



Summer 5-29-2020

## Collegiate Choir Makes Impression at South African Festival

Vi Kakares  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kakares, Vi, "Collegiate Choir Makes Impression at South African Festival" (2020). *News and Events*. 4035.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/4035>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at The Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.



# Collegiate Choir Makes Impression at South African Festival

May 29, 2020

**Editor's Note:** *The Collegiate Choir departed prior to travel restrictions enacted in response to COVID-19.*

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Members of Illinois Wesleyan University's Collegiate Choir sang their way through the Cape Town and Stellenbosch regions in South Africa during Spring Break where they were subsequently honored for their performance at a renowned cultural festival.

The choir, comprised of student musicians from a variety of academic disciplines, has participated in international tours every

four years since 2000 under the direction of Professor of Music Scott Ferguson. This year, the group performed concerts in the Chicago area before departing for the week-long South Africa tour, arriving back in Bloomington just before the COVID-19 pandemic began impacting international travel.

"I have unforgettable memories from every international tour, but the combination of the extraordinary natural beauty of South Africa, profound cultural experiences, and exhilarating performances put this tour in a special category," Ferguson said.

Among the most notable moments of the trip was the choir's performance at the Woordfees cultural arts festival in Stellenbosch. The 10-day cultural arts festival is the largest of its kind in the country, consisting of music, visual arts, theatre, writers' and film festivals. Although the festival typically includes international participation, the Collegiate Choir was the first American choir to be invited to perform at Woordfees.

"It was an exceptionally high honor for us to have the opportunity to represent the American choral tradition at this festival," Ferguson said. "It was also a great responsibility to be the first to represent, in particular, American collegiate choral ensembles."

The choir presented a joint concert with the University of Stellenbosch Chamber Choir, performing primarily sacred music from the contemporary era, including arrangements of American folk hymns and African American spirituals.

"The audience's reception to our singing was electric. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Ferguson said.

Among these pieces, Ferguson said the choir was honored to perform the world premiere of the 2019-20 Collegiate Choir commissioned choral work *The wicked are like the troubled sea*. This commission series is the oldest of its kind in the country, and it is made possible by the Sylvia Monti Anderson Commissioned Choral Work Fund honoring Delta Omicron, Illinois Wesleyan University's professional music fraternity.



The Collegiate Choir became the first American choir to perform at the Woordfees cultural arts festival in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Photo courtesy of Mark Cloete Photography.



*The wicked are like the troubled sea* is a dramatic motet, written by renowned South African composer Hendrik Hofmeyr, “one of the most highly regarded South African composers active today.”

“It is one of the best commissioned works we've had the privilege to perform during my 24 years at IWU,” Ferguson said.

The group also had the chance to rehearse the composition with Hofmeyr himself, who attended the performance.

“Your choir is absolutely superlative. It was a great privilege for me to have you do my work,” Hofmeyr told Ferguson.

The choir was recognized for its performance through its nomination for “Best Achievement” in the festival's classical vocal category. This was the first time that a concert of this type was nominated for this prestigious award. “It represented a validation of the choir's dedication to the art of choral singing and recognition of the months of preparation for this tour,” Ferguson said. “The choir maintains this level of performance every year, and I couldn't be happier that their dedication was recognized at an event of this stature. “

In addition to their performance at Woordfees, the choir also participated in a choral exchange with a high school choir at the Harry Gwala school in the Khayelitsha township near Cape Town, conducted by Mhlalasi Mungeka.

Ferguson’s colleague from the University of Stellenbosch, professor Martin Berger, who arranged the exchange, told him that it was rare for an American choir to visit a township to share music. Ferguson and Berger included the township exchange in an effort to show the value of using the arts to promote social justice. Ferguson said, “The township choir was excellent.”

“I would love to have some of their basses in my choir. We sang back and forth to each other, each choir spellbound while listening to the other. After our performances, we became one choir as they taught us a song from the South African tradition,” he said.

The choir also shared performances and social time with the Stellenbosch University Chamber Choir and Cape Town Youth Choir.

“We always learn much from listening to other choirs sing, and it was especially wonderful to hear performances of South African traditional music,” he said.

By exchanging music with choirs around South Africa, the Illinois Wesleyan Collegiate Choir experienced music as a connection between continents.

“I think the choir would agree that one of the greatest gifts from this tour was the opportunity to witness the universal power of music to transcend cultures and allow us to feel our shared humanity at its most fundamental level.”



Renowned South African composer Hendrik Hofmeyr wrote *The wicked are like the troubled sea* , a commissioned work that the Collegiate Choir performed at the Woordfees cultural arts festival. Photo courtesy of Mark Cloete Photography.



Professor of Music Scott Ferguson (left) spoke with Martin Berger, conductor of the Stellenbosch University Chamber Choir (middle), and Mhlalasi Mungeka, conductor of the Harry Gwala High School choir (right), during a choral exchange in the Khayelitsha township. Mungeka was presented with an Illinois Wesleyan hat and bag in appreciation of his hospitality.