



Indiana University *Sacred Music Intensive Course*

John S. Palmer

This event, held June 5–9, 2017, was the third such happening and nearly annual; it was suspended last year because of a renovation on the campus. The brainchild of Jacobs School of Music organ department chair Janette Fishell and choral arts professor Walter Huff, it is indeed what it says: an intensive organ and choral experience where participants form a choir, study organ and choral music, as well as receive individual instruction in these areas. Other faculty members include Marilyn Keiser, Yumiko Tatsuta, Rachel Mikol, Amy Hamburg Mead, Christopher Young, and Patrick Fischer.

The schedule is full: a daily two-hour choir rehearsal, one-hour sessions covering many aspects of choral music, organ repertoire, anthem reading, problem solving, and individual coaching in organ and vocal work. Participants stay busy all day long with the evenings generally free. New this year was a daily “body/mind/spirit” post-lunch session, as well as carillon playing.

The organ faculty presented an hour-

long recital in Auer Hall on the C.B. Fisk organ Monday evening to kick off the week. Varied repertoire included liturgical and nonliturgical compositions. Elegant and beautiful playing was heard, surely a motivation for all to “do better.”

As a culmination to the week’s work, a public recital is presented Friday evening of six choral anthems, accompanied as needed by workshop participants, as well as five organists presenting solo works. The appreciative audience joined the SMI Chorale in singing two hymns, accompanied with vigor by participating organists.

SMI, as the course is affectionately called, has approximately 50 participants each year, by design. Several people return each year and at least a dozen of them have been to all three courses. When you live (mostly in the dormitory), eat (in nearby restaurants), and sing (in the choir) with several like-minded souls for an entire week, you are bound to bond. Some folks know each other from SMI, while other friendships have spanned decades, primarily through grad school and work-related fields.

Leadership is top-notch; teachers know, from experience, what it is that participants need in terms of information, problem-solving, and participation. Everyone is encouraged to ask questions and share insights. The leaders make you feel comfortable with the sessions; where else would you have the courage to lead a choir in the same warm-ups that you do with your choir back home? When asked to go to the organ bench to demonstrate the topic at hand folks are eager to comply, knowing that doing so ensures the success of the session.

It goes without saying that the presence of Lois Fyfe Music puts the icing on the cake for such a gathering. Their display, availability, and helpfulness literally puts the music used during the week in the hands of all.

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