



*Andrews University ensembles perform for academy students and others at the 2005 music festival*

## SDA Music Festivals

*Beginning in the late 1940's, Adventist educators established annual music festivals that were exciting experiences for participants as well as audiences. Unlike earlier festivals in Adventist music, which had usually involved more mature musicians gathering to celebrate a special occasion or perform works such as the Messiah or the Elijah, these festivals were meant to encourage younger musicians and foster growth in music programs. Their success in doing so is now a matter of record and the reason why they continue today.*

The chatter in the bus was euphoric as the journey home began following the concert. It had been a thrilling musical experience, ending with prolonged applause from the audience. Within a short while, however, a subdued quiet prevailed as students

began drifting off to sleep or conversed quietly with one another.

From the beginning of their arrival three days earlier, they had rehearsed with over 100 other students for more than ten hours, developing ensemble and polishing the music. While the experience

had been arduous and there had been down times created by the long rehearsals and other activities, in the end, the thrill of being part of a large group playing and singing great music in a festival under inspired conductors had been an exhilarating experience.





For nearly 60 years festivals have been an important part of Adventist music education, and students have enjoyed experiences like the one just described. From the first two music festivals, one held in Michigan in 1947 and another hosted on the Atlantic Union College campus a year later, to the numerous music festivals now held annually, they have proven to be a rewarding endeavor for both music students and their teachers. While the festival at AUC happened within a year after the conference-sponsored festival in Michigan, many more conferences and unions would begin festivals for regional schools before another Adventist college would venture to sponsor one.

In the beginning, the conference and union festivals were usually hosted each year on different academy campuses in the region. Traditionally, every participating school's director would have his/her turn in front of the festival group, with decidedly mixed results.

Because of varying levels in ability among the conductors, embedded loyalties to them by their students, and rivalries between schools, members of the festival group often worked more diligently for some conductors than for others. Additionally, the constant change in conductors worked against developing good ensemble playing. Consequently, festivals, though often exciting adventures, were not always inspiring and educational experiences.

This fact was troubling to some directors, who wanted the festivals to be a transcendent experience dur-

ing which their students could work with other talented young people and enjoy a shared ultimate musical experience. In spite of these feelings, other directors resisted for many years the idea of having an outside conductor direct their festival groups.

In some regions of the country, this tension led to the colleges hosting their own festivals, offering academy band and choir festivals in alternate years to complement union and conference festivals which, for the most part, were scheduling their festivals that way. While the primary motivation for a college to host a festival was to help stimulate and enrich academy music programs, it was also an opportunity to influence prospective college students to choose their school and music program.

In the early years of college music festivals, the organizer and conductor was often the director of the featured ensemble. This dual role often left the conductor exhausted even before the event started. Further, the students often were not well prepared, placing the host school conductor in an awkward position and limiting what the group could achieve.

By the 1960's, many festivals began using guest conductors. At first these guests were mostly from the Adventist college or university for the region, because of arbitrary recruitment "territorial lines." As these restrictions eased and then disappeared, Adventist conductors nationwide became possible guests.

Further, organizers of festivals on the West Coast and in the Southern Union began to invite non-Adventist guest conductors for their festivals. Initial concerns about having outside conductors work with "our young people," based on worries about their influence and, in some instances, how they would view the quality of our music programs, proved to be unfounded. The latter concern actually became an incentive for both teachers and students to prepare more diligently for the event.

By the end of the 1960's and through the 1970's, numerous smaller festivals were occurring. More recently, many have been reduced in scope, due to declining numbers of students in academy music programs and increasing financial pressures. When the larger union festivals faltered or stopped in the 1980's and 1990's, colleges and universities became proactive in hosting them and working with conferences to assure that they continue or resume.

Today, most festivals alternate between differing ensembles and areas each year. A few include adjudication of ensembles and solos, and several offer workshops for the students.

Through the years, festivals have proven to be an important factor in sustaining interest in music in Adventist schools. Now, more than ever, inspiring festivals have become a key factor in the survival of music programs and ensembles at every level.

ds





## Music Festivals Overview and Timeline

1947

The Lake Union (in the Midwest) establishes the first *ongoing* music festival in Adventist schools. The festival includes both band and choir and is hosted by the academies on a rotating basis for many years. After it stops, because of financial problems, it is restarted in 1982 as the Andrews University Music Festival, hosted by AU and funded in part by the university, the Lake Union, and a fee paid by the students. It alternates between choir/orchestra and band and is complemented by numerous smaller festivals in the Lake Union.

1948

Atlantic Union College establishes the first ongoing college-sponsored music festival. Six academy choirs, along with trios, quartets, and other smaller vocal groups, come to the campus to join with the college choir in presenting a full weekend of programs by the mass choir and the college's band, orchestra, and choir.

1952

Walla Walla College starts a music festival for band and choir that involves over 240 students. While the school paper hails it as the beginning of an annual event, it ends after three years. In 1964, Lloyd Leno conducts the first of what will be a continuing annual series of festivals that alternate between the band and choir/orchestra. There are numerous other smaller festivals throughout the Northwest.

1954

The Central and Northern Unions establish festivals. When Union College begins hosting them later that decade, they are renamed "clinics" to satisfy educational leaders who want to guarantee that they are real learning experiences. UC continues to host what is now known as the Mid-America Conference Music Festival, which alternates between band and choir. There are numerous other smaller festivals throughout the Midwest.

1955

Pacific Union College schedules its first festival. It is the only festival in California that has continued without break since it started. The Southern California and Southeastern conferences, in partnership with La Sierra University, currently sponsor an ongoing festival that, like the one at PUC, alternates between band and choir. PUC also has a keyboard festival every year. There are numerous smaller festivals in California.

1957

Lyle Hamel establishes the Florida Conference music festival for elementary and junior high bands and choirs, hosted by Forest Lake Academy (See article on page 6). It has continued without break to the present.

1958

The Southern Union establishes a multi-faceted festival that continues until 1994, when Southern Adventist University begins to host and coordinate the event. It now alternates between band/orchestra and choir for four years and features keyboard and hand bells every fifth year.





## A Pioneering Venture . . .

Lyle Hamel

*One of the first, if not the first, known conference-wide music festivals for elementary and junior high students was organized by Lyle Hamel in 1957 while he was serving as band director at Forest Lake Academy in Florida. While there, he started a band program in the grade school in nearby Orlando. Following a joint concert with that group and his academy band, he was inspired to start a festival that would bring together students in Adventist music programs in Florida for a weekend of concerts. How the festival started and what happened at this historic event is described in the following excerpt from Strike Up the Band, Hamel's unpublished autobiography.*

Several schools in the Florida Conference had small instrumental ensembles and choirs. The thought came to me that it would be nice if all these musicians could get together in one place and play in a large band and choir. This would help them realize that they were an important part of a larger education program in the conference.

The Academy facilities were the only place where this could be done. In 1957, after sharing my plans with my principal and gaining his support, I approached the conference educational secretary, Ward Scriven, who, unsure of how his teachers would react, invited me to a meeting of all the teachers to be held in Miami.

I presented my ideas as well as I could, mentioning that the Orlando Elementary Band would be the nucleus of the massed band. I assured them there wouldn't be any problems with favoritism on my part as I worked with the group. I then answered a lot of relevant questions about the details. When I finished, Scriven said they would discuss this further and he would contact me following

their meetings, when he was back in his office.

He called some time later and told me the teachers had given their approval to have the music festival at Forest Lake Academy. Then the planning really got underway in earnest. Committees were formed to select the music, and the food director at the school was contacted since all the guests would be eating in the cafeteria. Speakers for the various meetings were selected and, since each school was to have their musical group featured at one of the meetings, scheduling was worked out with each school.

When the students arrived on our campus on a Thursday afternoon, camp meeting tents were in place and other housing arrangements had been cared for, with each school supervising its students. That evening, following a welcome and instructions, we had our first rehearsal.

Everything went smoothly. Friday was spent in more rehearsals. That evening our first public service was attended by an unexpectedly large audience. The

following morning, small music groups played during Sabbath School and the massed choir provided all the music during the morning service.

That afternoon a sacred concert featured more small groups, as well as music by the mass band and choir. A large, appreciative audience responded to Saturday evening's secular program, which featured the mass groups, with great enthusiasm. It was a wonderful affirmation for the music teachers and their students, as well as for the festival. Both the students and teachers were thrilled over the event, the chance to play in a large group, and the fellowship they had enjoyed. The obvious success of this first music festival for the Florida Conference started the wheels rolling for a repeat in the following year. From that beginning, the festival grew and improved during the remainder of my time at FLA.

*The festival continues to this day. When the Florida Conference celebrated the festival's 40th anniversary, Hamel and his wife were invited to return as honored guests.*