



Blessing Festival

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, February 9, 2018

By Hans Campman

In Amsterdam, on Saturday afternoon Feb. 9th we had a successful Blessing Festival, which was attended by 80 people.

The main idea of the Festival.

UPF, in cooperation with FFWPU, WFWP and the "Liberian Association" held the event, called the Peace- and Family Festival in community centre "No limit" in the outskirts of Amsterdam. For the occasion we had invited a singer from our own ranks, Mr James Houston from Sweden who is an outstanding Soul – and Gospel singer with a broad and varied repertoire of songs. In several Scandinavian countries he has been appreciated for his unique warm and mellow voice in combination with his modest and dignified appearance. In Holland, as a key element of the Festival we wanted to treat our audience to the experience of joyful togetherness by singing well-known popular songs with a deep meaning and beautiful melodies. People of all ages can relate to these songs. We estimated that James would be the ideal person to guide this. We invited him and his wonderful wife Britta to come over to the Netherlands for preparing and performing the music program for the Festival.

The musical aspect of the program of the Festival; the performers.

Looking back, we can say that the experiment has been a great success. Led by James Houston, the audience was happily guided through a sequence of medleys of songs in various styles, from Soul and R&B to Motown, Gospel and Musical. People joyfully sang along. The lyrics of the songs

were displayed on a screen, in a PowerPoint presentation put together by a 2nd generation couple in the Netherlands. People were singing while pronouncing the words on the screen.

The medleys (9 altogether) all contained a certain message, relating to building a world of peace and harmony. In singing James was supported by our own wonderful Soul/Gospel-singer Eleanor Klerkx-Flowers from the Netherlands. On most songs I had the privilege to back them up on piano. The two vocalists gave an unforgettable experience to everyone attending. Additionally, between the medleys there was an exciting, dynamic performance by a female violinist, the young talented Welmoed Alkenaar, student of medicine at Amsterdam University. She performed two violin pieces– the Song of the Cossacks and a Hungarian dance – melodies which were filled with passion and the joy of living.

The three main elements of the program.

- Mr Bert Janssen and his daughter in law Eli Giuliano were the MCs. They announced the songs by reading out the core message of each medley, and connected the songs of the sequence into one story line. The underlying message of the songs is that we can build the new and better world of peace, understanding and harmony between all people, but we need the help of God, the Heavenly Parent, and we need to work together, removing all barriers between us. The music was the first element of the program, with the purpose to prepare for the climax.

- Highlight of the program was the (10 minutes) presentation of True Mother's words on video. In her

speech True Mother announces the True Parents of humankind. True Parents represent the parental heart of God, which can unite all people as God's children. If we unite with True Parents and then invest all our efforts we can remove the evils and sufferings of the world and create God's Kingdom on Earth and beyond.

- Led by the MCs we had a solemn ("Holy) Toast to the ideal of "World Peace in One Family under God, based on loving marriages and families. " Except two people all attendees took the Holy Juice.

At the end of the concert a group photo was taken. Finally in the "foyer" attendants were treated to delicious food and high quality snacks; a lot of it was provided, even produced, by our own members.

Some good results of the Festival.

Looking back at the event we feel happy and hopeful. Even though we had not accomplished our (minimum) numerical goal of 100 attendants (partly because of the short preparation time) the Festival was a success in several ways. Among 80 people attending 35 were members and 45 were guests. We were able to strengthen (and even "repair") our already existing network and make precious new contacts. Some of the new guests were priests of various ("black") churches. Some of us (incl. myself) were able to invite our closest relatives.

My evaluation:

It was good to hold the Festival (as well as invite to the Festival) centered on the (one) artist.

- He is the main element (the "face") on the invitation pamphlet or poster



•He leads the people through the program by singing. He is supported by the MC.

□We would like to continue holding Festivals this way, using as a formula the idea to invite people to a music festival around one special singer. We invited the people by hand (giving out the invitation) as well as online. One sister called to churches. It was a pleasure to invite the people using a pamphlet displaying the face of the main artist. We were basically inviting the people to a “concert for peace (and happy families) by the famous Gospel- and R&B singer James Houston”.

□James Houston was the main feature of the program. He was not singing just two or three songs. Although on some medleys he was assisted by a 2nd singer, Eleanor Flowers, James basically led the audience through almost the entire program.

James Houston, in my opinion, can do this.

James’ voice is so intoxicating that he can entertain an audience for hours

even by himself. I felt it was effective to focus the Festival around not a multitude of performers, but around the one artist. Rather than having many artists perform one after the other, it was the one singer James Houston, “telling the story” by singing a (large) sequence of songs, in tandem with the audience. In carrying out the program he is supported by the MCs. However, at times between singing the songs (as it happened in Amsterdam) it can be James himself who - quietly yet effectively – shares a message with the public, relating to the vision behind the Festival.

The progression of the medleys and songs created a context and atmosphere in which it was easy and fitting to present True Mother’s words on video and to have the (“Holy”) Toast to World Peace.

This idea of emphasizing music in the Festivals is, of course, not new. It was applied in the Madison Square Garden Rally in the US two years ago; in

Vienna it was done at the rally “Peace starts with me” in April last year. In October 2017 it was done on a smaller scale, also in Vienna, in the Syrian Orthodox church, as a concert by Seiko Lee and David Eaton and a small orchestra.

The concert in the Syrian Orthodox church was quite similar to the Festival we have just been holding, the difference being that with James Houston (although he can do the “classics” too) the emphasis is on the “contemporary” styles, which he masters so well.

In this way the aspect of singing together can be stressed even more than in the previous concerts. By singing together in harmony and unity with each other centred on even one (good) famous singer our audience can experience a glimpse of the “One family of brothers and sisters under God”. God’s Heavenly Kingdom can be felt/touched for a short moment in time. This makes an excellent spiritual platform for receiving True Mother’s message as well as the Blessing Toast.

Conclusion.

I think Festivals where people can sing famous melodies together can be effective as a formula for Blessing Festivals (besides, of course, many other ways). For making this kind of Festivals the most important person is one very good singer who can lead this. James Houston, in my opinion, more than qualifies for the job.!