

So Much Music!

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In a room in the Minnesota Boychoir office at Landmark Center, one will find floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with music—thousands of pieces carefully catalogued and ready to be performed. The music represents sixty years of Minnesota Boychoir choral history.

In the early years, the choir mixed classical and sacred music with folk music and popular Broadway musicals such as *Oliver!*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *The Sound of Music*. The choir also sang patriotic tunes, a reminder of the turbulent political climate at the time. During his years as choir director, Paul H. Pfeiffer continued conducting classical and sacred music with a repertoire modeled after the Vienna Boys Choir—“Laudamus Te” from Antonio Vivaldi’s *Gloria*, *Kyrie* by Antonio Lotti, and “Quando corpus morietur” from *Stabat Mater* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. The choir often ended performances with *Emperor Waltz*, composed by Johann Strauss II and a favorite of many singers, including Jim Mulrooney:

[This] was a song that we sang at the end of every single concert. . . . I could still sing the whole thing. I danced to that with my mom at my wedding.¹

Current Executive and Artistic Director Mark S. Johnson continues to feature the classics while also expanding the choir’s repertoire. Chelanga Langason recalls “Carol of the Bells,” “Siyahamba” (a South African freedom song), “Praise His Holy Name,” “O Sifuni Mungu” (All Creatures of Our God and King), “Shut De Do,” “Total Praise,” and “Prayer of the Children.” His younger brother, Will, who still sings in the choir, enjoys “Revelations” and “Blessing,” 🎵(12) which the boys sing every year.² Chorister Mark Hug also is fond of the traditional closer. “The last song that we always do is called “Blessing” . . . that song just brings everyone together.”³

Johnson is known for his thorough preparation in working with each piece. For works in languages other than English, including Swedish, German, Swahili, and Māori, he will, at times, bring in a person fluent in the language to work with the choristers on pronunciation and meaning.

NOTES

1. James “Jim” M. Mulrooney and Patrick Mulrooney (Jim), interview, Minnesota Boychoir Oral History Project, Ramsey County Historical Society (hereafter MBOHP), September 19, 2020; Virginia Pfeiffer, email with editor, April 5, 2022. Virginia Pfeiffer remembers, “Paul was conducting the Boychoir [at a] . . . Minnesota Music Educators Association conference when he was ‘discovered’ (or the boys were heard) by a talent scout from the Vienna Boys Choir.” The scout was impressed by the boys’ ‘German lilt’ when they sang the *Emperor Waltz*. “Paul was raised in a home where German singing was done, and thence he knew how to get that ‘lilt.’”

2. Langason Family, (Chelanga and Will), interview, MBOHP, September 10, 2020.

3. Hug Family (Mark), interview, MBOHP, September 2, 2020.