

MCCC Paves Way for Harmonious Career for Alumna Susan Nelson

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In the world of sacred music, Mercer alumna Susan Nelson has achieved notable success as a musician and handbell composer, with more than 120 published pieces to her credit. Her innovative compositions have been performed by select bell choirs at festivals in Singapore, Scotland, Germany, England and Switzerland. Last year, she won the coveted ASCAP Plus award from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers for her performance and composition work.

Growing up in a musical family, she played piano, guitar, and recorder at an early age. Yet, it was Nelson's experiences as a student at Mercer County Community College that set the stage for her passionate pursuit of music education. She recalls two faculty members -- Paul Scheid and John Kulpa - who particularly nurtured her talents. Scheid gave Nelson her first organ lessons, while Kulpa was her flute teacher.



Susan Nelson ('75)

After several years at Mercer, where she took a wide range of courses including many in music, Nelson was ready to transfer to Rutgers. She says, "Mercer prepared me both educationally and emotionally to succeed in a four-year school. The low tuition rates also helped since I had to put myself through college."

Her transfer to Rutgers was exceptionally smooth. "I was so well prepared that when I transferred to Rutgers University, I was able to test right out of the second semester classes in sight singing, keyboard harmony and music theory during the registration process."

At Rutgers, Nelson earned a bachelor's degree in music theory and composition and during that time learned to play harpsichord and krumhorn, a Renaissance woodwind instrument. Seeking to broaden her career opportunities, she also received teacher certification from Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey).

Moving on to the post of musical director at Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Advent in Trenton, Nelson was soon to add another instrument to her repertoire. With the church's purchase of a two-octave handbell set to commemorate its 100th anniversary, Nelson was asked to start a handbell choir in honor of the occasion. She quickly took up the challenge, first studying techniques with noted faculty at Westminster Choir College at Rider University. As she mastered the handbells, composing became a natural extension of her talents.

Over the last 10 years, Nelson has served as director of music at her home church, St. Mark Lutheran in Hamilton. She also works as a technical assistant in Talbott Library at Westminster Choir College and, in her spare time, has established 4-Tolled Publishing, her own publishing company. One of her noted works is KidzRing!™, a series of books designed for very young ringers.

"The most rewarding thing is the privilege of working with talented ringers and singers, developing their talents and watching them grow," Nelson says proudly.

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