

Article for *the Georgia Bulletin*

## Archdiocesan Festival Choir Celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The members of the Archdiocesan Festival Choir of Atlanta will celebrate a decade of song together with a spectacular **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert** on Saturday April 21<sup>st</sup>, 8:00pm, at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, 2855 Briarcliff Road. The concert will feature music drawn from each of its previous 10 seasons and will be highlighted by the Festival Choir's first performance of Giovanni da Palestrina's *Missa Brevis*. Tickets are available online at [AFCATLANTA.ORG](http://AFCATLANTA.ORG), or at the door for a suggested donation of \$15.00.

In 2002 the idea of forming a choir made up of musicians from around the Archdiocese seemed like an unreachable dream. The sheer size of the diocese and the sizeable time commitment that such a choir would require from already busy music ministers had always seemed too great an obstacle to overcome. But over the last 10 years, in spite of the constraints of time and distance, catholic musicians from over 30 parishes in the archdiocese....from downtown Atlanta to Cumming, from Peachtree City to Covington (and many points in between) have gathered together to bring voice and substance to this dream.

“Now the Festival Choir has become a part of the musical fabric of the diocese”, says founding member Quentin Van Meter. “In addition to our annual concerts, we have taken part in dozens of liturgies for the Archdiocese like the Eucharistic Congress, and Permanent Diaconate Ordinations, and we were honored to present a program for the Southeast Liturgical Music Symposium last year. The music we strive to make challenges our esthetic needs while at the same time enriches our spiritual connection to the liturgy.” “And...” as Jean Nash of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Smyrna adds...”it's a whole lotta fun!

The music of this year's concert is equally diverse and could be said to represent the “greatest hits” of the Festival Choir's previous 10 years. “The repertoire of the choir has always been as broad and varied as the music of the church throughout the ages” notes Linda Morgan, Director of Music at Mary Our Queen parish. “The music of the Roman Catholic Church was, perhaps, the single most important cradle for western music in recorded history, and the music that the Festival Choir sings, attempts to explore this rich tradition.

This concert will represent this great tradition in all its fullness. The program will traverse the music of the church from Medieval Gregorian chant to Spanish and English music of the Renaissance by Victoria and Tallis. With music by the Italian Baroque

master Vivaldi, to diverse settings of the Ave Maria by 19<sup>th</sup> century composers Bruckner, Brahms and Rachmaninoff. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century French masterworks by Faure and Durufle as well as rousing 20<sup>th</sup> century settings of ancient Latin texts by Britten, Lauridsen and Twynham will all reflect the glory of this great and ever evolving musical tradition. Morgan adds, “all of this music, coming from various periods, cultures and styles has a great deal to say to us about what catholic music is and has been through the centuries.”

It is also notable that the featured work on the program Giovanni Perluigi Palestrina’s *Missa Brevis* will be the first complete polyphonic setting of the mass that the choir has sung. John Brandt of St. Joseph’s Parish in Marietta recalls that “one of our founding principles was to present the great masterworks of the Roman Church, and among the greatest of these are the hundreds of mass settings by the world’s most influential composers. It is instructive and humbling for us to realize that it has taken 10 years of singing and learning together to finally allow us the ability to approach this masterwork of the “grand master” of the polyphonic style.”

Palestrina (1525 - 1594) was highly regarded and much published in his lifetime. He began his career in his home town, but in 1551 he became Choirmaster of the papal choir, and he remained in Rome composing and directing for all the major churches for 43 years!. His prodigious compositional output is comprised of at least 104 attributable masses, over 375 motets, 68 offertories. 65 hymns, 35 Magnificats and 5 sets of Lamentations. The *Missa Brevis* is one of his most frequently sung masses and has an immediacy of melodic appeal and a notable clarity of texture. It is a transparently beautiful work and one of the finest settings of the Mass text of any period.

For this special Anniversary Concert celebration, the Festival Choir has invited noted Atlanta Conductor David Brensinger to lead them. Brensinger was for 15 years the artistic director and conductor of the Atlanta Singers, the city’s premiere *a cappella* vocal ensemble. He is director of music at Holy Innocents’ Episcopal Church in Atlanta, and his choirs have been heard in live and broadcast performances, locally, regionally and nationally. He has also been a frequent guest artist with the Atlanta Symphony Choruses.

The concert will be presented in the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish’s wonderful new worship space. The beautiful worship space has a wonderful acoustic and magnificent pipe organ that will provide the perfect sacred environment for this musical celebration.

The entire Archdiocesan family is invited to attend this concert. Ample Parking is available.