

Furman Magazine

Volume 43
Issue 3 Fall 2000

Article 71

9-1-2000

Musical ambassadors

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Recommended Citation

Khandke, Kailash (2000) "Musical ambassadors," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 3 , Article 71.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol43/iss3/71>

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Musical ambassadors

In August, two separate groups from the Furman community were in Prague on the same day. One was a group of nine professors participating in a two-week seminar in the Czech and Slovak Republics as part of the university's Faculty Seminar Abroad program. The other was the Furman Singers, who were presenting a concert in conjunction with their 14th biennial European concert tour.

Bill Lavery, director of international education and leader of the seminar program, urged the faculty to attend the Singers concert, held at St. Nicholas Church in the city's Old Town Square. We readily agreed — and what followed was a performance that warmed not just our hearts, but those of the hundred-odd denizens of Prague and the handful of tourists in attendance.

It is one thing to hear the Furman Singers at graduation, convocation or a two-hour concert. It is quite another to experience their performance in a splendid 17th-century Baroque church, where the acoustics are tailor-made for such spiritual invocations as "O Magnum Mysterium" and "Ubi Caritas." As Bing Vick, director of the Singers, says, "Prague is at the crossroads of classical music." Kathryn Duncan, a sophomore member of the Singers, adds, "Making music in the same places that Bach and Mozart performed was just incredible."

Hearing our students perform in such a spectacular setting was incredible as well. Their rendition of Haydn's "The Heavens are Telling" left us dumbfounded and a little teary-eyed. As senior Joe Stillwell puts it, "Sacred music was truly meant to be performed at a cathedral, with lots of reverb."

David Spear, professor of history, was struck not only by the beauty of the music but by the idea of redemption. "I had carried in my mind's eye all these images of Prague during the Nazi occupation and shrouded in the grayness of the Cold War. Now, finally, as a matter of course, singing groups from as far away as the United States could freely visit and perform in the heart of Prague's Old Town Square. I was moved by both the acoustical and temporal harmonies of the concert."

During his 30 years as director of the Singers, Vick has taken the group to many historical and cultural centers in Europe. In addition to Prague,

this summer's trip included performances in Germany (Dresden, Erfurt and Nurnberg) and Poland (Wroclaw).

On each trip, Vick emphasizes one resounding theme: "This is not just a musical and cultural experience. You are representing not just Furman University. In a broader and more important sense, you are ambassadors of the United States."

Troy Robertson, president of the Singers, says that Vick has a subtle way of conveying this broader context. While a high standard of musicianship is expected of the Singers, they are also expected to be precise and responsible in their actions, to be punctual and to dress appropriately.

Another aspect of the Singers' tour deserves special mention: All the students go on their own volition. Many of the Singers work hard over the summer — some even hold several jobs — to pay for the trip.

Perhaps it was a quirk of fate that brought us together with the Furman Singers on that mid-summer afternoon. Regardless, the one-hour concert renewed our faith in what Furman stands for as a liberal arts school — the development of the whole person. And in a larger context, the Singers perform a selfless act every two years as goodwill ambassadors for our community, state and country.

The Furman Singers have once again done their part. Now it is our turn. As members of the Furman community, where and what will you perform this year to put Furman on the map?

— **Kailash Khandke**

The writer, an associate professor of economics and business administration, has taught at Furman since 1995.



JUDY VICK