

The first anniversary of God Bless America Festival at the Washington Monument

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New Hope Singers International entertain in the Manhattan Center, wearing their Bicentennial costumes

Filling the Manhattan Center's Main Theater nearly to capacity, New Yorkers celebrated the first anniversary of the "God Bless America Festival" at the Washington Monument on September 18. Guests from all five boroughs of New York and New Jersey joined with Unification Church members in a fitting commemoration of Rev. Moon's great declaration on the Washington Monument grounds one year ago.

The evening's program was introduced by a charming, star-spangled Uncle Sam. The audience was inspired to join the Go World Brass Band in the national anthem.

Sunburst opened the entertainment portion of the program to an eager audience with, "I'm Gonna Live in Sunshine," and relived their performance at the Washington Monument with "Oh, Happy Day." Singer Patsy Johnson introduced their next number, "Save the Country," as "our theme song for 1977, 1978, 1980...." Finally, "Let's Go to Moscow" echoed throughout the halls as the audience joined in.

The stage was brightly decorated with a huge God Bless America symbol suspended in the center. Encircling the symbol was a ring which read, "God Bless America Festival 1977." Silver garlands hung vertically were accented by stars which flashed on and off in time with the music throughout Sunburst's performance.

As usual the appearance of the Korean Folk Ballet in the Fan Dance dazzled the audience. In beautiful red, white, and gold costumes, they whirled across the stage and drew many outbursts of applause from

the crowd. The international theme was expanded with the introduction of the New Hope Singers International in colorful costumes from around the world. "America, Our Heritage" recalled the God Bless America theme, and "Il Ri Ri Ya" (a Korean folksong) delighted everyone. Other selections were, "Oh Danny Boy," "When You Wish Upon a Star" and "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

The Korean Folk Ballet returned to perform the Penitent Monk Dance, and the drums thundered just as they had on the Washington Monument grounds.

An unforgettable element of the Washington Monument campaign was the pep and spirit of the Go-World Brass Band, and their anniversary performance wasn't lacking in either. The band opened with a medley of songs from "Man of La Mancha," and brought the house down with two jazz favorites, "Lullaby of Birdland" and "Perdido." Their final number, John Phillip Sousa's "Washington Post" march, drew cheers for more from a delighted audience.

With strains of "Washington Post" echoing in our minds, we were fortunate to see the greatest reminder of all of that victorious day in 1976 -- Rev. Moon in the Washington Monument rally film. As he boldly declared God's will for America, the crowd in the Manhattan Center relived the historical evening.

Church president Neil Salonen delivered an address in which he recalled the purpose of the great rally at the Washington Monument.

"September 18 will be a day of celebration... for all Americans, when they learn the significance of this day, and when the spirit of the Washington Monument campaign is substantiated all across America. Most important, of course, is that today is the first anniversary of the Washington Monument rally. But it's obvious to those of us in the Church that September 18 has been a special day in the mind and in the heart of God for a long time. It was on September 18, in 1961, that the Unification Church of America was founded."

Mr. Salonen continued, "The greatest of the first public rallies held here in America took place right across the street, in Madison Square Garden, on September 18, 1974. On that night, the members of the Unification Church were absolutely beside themselves, because they knew that it wasn't their efforts that gathered together over 60,000 people -- a turn-away crowd for Madison Square Garden. It could only have been the Spirit and the power of God, calling out to the people who were hungry to know His words. And on that foundation we continued to proclaim, until finally last year on September 18, we celebrated the Bicentennial God Bless America Festival-a celebration of America, dedicated to God. Over 300,000 gathered, in the name of God, to celebrate His blessings to this country and the significance of her future. Last year, September 18 was a great day."

Mr. Salonen shared a portion of his own testimony and personal experience of Rev. Moon's deep love for God and America. "It's the responsibility of those of us who know him, those of us who've seen him from the inside, to bear witness to what his life has meant to us, for the Christian world, for America, and finally for the whole world. And in the act of bearing witness, to correct the wrong impressions of those who are still in darkness."

At the close of Mr. Salonen's address, the audience joined together in prayer for America. The New Hope Singers International and Go-World Brass Band joined together in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," a stately finale for a most significant and memorable evening.