



The Renaissance Choral Ensemble

The Jackson MS AGO Chapter continued its 34-year tradition of presenting an Annual Choral and Organ Concert, this year on February 21st at Northminster Baptist Church, featuring the Renaissance Choral Ensemble from Northwest Rankin High School which is a part of the Rankin County School District. The large choral program there is directed by Toney Keeler; the evening performance was very ably Ensembdirected by Kenny Keeton (Assistant Director of Choral Activities) and student teacher Meg Harris and was accompanied by pianist Naomi Bates. Their program, performed by memory, included a wide range of style and period, starting with a Medieval Gloria arranged by Vijay Singh, continued with a Craig Heller Johnson setting of Emily Dickinson' poignant poem, "Will There Really Be a Morning," which was sung by the Women's Ensamble. The full ensemble continued with "Deep River," arranged by Ben Parry; a setting of Psalm 29:1 by Rosepanye Powell; Benedictus" arr. By Brian Lewis; and the widely sung gospel anthem "Total Praise" by Richard Smallwood and arranged by Doreen Rao. Their program closed with the beloved Peter Lutkin "The Lord Bless You and Keep You." The Ensemble sang beautifully on pitch, using their well-taught skills in diction, breath control, and blend to produce an expressive and inspiring program.



Organist Jeff McLelland

The choral presentation was preceded by a short organ recital by Dr. Jeff McLelland, Director of Music and Fine Arts at Independent Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, Alabama. The choral ensemble had front row seats for Dr. McLelland's well-chosen repertoire of Bach (*Pièce d'Orgue* in G Major, BWV 572, followed by three varied chorale preludes from the *Orgelbüchlein*), Gerald Near ("Solemn Prelude on a Theme of Tallis"), and closing with Myron J. Roberts' "Prelude and Trumpetings." Dr. McLelland's registration made good use of the tonal resources of Northminster's majestic three-manual Austin pipe organ, with the Bach manifesting the well-structured principals as well as the lovely flute work; the Near showing the organ's capacity for a rich broadness, and the Myron being a perfect showpiece for the powerful reed pipes, particularly the *Trompette en Chamade* and the 32' *Bombarde*. His performance of these works was well articulated, energized, musically satisfying to the audience and served as an exciting introduction to the pipe organ for the students.

---Carol S. Durham