

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Music Ministry

First Baptist Church (Shelby, NC)

9-19-1970

Biblical Recorder September 19, 1970

Jo Anne Yates

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/baptist-historical-collections-first-baptist-church-music-ministry>

Dream Becomes Reality for 'Good News Singers'

By Jo Anne Yates

Last December, it was only a dream. There I was, standing outside the door of the music suite in Shelby's First Baptist Church with butterflies in my stomach, waiting to audition for a choir which would tour the Soviet Union the following summer. Then, after months of pounding the streets saying, "Would you like to buy . . . ?" and many long hours of rehearsal, the Good News Singers of America, proclaimed "Ambassadors of Good Will from North Carolina" by Governor Robert W. Scott, embarked on a mission never before attempted by a group of amateurs.

Our group arrived in London on Friday, July 31. We were immediately captured by the "old world" charm which the British are known for — some of the singers even attempted to pick up a bit of the English accent! No concerts had been scheduled in London when we arrived, but thanks to the talents of Gene Watterson (our pastor and official mouthpiece and negotiator), a concert was arranged for us in Infield Park. During the presentation of this concert, the entire choir received a huge dose of genuine English hospitality, and we loved every part of it! It was amusing to see those British faces light up when we sang "God Save The Queen" and "No Man Is An Island." Both are a part of the rich English heritage that gives the British that unmistakable air of dignity and pride intermingled with a wit that won our hearts. As the people followed our buses out of the park, waving and wishing us well, a surge of inspiration swept across the whole group and we felt great inside.

'We entered an entirely different world as our plane landed in Leningrad, USSR, the following Monday afternoon. There were no smiling guides to meet us at the airport — only the businesslike guards who confiscated our passports and the grim faces of the customs officers who checked our declarations and baggage. As we rode the buses to our hotel, there was very little conversation — quite unusual for our group. I think it was because we then realized the seriousness of our "mission." We could feel the tension a Com-

(Editor's Note: At the invitation of the Soviet Minister of Culture, a 138-member choir from the Shelby area recently toured Europe and Russia singing. Most of the "Good News Singers of America" came from First Church, Shelby, but 55 churches in seven counties around Shelby had singers in the group led by Van Ramsey. One of the group, Jo Anne Yates, now a freshman at Appalachian State University, recounts events of the tour in the accompanying story.)



Jo Anne Yates

munist atmosphere created, and it made me try to imagine what it would be like to live in such an atmosphere for the rest of my life.

Our reception in Leningrad was quite cordial. We were taken on an extensive and interesting sight-seeing tour of the city, viewing elaborate palaces and legislative buildings of historical significance. While we were touring, we gave the Russians a sight-seeing sight, too — imagine how they stared at 138 American tourists dressed in red, white and blue uniforms!

While in Leningrad, the Good News Singers presented three concerts — one in "Friendship House" (the palace headquarters of a society to promote friendly relations between the USSR

and other countries), one in our hotel's dining room, and another in a park near our hotel. Perhaps our concert in the park stands out most vividly, because after our final encore the park manager brought a bouquet of flowers on stage and delivered a touching address to choir and audience which translated, "The people of Russia do not want war. We want peace. We want our children to grow up in a world of peace." His sincerity, coupled with the audience's warm reception, really moved us.

Moscow, Russia's capital city, was a very cold Communist place. We were kept busy sight-seeing there, but we still managed to sing an impromptu concert here and there in a park or on our busses. Mr. Watterson spent most of his time in Moscow negotiating with the intourist office there, trying to secure concerts and transportation for our group.

Vivid Memories

Two experiences in Moscow are most vividly stamped in our memories — our visit to Lenin's tomb and our visit to the Moscow Baptist Church. We visited Lenin's tomb on a beautiful, clear Sunday. I had done a little checking with some Good News historians before we reached Red Square, and learned that supposedly the body of Lenin was preserved in that tomb for public display and that he had been dead for 46 years. At first, it was hard for me to believe that people could spend 46 years grieving over a fallen hero, but when I saw it with my own eyes — a seemingly endless stretch of people willing to wait in line for hours to view the body of a man dead for almost half a century — I believed it.

As our group filed by the heavily guarded glass case under which the body of Lenin lay, one of the main differences between America and the USSR really hit me. In the United States when a great man dies, we acknowledge his achievements and press forward from there. We believe in putting our faith in our present leadership rather than shedding tears over the past. I couldn't help but wonder if the Russians weren't unknowingly expressing a profound lack of confidence in

their present and future leaders by continuing to mourn Lenin's death.

On that same Sunday evening at 6 o'clock, we worshipped in the Moscow Baptist Church. For the first time since entering the Soviet Union, we felt a genuine warmth and friendship as we saw those 2,000 devoted Baptists crowding the pews, aisles and stairways of that little church, defying governmental prejudice, hungry for the living Word. They requested that we sing "We Shall Overcome," a song which to them signifies Christ's victory over the world. We sang that song lustily, and as I looked to my side and saw the earnestness in the faces of my friends, it brought tears to my eyes. We sang other hymns with our Russian friends — "Bless Be the Tie" and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." They sang in Russian and we sang in English, but there was a beautiful kinship in that sanctuary which was truly sacred.

Tears of Compassion

As we left the church, the Russians sang "God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again" and waved their handkerchiefs to us in a loving farewell. Again, tears found their way down our faces. Some singers cried tears of compassion for Moscow Baptist Church. Some, realizing the tremendous faith people possessed, cried because their own faith was so small. Others cried for the Americans back home who take their religious freedom for granted.

The following Monday, as our flight from Moscow to Paris carried us back to freedom, an unmistakable sigh of relief echoed through the choir. Our morale was sky-high as we invaded Paris, shopping, sight-seeing and singing whenever possible. We presented two concerts in Paris—one in the Luxembourg gardens and another in the Natarre hospital for the mentally ill, elderly and poor in Paris. We were especially blessed at the hospital concert just seeing those tired faces brighten as we sang "Aquarius" and mingled through the audience, shaking hands and extending a good news greeting.

Now, although our tour is in the past, the Good News Singers' mission is still the here and now. We saw our impossible dream become a reality — now it's up to us to tell our story time after time in hopes that, in sharing our experiences, we can convey this thought: "It's great to be an American!"

Missions Gifts Up \$478,484 Over '69

Contributions to world missions through the Southern Baptist Convention unified budget plan, the Cooperative Program, have increased by \$478,484 or 2.58 per cent over the same eight-month period in 1969, a SBC financial report indicated.

The report, prepared by the SBC Executive Committee, disclosed that mission gifts through the Cooperative Program had reached \$19,027,893 through the end of August 1970, compared to \$18.5 million during the same period in 1969.

During the month of August, giving through the Cooperative Program increased 6.85 per cent compared to August of 1969 and four states failed to get their checks to the SBC office in time to be counted in the August report.

Cooperative Program contributions during August totaled \$2.3 million, the report indicated.

In addition to undesignated funds through the Cooperative Program which allocates the contributions to SBC causes on a convention-approval formula, an additional \$21.2 million for the year has been given in designated contributions to specific mission causes.

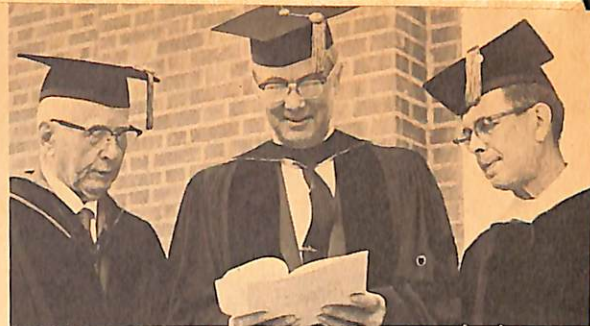
Designated contributions have increased on \$35,969, or .17 per cent over designations for the same eight-month period in 1969.

Grand total SBC mission gifts (Cooperative Program and designated contributions combined) reached \$40.2 million for the eight-month period, up \$514,453 or 1.3 per cent compared to the \$39.7 million grand total gifts for January-August 1969.

The monthly financial statement prepared by the SBC Executive Committee includes only amounts given to Southern Baptist Convention causes, and does not reflect amounts given by SBC churches to local and state mission efforts. (BP)

Hill Trip Postponed

A 10-day trip to the Holy Land Oct. 28-Nov. 6 to be directed by Woodrow Hill, pastor of First Church, Thomasville, and previously advertised in the RECORDER has been postponed. Hill said the trip will be rescheduled later. Persons interested should contact him at First Church, Thomasville.



DEANS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION — Ernest J. Loessner (right), newly inaugurated Dean of the School of Religious Education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, looks over the program for the inauguration with the only other men who have served as dean of the religious education school. They are Gaines S. Dobbins, left, who was the first dean of the school from 1953 until his retirement in 1956, and Allen W. Graves, center, who served as dean from 1956 until 1969 when he was shifted to Administrative Dean.

Report Cites Danger Of Alcoholism Among Teenagers in Britain

Alcoholism among Britain's young people is becoming a problem that "should give far more cause for alarm than drug addiction," according to a medical report issued in London.

Published by the Medical Council on Alcoholism, the report outlined the results of research undertaken since the Council began operations in 1967.

According to Dr. Max Glatt, vice-chairman of the Council, "One sees an increasing number of alcoholics in their 20s. Many of them say they have been drinking to excess for more than 10 years. The trend in this country is that alcoholics are getting younger."

Alcoholism has emerged as the country's third major health hazard, closely following heart disease and cancer, the report said, adding, "In Britain alone there are at least 300,000 sufferers in various stages of the disease."

In a front-page editorial comment on the report, the London *Baptist Times* remarked:

"Rescue operations for the victims of alcoholism are necessary. But if this is to be stopped from becoming a major destroyer, bringing havoc to millions of lives and homes, a massive study, educational, and public relations program must be organized quickly." (RNS)