

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

CD by The National Christian Choir

Thoughts on the CD and its contents

by Music Director, Dr. C. Harry Causey

It's gratifying and amazing to me that this CD – the second one ever recorded by The National Christian Choir – is still one of our most popular recordings. Funds were short at the time, so we could not afford an orchestra. Instead, we gathered in the acoustically rich National Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, which is also blessed with a magnificent pipe organ. Five brass players from the United States Navy – all Christians, and all enthusiastic about The NCC – volunteered their talents as well. Along with a few other instruments accompanying, the singers set upon the all-day task of recording and worshiping through some of our greatest hymns.

How Great Thou Art – From a Swedish minister over 100 years ago to the hands of a British missionary about 40 years ago, this poem and music found their way into the early years of the evangelistic crusades of Billy Graham. One of America's favorite hymns took root. The original authors and composers were inspired by the power of thunderstorms. Isn't it wonderful how God uses everyday things to inspire great art? I love this hymn. One of the reasons is that it doesn't talk about God: it speaks to God. As worshipers, I think that's vitally important.

I Need Thee Every Hour – The arranger of this anthem, John Ness Beck, was a personal friend of mine. When I lived in Cincinnati, he lived and composed in Columbus, Ohio. I visited him in his home one day. As I was about to leave, he took me to his piano where he had merely sketched out the idea for this organ-accompanied, lovely treatment of the hymn. He asked me to sing along as he played. We both had tears in our eyes. Upon the release of this choral gem, I quickly put it into the hands of my church choir to sing; and I have always felt privileged to have been present at its birth.

Crown Him Lord of All – From the simple, quiet start to the triumphant ending, this has become one of my favorite hymns. We didn't sing this in my small church in Rockingham, North Carolina. In fact, I had never heard it until I discovered this anthem arrangement many years later. I love the progression of Bethlehem through His ministry to His triumph.

Have Thine Own Way, Lord – It's such a simple hymn that I decided I needed to make a complicated arrangement to challenge my choir. If you understand choral music, there are usually four parts – Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. This arrangement, however, divides each of those voice parts with a resulting eight-part, unaccompanied arrangement that takes special care to sing well.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness – I was surprised to read one of those opinion polls in a Christian magazine years ago that said this is the favorite hymn of American Christians. I would have thought "Amazing Grace" or "How Great Thou Art" would hold that distinction. Regardless of your preference on that question, this is undoubtedly one of those great Scriptural truths that has been beautifully captured in inspiring music. I love this arrangement for both its tender moments and its powerful ones.

Amazing Grace – Here's another arrangement by John Ness Beck that is very complex because of its simplicity. Ah for the days when the organ was the standard accompanying instrument for choirs

and congregations in worship services. This arrangement just couldn't be done in most churches today because they've abandoned the King of Instruments.

A Mighty Fortress – Steve Green is one of my favorite Christian recording artists. In fact, Steve is one of my favorite Christians! He arranged this powerful hymn and then gave The National Christian Choir the wonderful compliment of asking us to help him premiere his cantata of the same name at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Washington, DC, years ago. It's unaccompanied. I'll never forget Steve's walking onto the stage, ready to join us in singing. I had told our pianist that as Steve approached the microphone, play something softly in the background that would give him the starting key. The only problem is that I forgot to tell Steve how he was to get his pitch. With thousands of folks waiting for him to begin, he looked at me with wide eyes and whispered, "How do I get my pitch." I told him the plan and encouraged him to trust the pianist. He did. It was correct. All went well. Some years later, I invited Steve to join us for the premiere of one of our works entitled "The Heart of a Child" (on which he is a guest soloist). I asked him if we could also sing this great arrangement of "A Mighty Fortress" again that night, which we did. Sorry, but Steve is not on this CD singing this hymn; but my singers sang their hearts out on this one.

No Turning Back – For this anthem, I put together two songs – "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" and "He Is Lord." Think about it: I have committed to following Jesus Christ because He is the Lord. I pray that is true for you as well.

Standing on the Promises/O Jesus, I Have Promised – This is fast. How fast? Well, if you are one of the signers, make sure all your dentures are secure! It moves into one of those hymns which has brought me to tears on many occasions. I love the harp part on this setting, but I have to confess that it's not really a harp. It's a synthesizer. We couldn't afford the real thing. But I was so happy in the recording studio when Sandi Patti's recording engineer couldn't tell the difference.

Jesus Paid It All – I've heard many arrangements of this hymn. None of them have moved me as much as this one. The violinist is real (!), and his lovely playing along with this masterful arrangement is a splendid wedding.

Abide With Me/My Jesus, I Love Thee – One of my keyboard accompanists, Judy Hooks, arranged these hymns for us. She is a tremendously talented lady; and this – in my opinion – is one of her crowning achievements musically.