

Bauman Takes Over as Director of "Messiah" Performances

by Andrew Tallackson

Last Christmas was a milestone year for Handel's "Messiah" in Michigan City, marking the 50th anniversary of the oratorio's debut at First Presbyterian Church, 121 W. Ninth St.

Despite health issues over the past few years, Dan McNabb had no intentions of stepping down as director. But as each rehearsal neared the final performances, he realized maybe it was time to let go, to leave on the proverbial high note. The decision was bitter-sweet, but one he'd arrived at with peace.

"There are all these wonderful people I've met from this event, and I'm struck by how we were able to unite ourselves through the same goal," he said. "That's what is so captivating about this to me. (Handel's "Messiah") is like presenting a gift to the community. It's a privilege to be part of that.

"What tops it off is, I can turn it over to someone as adept and gifted and musically talented as this gentleman here."

McNabb, standing in the First Presbyterian sanctuary, gestures to Phil Bauman, music director and conductor of La Porte County Symphony Orchestra, who will take over the reins as the oratorio's director come November when rehearsals begin.

"I have great respect and admiration for Dan McNabb, and the dedication he has invested in the annual performances of 'Messiah' for the past 50 years," Bauman said. "It was certainly a labor of love: A love for the work of Handel and love for the artists involved.

"I'm deeply honored and delighted to have been asked to carry on the tradition of 'Messiah' performances in Michigan City."



Nic Orbovich

man right from the start.

"There's nothing wrong with asking for the best," Orbovich said with an affectionate laugh.



Dan McNabb (right) symbolically passes on the directing baton of Handel's "Messiah" to Phil Bauman in the First Presbyterian Church Sanctuary.

Bauman had been an admirer of the performances for years. He knew several of the guest soloists as well, and was impressed by how audiences pack into First Presbyterian's sanctuary "like sardines," he said, to experience it. He'd also conducted a performance of "Messiah" in New Buffalo, one in which Orbovich performed as violinist. For Orbovich, Michigan City's performances of "Messiah" reflect something altogether unique.

"This is a special event right when you walk in," he said. "You feel the sense of community, a definite relationship between the choir and the orchestra and the audience. It's almost like a family, like the audience is part of the production."

Bauman was aware of McNabb's departure, but did not apply for the position. After all, he's busy at the helm of LCSO. However, he says he was delighted and pleasantly surprised when Orbovich contacted him.

"I appreciated the way it was presented to me," Bauman said. "I needed to have conversations with everyone to see if it felt right. By the end of those conversations, it felt right."

For Bauman, the task at hand once rehearsals begin is getting acquainted with everyone, keeping spirits light and bringing everyone and everything together to represent one unified vision.

Bauman, however, isn't worried.

"You can see the love and devotion," he said, "the blood, sweat and tears, that people put into this."