, or email stjohntampa@tampabay.rr.com. There will be rehearsal on Saturday from 9:00 a.m until 5:00 p.m. with Chris.

Notice from the Vice President to Choir Directors: Please send a list of your members’ names, addresses and emails as well as the filled out Choir Survey form and your choir’s membership check to Margaret Sarafoglou, 6201 SW 118th Street, Miami, FL 33156.

Federation Trip to Greece, 2008
Please see the attachment for forms and contact information.

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FEDERATION CHORIR TRIP TO GREECE

As you may remember, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios has recently been encouraging the federation to organize a choir tour to Greece. We have accepted this challenge and have now begun making plans for this trip. We have confirmed with His Eminence a departure date of Thursday, June 5th, 2008, and a return on Monday, June 16th.

Traveling with His Eminence, we will be singing the divine liturgy at the church of St. Andrew in Patras, and also presenting a concert there. In addition we will visit Kalavryta, Zachynthos, Olympia, Delphos, and Meteora, presenting concerts of sacred and folk music. We will also sing the divine liturgy at a church in Athens.

While the cost of the trip cannot be confirmed at this date, based on this year’s costs, plane fare will be approximately $1000 to $1200 per person, and the cost of lodging, food and local transportation is estimated to be approximately $1000 per person. The federation will make every effort to keep travel costs low; for example, we are exploring the possibility of staying in homes while in Patras.

The core of the choir will be members of the Dormition choir from Greensboro, NC and the Orthodox Youth Choir of Tampa Bay, groups which were awarded gold medals in the Metropolis 2006 and 2007 Hellenic Dance Festival choir competitions. The group will be directed jointly by Kevin Lawrence and Joanne Kambouris. We are sure to have room for additional singers from around the Metropolis, especially tenors and basses. Since it is important to have some idea of how many are interested in taking part in this adventure, we ask you to fill out the brief survey and return it by the end this month.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Toula Chininis
336-288-7968
2LA@bellsouth.net

CHOIR TRIP SURVEY

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
E-Mail ____________________________
Phone ____________________________
Federation Choir Conference (years participated) ____________
Voice Part ____________________________
Any musical training in voice ____________________________
Any musical training in an instrument ____________________________
Member of church choir (years) ____________________________

Please submit survey only if you are truly committed towards this trip. Selection may be based on auditions and choir director’s recommendations.
Music under the Byzantine Dome

Benefit Concert Featuring The

Orthodox Youth Choir of Tampa Bay

Friday, February 22, 2008 7 PM
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church
409 Old Coachman Rd
Clearwater Fl
Donation: $15
(Hors-d’oeuvre reception included)

Call or email Joanne Kambouris for tickets and information
727-734-7721 email: skambour@knology.net

All proceeds of this event will support the OYCTB trip to Greece by invitation of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta. Please help us realize the dream of experiencing our faith in the ancient land of the early Church!