



Columbia Union College at Kennedy Center

In April of this year, the Columbia Union College music department gave an acclaimed concert at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in the Nation's capital. It was the opening event for what will be a two-year celebration of the school's first century.

The crescendo in excitement and emotion could be felt from the first to the final notes in the concert given this April by Columbia Union College's choir and orchestra in Kennedy Center. It was one of those transcendent experiences when audience and performers alike realized they were sharing in an historic event, a memorable moment in their personal musical journey, and

a defining one for CUC on the eve of its 100th year.

The program, which featured the school's Collegiate Chorale and New England Youth Ensemble and showcased world-renowned composer John Rutter conducting three of his compositions, was greeted with prolonged and enthusiastic applause as the evening progressed. It ended with a three-minute standing ovation.

Who could have envisioned, in 1904, when Ellen White was urging that a college and hospital be built on the site where CUC now stands, that one day a huge crowd of nearly 2,000 would join in one of the most prestigious performing centers in the world to celebrate the passing of a hundred years at that school?

Yet, that is what happened when fans of classical and choral music

were treated to a virtuoso performance by CUC's ensembles this spring. Washington Post music critic Grace Jean wrote of the evening:

... John Rutter energetically demonstrated how a composer, leading talented singers and instrumentalists through his own works, can ennoble music,"

James Bingham, director of the Collegiate Chorale, and Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse, conductor of the NEYE, have been at CUC since 1994. They had previously worked together at Atlantic Union College, where they had toured extensively and performed in high profile venues.

As they arrived at CUC, they immediately embarked upon a similar schedule with CUC's ensembles. They toured in the U.S. as well as overseas, including Southern Europe, South Africa, and Australia, where performances were given in the Sydney Opera House and in major cathedrals of the country.

They played a number of concerts at Carnegie Hall in New York City and in cathedrals and concert halls in Washington. Following the choir's 2000 Christmas concert in the National Gallery of Art, Washington Post music critic Joseph McLellan wrote,

Columbia Union College in Takoma Park is far from the largest or best-known college in the Washington area, but it has

an excellent music program and a chorus, under the direction of James Bingham, that is notable for its quality even in a metropolitan region overloaded with fine choruses.... [the] program was imaginative in its choice of repertoire and polished in its performance.

The collaboration between Rutter and groups conducted by Bingham and Rittenhouse had started over a decade before at AUC and continued at CUC. Rutter

Rittenhouse opened the first half of the concert conducting Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte Overture*. Bingham, began the second half with Vaughan William's *Serenade to Music*.

Rutter conducted two of his well-known and popular works, *Gloria* and *Requiem*, and then concluded the program with a recently composed medley of African-American spirituals, *Feel the Spirit*, written for mezzo-soprano, choir and orchestra. The singer for the occasion was Sylvia Twine who, with her rich voice, was praised by critic Grace Jean for capturing "the very essence of the spiritual."



The evening was hailed by Randal Wisbey, president of the college, as "a triumph of music at CUC." He added, "The Washington metropolitan area is

had joined them on the South African tour where he conducted the CUC group and local choirs in programs given in leading concert halls.

It was after this experience, and the numerous concerts in which he had conducted their groups at Carnegie Hall, that he suggested the possibility of a gala concert in the Kennedy Center under his directorship.

While the spotlight was on Rutter and his music at Kennedy Center,

rich with opportunities to hear world-class musicians, and audiences are typically educated and discriminating. John Rutter and CUC's talented conductors and musicians drew effusive praise from all corners."

Roy Branson, professor of ethics and public policy and director of the CUC Center for Law and Public Policy, observed, "Sometimes you applaud a performance out of courtesy, or because someone you know is onstage. This was not one of those performances. It was an example of musical interpretation, discipline, and



mastery - one that fully deserved presentation in one of the world's premier venues for the performing arts."

The two-year centennial celebration at CUC, with the theme of "Engage, Excel, Explore," will continue with additional performances, lectureships, service

opportunities, local festivals, award ceremonies, and other events commemorating the college and its unique contributions to the community over the past century.



John Rutter Acknowledges the performers and takes a bow. James Bingham, Sylvia Twine, Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse, and Rutter respond to the standing ovation at the end of the concert.