



JULY 16, 2023

From “lil ol’ Harrisonburg” to the National Cathedral: Local choir to perform original and traditional music

By **Kayla Brown, contributor**
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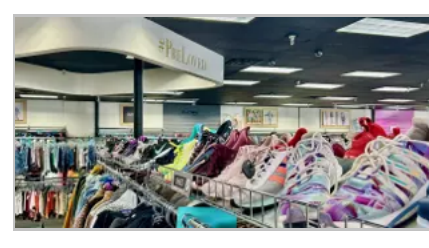
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Video and article by Kayla Brown, contributor

Linell Moss has been a choir musician and director for decades, but now an opportunity of a lifetime will lead her and the rest of Harrisonburg’s Emmanuel Episcopal parish choir to Washington, D.C., on Monday evening to sing at the National Cathedral.

Moss serves as music director at Emmanuel Episcopal, where she has attended since 2016, and when she found out in February about the opportunity to apply to perform at the National Cathedral, she immediately sent in audition clips.

They received approval in record time, Moss said.

“There are a lot of details, but these singers are so wonderful and they’ve been working so hard since March. We really feel ready and we’re thrilled to be doing it,” Moss said.

Rev. Joseph Butler arrived at Emmanuel a year ago and immediately recognized the talent within his new church community.

“One of the great parts about Emmanuel as a church community is we do a lot with music,” he said. “We are very blessed with lots of very skilled musicians and choir leaders and of course, our choir.”

But the best way to grasp how magically medieval the choir can sound, especially under the acoustics are just right, is to hear them — whether they’re performing or just practicing:



The service begins at 5:30 p.m. Monday but isn’t broadcast or webcast. Entry to the National Cathedral is free as long as tickets are available.

Moss said the choir consists of church attendees, interested community members and two entire families. Their skills range from professional choir scholars to people who just love to sing.

“We have a 13 year old, a 16 year old, college students through retired folks. We love the intergenerational experience,” Moss said.

On a regular Sunday, Emmanuel’s choir averages 15 people, but 26 are participating in Monday evening’s service, which is called a choral evensong. An evensong is an Anglican tradition dating back centuries that combines Renaissance hymnals and modern day music, according to the [National Cathedral’s website](#).

“I’m very proud that we get to do that and really lean into keeping some of these traditions alive,” Butler said. “Because if no one else does it ...” He paused and gestured with his hands as if to show *poof* — those traditions would be no more.

The choir will sing five pieces, two of which are composed by a pair of Emmanuel’s own parishioners. The choir’s organist, Brad Lehman, composed “None Other is the Lamb” in 2019 and Carol Warner composed “Anima Christi” in 2022.

“We not only get to do obviously the great works of our tradition, but we even get to do some of our own in house. It’s not often you get in-house composers,” Butler said.

Cannon Randle, who has been a part of Emmanuel’s choir since January, also participates in the church’s Diocese New Priest Initiative, a training program for aspiring parish leaders. Despite “always singing loud,” he has no formal choral training.

“I don’t know how to really read the notes and so forth,” Randle said. “I kinda have to listen to what the people who do know what they’re doing are singing and I can match that.”

Regardless of formal training, the choir meshes together to express their faith through music.

“We’re singing but we’re not performing. We always like to acknowledge that our singing is not a performance, it’s part of the church service. It’s a gift to ourselves, to those listening to us praying and praising. It’s a very special kind of choral music.”

While Butler is used to standing behind the pulpit, he looks forward to trading his usual priest’s robe for a choral robe and will sing as one of the group.

“I wear the collar, get a lot of the credit, but they made all this happen,” Butler said. “So I’m just grateful for them.”

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