

## Preview

### **Six choirs are finalists in the sixth annual Jubilation! Elizabeth Stuart Church Choir Festival**

by Daniel Hathaway



If you're a church or synagogue-goer, your house of worship probably comes equipped with a choir. Whether they're made up of amateur or professional singers or a mixture of both, hard-working choirs don't get out to hear each other very often and have the opportunity to be inspired by other ensembles.

Half a dozen years ago the late Elizabeth Stuart, a WCLV account executive and a fine church choir soprano and soloist herself, decided to fix that. She came up with the idea of a choir festival to be sponsored by Cleveland's classical FM station. Intended to foster quality choral singing in houses of worship in Northeast Ohio, the festival would also be a competition with prizes attached. After Stuart's untimely death in December, 2010, WCLV renamed the church choir festival in her honor.

On Thursday and Friday, May 9 and 10 at 8 pm, the six finalists in the 2013 Jubilation! Elizabeth Stuart Church Choir Festival will sing their final rounds, three choirs each night, as part of the Helen D. Schubert Concert Series at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in downtown Cleveland. Both evenings will be broadcast live over WCLV, 104.9 FM and emceed by Bill O'Connell.

Thursday night's lineup features the choirs of The Church of the Gesu, Cleveland Heights, Joseph Metzinger, director; St. Casimir Parish (Neff Road), Cleveland, Rita Cyvas-Kliorys, director; and St. Sebastian Catholic Parish, Akron, Lynn Frey-Steward, director. Friday evening's performances bring on the choirs of Suffield United Church of Christ, Mogadore, David Baughman, director; St. Hilary Catholic Parish, Fairlawn, Carissa Young, director; and The Ensemble of The Federated Church, Chagrin Falls, Amanda Powell, director.

The six finalists arrived at this point by submitting two recorded pieces selected from a number of categories: a movement from a cantata, oratorio or requiem, a work in the English choral tradition, a spiritual or work from the African American Gospel tradition and a renaissance *a capella* selection (finalists would be required to perform at least one unaccompanied piece).

Each choir in the final rounds will sing a 20-minute segment reflecting a variety of musical styles but including one selection from a repertory list provided. First prize is \$1,000 and a trophy; runners-up will receive \$500 each and a plaque, and all choirs will receive a CD of their performances. Judges for the festival include Robert Page, former director of choruses for The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, Frank Bianchi of Baldwin Wallace University, and Peter Jarjisian of Ohio University.

This six finalist ensembles range in size from 14 singers (Suffield UCC) to 63 (St. Sebastian), with others numbering 27, 29, 32 and 38. Repertory includes Renaissance standards by Tallis, Hassler, Allegri, and Gallus, baroque and classical choruses by Mozart and Handel (but no Bach), Romantic music by Brahms, Dubois and Gounod, and recent works by John Rutter (a favorite with 4 selections), Franz Biebl and Ola Gjeilo, plus spirituals, African chants and other arrangements. Download the complete program [here](#).

*Pictured above: the 2012 first-place winner, the choir of St. Noel Church, Willoughby Hills, Agnieszka Bieniek, director*

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