Features

Composer says beautiful music leads to beautiful liturgy

By Lee Strong

The last two decades have been exciting ones for liturgical musicians, according to Marty Haughen, one of the leading composers of contemporary liturgical music.

"(Since Vatican II), the liturgy has been in a state of transition," Haughen said during a recent Rochester visit. The ongoing reform of the liturgy has led to "a lot of new life and enthusiasm among liturgical musicians. I see more and more people writing, more and more people becoming involved."

This state of flux offers a unique opportunity for the U.S. Catholic Church, Haughen added. "I think what we are creating is a new worshiping tradition."

Musically, Haughen has been an integral part of creating this new tradition. After serving an apprenticeship of nine years as music director in various Minnesota parishes, Haughen has been for the last two years a lecturer, workshop director, musical consultant and performer, spreading his own vision of the direction the renewal is taking.

Haughen recently brought that vision to Rochester as part of the Festival of Religious Arts hosted by St. Bernard's Institute and Colgate Rochester Divinity School. Haughen performed a concert of original liturgical music on April 15, and conducted two workshops on April 16 — one focusing on the use of music in the celebration of the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, and the other on building bridges between "folk" and "traditional" styles of music.

"We need to preserve the rich, living tradition of music in the Church," Haughen noted. At the same time, "we need to keep (composing) to make the music viable. Folk and classical music (can go) together as long as it's done sensitively."

Haughen traces his musical roots and understanding back to his upbringing as a Lutheran. Organ music and choirs are an important part of Lutheran worship, and Haughen began his career by playing the organ for services. This experience gave Haughen a "high regard for choirs and for beautiful melody."

By the time he went to college in the late 1960s, however, Haughen had begun to find Lutheran musical tradition too limiting. He also discovered folk music and began playing guitar. Two years after finishing college, he was hired as the music director of a Catholic parish.

Haughen's job involved not only playing the organ and directing the choir, but also leading the folk group. He quickly discovered how little quality music was available for the folk



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal
Marty Haughen, a leading composer of contemporary liturgical music, performed for the Festival of Religious Arts April 15.

group.

"In the (early) days you didn't have any liturgical music, just secular songs put to liturgical use," Haughen explained. "Then you had music that was naive, innocent, that talked about personal relationships with God. The main purpose of this music was to give the congregation a sense of being involved."

Then two events changed the direction of liturgical music in the U.S. Catholic Church.

The first was the 1972 publication of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement "Music in Catholic Worship." Haughen explained that this document called for music to be integrated into the liturgy, not to be regarded as something separate or extraneous. In order to integrate the music successfully, the document says liturgical

musicians need to understand "what the liturgy is," Haughen pointed out. "You need to know where the ritual came from and what meaning it has for our lives."

The second event was the 1975 release of "Neither Silver Nor Gold," the first album produced by a group called the St. Louis Jesuits.

The Jesuits created songs that were "not-just singing, but singing the liturgy," Haughen not-ed. Their songs were closely based on scripture, and were attempts to synthesize developments in liturgical music since Vatican

II. In essence, he said, the Jesuits moved contemporary liturgical music "toward the mainstream of Catholic liturgical expression, and paved the way for folk music to be viewed as textually compatible with more traditional and formal musical forms."

The Jesuits' album inspired Haughen to write his own compositions. For the first five years, he wrote what he now calls "awful music." In recent years, however, Haughen's compositions have gained wide acceptance, and such songs as "We Remember," "Canticle of the

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