

Celebrating 175 years of Music at Dundas St. Centre, Part 1

At the dedication service for the new Casavant organ on September 14, 1930, Rev. E.W. Young chose to read Psalm 98: **"O Sing unto the Lord a new song Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the Earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise."** These excerpts epitomize the musical excellence and faithful, musical commitment that have been upheld by the people of Dundas St. Centre since its beginnings, 175 years ago. The tidbits of information that follow are little reminders of musical happenings that have been extracted from the writings and historical research by Audrey Gibson in "Celebrating 150 years" and by Diane Cuppels' "A Pictorial Guide to Dundas Street Centre United Church" and from annual reports dated 1996 and onwards.



The Organ – As is the case at many churches, the organ is the centre piece of musical ministry. We do not know the nature of the pipe organ in the first Methodist church built in 1870 at the corner of Dundas and Maitland Streets. When that church was destroyed by fire in 1895, it was replaced in one year with an imposing, red-brick Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style building, and in it, a three-manual Karn-Warren, Electro-Pneumatic pipe organ was installed. In 1929, that organ was destroyed by fire and a new three manual Casavant organ was installed in 1930. At that time, Ernest White (former Londoner) from New York City was invited to perform as one of the guest virtuoso organists at the dedication. The organ had 30 stops, 53 ranks and 3091 pipes. The solid oak organ case was moved forward, directly behind the pulpit and the size of the choir loft was increased to accommodate it. In 1980 the organ pipes

were re-gilded and in 1985, the console itself was restored and upgraded. Following several repairs to aging leather bellows, a substantial renovation by Dodington and Dodington was completed in 2019 in order to digitize (computerize) the console and replace the mechanical action with modern and state-of-the-art electronic valves for vibrating air columns in the pipes. Over the years, there have been numerous organ recitals by local organists and invited virtuosos as fundraisers and celebrations of the excellence of the instrument.

The Organists and Choir Directors - During the past 175 years, there have been many well-qualified organists and choir masters at Dundas St. Centre. Each of these musicians has brought special talents and expertise in presenting the ministry of music, leading and teaching choir members and providing musical education to the community. A list of organists follows: William Ellis (1870-1890), W. James Birks (1890-1895), William H. Hewlett (1895-1902), Daniel Mannes (1902-1904), John Parnell Morris (1904-1938),

Charles Edward Wheeler (1938-1945), Alec Burr (1945-1965), Edith Pack (1965-1975), Albert Furtney (1975-1976), James Hill (1976-1989), Angus Sinclair (1989-1994), Donald Cook (1994-1998), and Norman Abbott (1998-present). William Hewlett was an accomplished hymn writer and advised in the development of the new hymnbook for the United Church of Canada in 1930. After leaving London, he was a cofounder of the Royal College of Music in Hamilton and was the director of the well-known Bach-Elgar Choir. Parnell Morris was a widely sought-after concert tenor in his own right. While at Dundas St. Centre, he taught voice privately and headed the voice department at Alma College in St Thomas. Charles Wheeler was organist at First St. Andrew's United Church for more than 40 years before coming to Dundas St. Centre. James Hill was inclined towards musical theatre and encouraged the youth in theatrical productions. He directed the Young People's Choir in "Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance". Angus Sinclair, trained at Waterloo University, was highly skilled as an organist, accompanist and choir director. During his time, the women's singing group, "Cecilian Singers", presented many successful concerts, such as Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater." Dr. Donald Cook was Principal of the Western Conservatory of Music (now Conservatory Canada) as well as being organist and choir director at Dundas St. Centre. Being a specialist in hymnody, he excelled in illustrated hymn lectures and organized numerous fund-raising variety shows highlighting local musical talent in the congregation. In honour of our 150th anniversary (1996) he composed a special anthem, "Surely the Lord Is in This Place". Norm Abbott has brought to Dundas St. Centre special talents as organist, pianist, choirmaster, accompanist and voice coach for opera singers. With a Master's Degree from Western University in cello performance, he extended his talents to arrange music, accompany and teach strings at Western University, Forest City Strings, and the Suzuki School of Music.



Angus Sinclair
1989-1994

Dr. Donald Cook
1994-1998

Norman Abbott
1998-present

(Dr. Cook's photo provided by Dr. Cook; the other two photos taken by D. Cuppels)

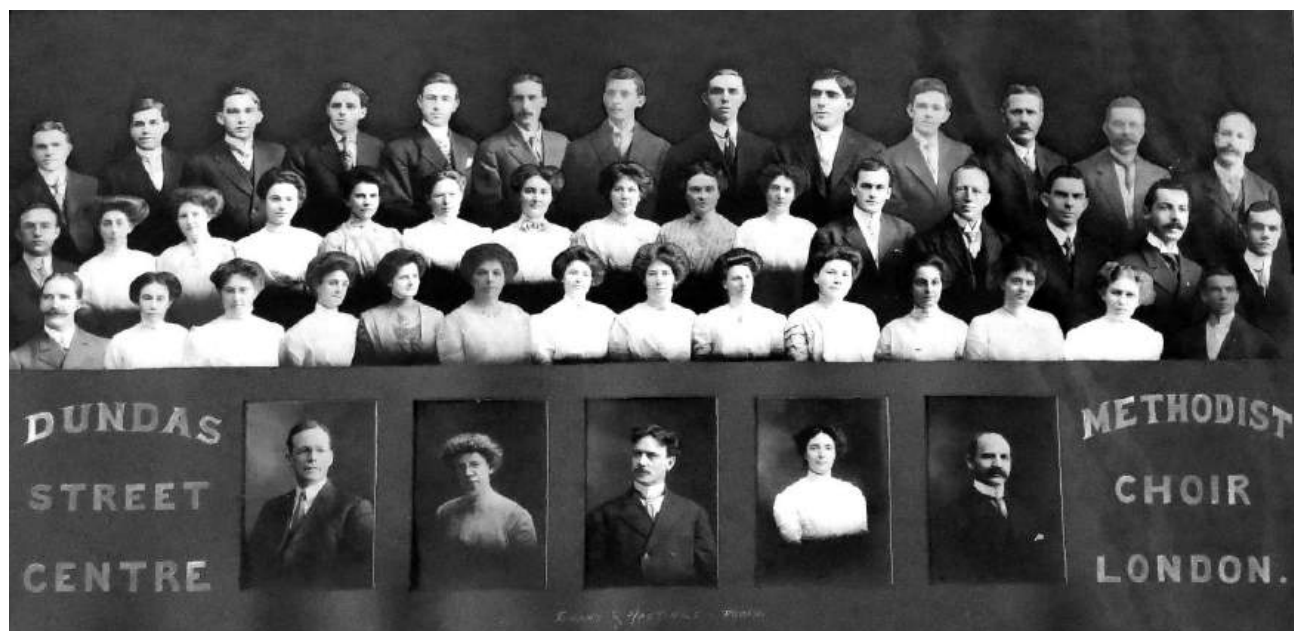
The Ministry of Music and Hymnbooks - We can be assured that the strong singing of Wesleyan Methodist hymns was the foundation of worship in the first churches. Up until 1966, there was an evening worship service at Dundas St. Centre, in addition to the morning worship. From the beginning, music in the order of service included hymn singing by the congregation, anthems by the choir and special solos. In 2013, a "Worship in Song" service was offered as one of several subsequent alternative style of services at Dundas St. Centre. In 2002, Altaf Vellani and Fritz McIntyre provided a "rock" service, entitled "Man in Pain". In 2014, Eduard Klassen from Stratford led a musical service of worship using his Paraguayan harp. A Friday evening Taizé service was introduced in

2002 and continued until 2011 with musical help from choir members, choral scholars and instrumentalists (piano, flute and recorder).

The first Methodist hymnbooks available were "The Canadian Hymnal "(1889, 1895) and the supplement "The New Canadian Hymnal "(1916), which was used in Sunday School worship services. "The Methodist Hymn and Tune Book" was introduced to Canadian congregations in 1917. The rivalry between Wesleyan Methodists and Episcopal Methodists was not quelled by union to form the Methodist Church of Canada in 1884. Notes and records reveal that Episcopal chants in the new hymnbook never caught on at Dundas St. Centre. By 1928, it was decided by the Official Board that a new hymnbook was required because there was, as quoted from the records, "something wrong with the hymns or the hymn tunes" for congregational singing.

The first hymnbook of the newly formed (1925) United Church of Canada came out in 1930. "The Hymnary" (blue hymnbook) was readily adopted by Dundas St. Centre. It contained a wide collection of traditional Episcopalian and Wesleyan hymns, new American gospel songs and hymns, and musical settings for the psalms. This collection was replaced by "The Hymn Book" (red book) in 1971 for United Church and Anglican congregations. "Songs for a Gospel People" (1987) was published as a supplement to the red hymnbook. In 1996, the United Church Publishing House released our new United Church hymnbook, "Voices United," containing 718 hymns (traditional and new) and 150 psalms and other scriptural songs. It was supplemented in 2007 by "More Voices" which contains many new and contemporary hymns for choir and solo singing.

The Choirs - The Senior Choir has been the mainstay for worship over the years. Early Methodist choirs at Dundas St. Centre were supported by funds raised through special concerts such as the Birks concerts started in 1895. These choirs were popular and large



(as many as 50 singers), such as the one depicted in this photo from the early 1900s. Soloists listed in 1930 include Madeline Bell Richmond (soprano), Leon Adams (baritone),

Clifford Hall (tenor) and Jean Buttrey (contralto). Garnet Brooks was engaged as tenor soloist in 1958. The use of paid soloists and section leaders was discontinued in 1965. Garnet Brooks returned to sing at our 150th anniversary service in 1996. Currently, the

choir is supported by the expertise of choral scholars who are music students from Western University or from studios of local voice teachers. These scholarships, established in 1996, are funded by private donations and interest from endowments from Lottie Brown and Jean and Alan Coote. Since 1997 there have been 37 scholars in the Dundas St. Centre Choir. A Junior Choir (1996-2001) was established with the help of Lois Bezeau, Don Sanderson, MaryAnn Conn and Norm Abbott. Mary Empey conducted the "New Beginnings" choir (1992- 1997) which presented contemporary Christian and Gospel pieces at worship services.

Let us conclude by suggesting that we continue to uphold the challenge of Psalm 95: **"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord....Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song."**

May the good music of Dundas St. Centre ring always in our ears and in our hearts.

Jim Traquair and Diane Cuppels

Celebrating 175 years of Music at Dundas St. Centre, Part 2

Music has always been a successful platform for reaching out to the community. Since the church's beginnings, the church organists and choirs offered concerts and recitals to the congregation and to the public. More recently, our Sanctuary has been in great demand as a rental concert and recital space. We rent to local teachers and their students, to community choirs and orchestras and to professional musicians.

Musical Outreach - From its very beginnings, musical training for the public and outreach to performing artists of the community have been part of the musical ministry at Dundas St. Centre. Early music directors gave training to choral singers as well as to soloists. Choir masters, such as William Hewlett, James Birks and Parnell Morris, were directors of local choirs and community choral societies; they also taught at colleges and in private studios. Community choirs and orchestras were always part of the community outreach and fellowship of Dundas Street Centre. The 'Young Adults' group, formed in 1952 as a fellowship group, quickly evolved into a choir



Mary Empey and Angus Sinclair, 1995
(Photo courtesy of D. Cuppels)

under the leadership of Jim Brooks. Also in the 1950s, the Dundas Street Centre orchestra played regularly at worship services and Sunday School events, under the leadership of Len Andrews and Maurice Beckham. It had many non-church members and even attracted new members to Dundas Street Centre United Church. In the 1990s, **Angus Sinclair** formed a women's choir named The Cecilian Singers and regularly assembled men from the congregation into a Men's Choir for special worship services. The New Beginnings choir directed by **Mary Empey** at about the same time, delighted the congregation with gospel and contemporary Christian selections.

Concerts for the Church and Community

The church organists and choirs have regularly offered concerts and recitals as fundraisers for Dundas St. Centre. In the 1890s, the Birks Concerts were conceived as a means of promoting excellence in vocal concerts and recitals. In the 1970s, the 'In Praise of the Arts' Committee was struck to foster good quality concerts at Dundas St. Centre. The church Sanctuary, with its excellent acoustics and semicircular, cantilevered post-free balcony, provides a highly desirable rental space for concerts. The attractiveness of the Sanctuary was further enhanced by leveling the floor (in 2010) and removing some of the front pews to accommodate larger orchestras (2007, 2010). Local music teachers have been supported by providing them with reasonable rental contracts. Recent examples are Roland Fix, voice teacher, and Sig Martin, string teacher. Purchase of the Yamaha grand piano in 2005 has enhanced the staging of concerts and recitals. Performances by the St Mary's Choir School, Valley View Men's Chorus and the

combined Beal and London Singers have become annual events attracting hundreds of concert goers each time. During Dr. Cook's time at Dundas Centre, the gala recitals of award-winning students at Conservatory Canada were held annually in our Sanctuary. When Norman Abbott was on the faculty of the Forest City School for Talent Education (2004-2007), the "Serenade for Strings" was an annual afternoon concert featuring young students from the school. Other groups have included Pro Musica, Fanshawe Chorus, the London Singers, Orchestra London, and the Canadian Orpheus Male Choir, all in 2003. Noteworthy productions were "Elijah" (Felix Mendelssohn) and "Carmina Burana" (Carl Orff). Orchestra London staged the "The Prodigal Son" by B. Britton to great acclaim. Groups such as Pro Musica have taken advantage of the excellent acoustics in the Sanctuary to make recordings. Since 2011, Dundas St. Centre has been the home base for the London Community Orchestra and the London Youth Symphony; both groups perform two or three concerts a year in the Sanctuary.



Forest City Fire performing in 2015 (Photo courtesy of **D. Cuppels**)

Other noteworthy rentals by professional performers include guitarists Leona Boyd and Pavlo (2001) and the "Dynamic Duo" of Marie Bottrell and Rick Loucks, country and western singers (2016).

Fundraising has been the impetus for many excellent performances in the Sanctuary over the years. In the 1930s, organ recitals by local and international organ virtuosos were organized to highlight the then new Casavant organ and to raise funds for its purchase and installation. Albert Furtney in 1975 and Angus Sinclair in 1994 organized 'hymnathons' to help support the maintenance of this organ. Sponsors were asked to pledge a monetary amount per every hymn played. Organ, piano and voice recitals at the church have featured some outstanding performers. An example are the recent piano recitals by Prof. Bruce Vogt from the University of Victoria. His performances supported our Out of the Cold hospitality meal program (2018 and 2019). Variety shows under the title "Feeding Body, Feeding Soul" in support this same Out of the Cold (OOTC) meal program (2007-2013), have featured Dundas St. Centre Choral Scholars, organists (Don Cook, Angus Sinclair and Norm Abbott), pianists (Norm Abbott and Kathy Hyde), vocal soloists (choral scholars, Roland Fix and George Andrin) and local choirs such as the Forest City Fire barber shop singers, Agritones, Valleyview Male Chorus, Amabile Choirs and Broadway Singers, to name a few. These shows have raised thousands of dollars for the OOTC meals. The Choral Scholars have presented very entertaining fundraiser concerts all accompanied by Norm Abbott and supported by the choir who provided

sumptuous desserts. Some of these events include 'We Need a Little Christmas' by Kathryn Lackie and Andrea Drobny (2002), 'Divas and Desserts' by Laura Sylvis, Vicki Hayter, Andrea Drobny and Ellen Denning (2004), 'Cabaret' by Michelle Kujawa, Andrea Drobny, Lucy Bledig and Ellen Denning (2005) and 'Thus Sings My Soul' and 'O Hear the Angel Voices' by Jillian Law, Lisa Mulgrew, Megan Robertson and Bethany Routledge (2014). In addition to organ recitals, Dr. Cook organized many fundraising concerts during our 150th anniversary year: 'Foundation of our Hymns,' 'Soup and Psalms' and 'Ice Cream Spring Fling' (all in 1999), 'Harvest of Hymns' (2001), 'Music for a Sunday Afternoon' (2006), 'Palm Court Pianostalgia,' (2006), 'Serenade for Strings' (2004, 2005, 2006), and a 'Taste of Vienna in Songs and Sweets' (2007).

Of course, we cannot leave out the fun-filled opportunities for eating and singing in the annual St Patrick's Day 'Hot Potato Bash' started by the UCW in 1997 and now continued by the Unified Board. Vocal stylings of soloists and small ensembles and soloists such as Norm Abbott on the piano and Ken Conn on the fiddle or Ruth Lewis on her jingle stick or autoharp are highlights topped only by congregational singalongs of favourite Irish tunes. Not to be outdone by the Irish, Norm Abbott and Don Sanderson (bag piper and haggis maker) organized a Scottish fling, 'Soup and Song with Burns and Other Bards,' to celebrate Robbie Burns Day (2006).



Choral Scholars **Bethany Routledge, Lisa Mulgrew, Meg Robertson and Jillian Law** with **Norman Abbott**, 2014
(Photo courtesy of **D. Cuppels**)

For 175 years, music at Dundas Centre has equaled good quality fun and education! We are reminded of the words of Robert Lowry's hymn written in 1869:

"My life goes on in endless song,
Above earth's lamentations.
I hear the real, though far-off hymn,
That hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear its music ringing.
It sounds an echo in my soul,

How can I keep from singing?"

Play and sing on!

Jim Traquair and Diane Cuppels