

## An interview with Brian Saunders, director of the New Hope Singers International

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*In their six weeks in Washington, D. C., the three-year-old New Hope Singers International, composed of singers from 25 nations, performed at veteran's hospitals, senior citizens' homes, hospitals, and public rallies, climaxing their stay with the God Bless America Festival on September 18.*

Our goal is to be a really true Christian choir so that no matter where we sing or for what purpose or to whom, we can truly inspire Christian people of all denominations, religious people and non-religious people, to really feel that religion is not only a deep part of man's eternal life but something they must have, now, in their hearts, something they must live with.

Because we have many different types and qualities of people in our audiences, I try to select music that is stimulating and music that many people know, from all parts of the world. For example, our international folk songs are not folk songs that we dug out from 15th century literature but they are songs that the people presently sing as part of their folk culture.

A religious end can be achieved in many different ways. For a religious experience, the first thing that must happen is that a person's heart must be stimulated or made more round or full. You must elevate their heart somehow; either give them great joy or make them think extremely seriously about a situation, but you must really move their emotions very deeply. Even a medley of international folk songs can be a profound experience if the motive is pure and it gives a clean, pure feeling.

We do many things that give us deep emotional fulfillment, like going to old-age homes and orphanages. We go there to give joy but I think we receive much more than we give. To see old people in their later 70s, 80s, even 90s feel really stimulated by our performance and come up to us crying, kissing us and shaking our hands. Or to go to orphanages and have kids hold on to you, run up to you and pull on your leg. These are very deep emotional experiences for us, to feel these people loving to be loved and loving to feel clean joy and to have a wonderful time. We have much reason to think of why we should try to stimulate others.

We're almost three years old now and we've traveled about 400,000 miles. We've performed in the White House. We've done tons of community service work, like singing in Sunday services in churches and at veterans' hospitals, old-age homes, orphanages. We've sung at Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, in

seaside concerts and on boats and ocean ferries. We've done many different types of performances. Our first performance was at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and our second was at Carnegie Hall, after two weeks of rehearsal. That's when Reverend Moon had just organized the choir.

I've been with the choir since it was formed on September 15, 1973. I have been in music all my life. I went to school at Ohio State University, then I taught music composition and music theory there. I had studied choral composition and conducting in Europe at the Vienna Academy of Music. I've sung with the Robert Shaw Chorale.

When I joined, there weren't any members in my state, so I really felt God had led me to the Unification Church very clearly. There was a team witnessing on the Ohio State campus and I went to hear them sing because I thought they were such lousy singers. I went to one of their lectures, joined and that was that. About a year later I quit teaching and went to Belvedere for training.

I joined because I felt that I had had all the intellectual experiences I ever wanted to have. I was teaching at a young age and I was winning composition awards but my heart was craving for anything of significance. I was desperate to receive a heart experience. I had been looking around at all different religions, not just the Unification Church, but it was in the Unification Church that I found my spirit most deepened and the people most understanding. They were so considerate in crying to bring someone closer to God. They were inexperienced but humble, and ready to go the difficult path. I like going difficult paths; I always have. Life is very full that way, and I like to live a full life.

I've always loved choirs and ever since I was little I had dreams about conducting choirs. In junior high school I would hitchhike against my parents' wishes a few hundred miles on Saturday to hear a college choir, then I would critique them for the local paper. So choirs are ingrained in my blood. When I was ten years old I sang in five choirs at the same time. So now I can pour my whole heart into this mission and feel that it is God's desire.

The purpose of this group is to be a classical choir. Not that it is always supposed to sing a Bach A minor mass every morning before breakfast and not that it should sing Handel's Messiah every day, but it has a certain formality, even if we're singing songs from The Sound of Music. It's a very free situation in that we can do all sorts of music and feel that it is part of our mission. I can go to a music store and feel free to look in any catalog, rock music, anything. Or when I'm arranging songs, I can do anything. Our appeal is to everybody, not just to one kind of audience.

For the Washington Monument rally I was thinking of doing a whole medley of international folk songs, from maybe 15 to 20 countries, one after another during the afternoon entertainment. People could really feel, "Yes, this is an international festival. Here they are in their international costumes and this is really an international experience." We can introduce them to a more international way of thinking and get people out of themselves. We'll have authentic costumes too, cowboys, Indians, Eskimos, Japanese, Korean, European, an amazing spectacle.

By our international spirit, many people in Washington will understand that no country in the world should exist just for itself; countries must exist for a higher purpose. I can't think of this rally as just being a bicentennial event, but it is an international celebration of America's bicentennial. And that makes my heart jump up and down. I really feel that this is the most powerful message of this bicentennial celebration. America couldn't have anything that is just American because America is from all over. Here we come, representing all part of the world, gathering together to celebrate the 200th birthday of this country that God has christened to be a shining bastion of hope for the free world.