

Keyboard Festivals plant seeds of worship

By Lindsey Williams

Writing Specialist

From grades K5 – 12, 706 children across ten locations performed worshipful music during The Mississippi Baptist Area Keyboard Festivals, Jan. 25-27.

“I have heard nothing but great successful reports all over the state,” said Wyndy South, Consultant of Mississippi Baptist Convention Board’s (MBCB) Worship Ministries and leader of the Festival at First Church, Jackson. “Everybody had a really worshipful time. The Festival at First Church, Jackson, had 200 kids – 900 people including their family members. This year we had the organ, and we sang a hymn; it was like being in church. Then everybody was running around to find their siblings, and it was just a lot of fun.

“My favorite part is at the end of the Festival, when all the kids come up to me and I say, ‘How did you do?’ They look at me and go, ‘I did okay, Ms. Wyndy.’ I say, ‘I can see that blue Superior sticker from here – I know you did great. Can I read your comments?’ ‘Oh yes!’ they’ll say, and their parents are right there. I’ll say, ‘Hmm, what’s this right here? Don’t let your feet swing while you’re playing? You must have thought you were on the playground!’ And they laugh and say, ‘Oh, Ms. Wyndy, you’re so crazy!’ The rapport I have with them is amazing because they’re so receptive to that. They know me and I know them, and I just absolutely love those kids.”

South has known the ivory keys since she was three years old and taught piano for most of her life. Long before she began working with the MBCB, Keyboard Festivals started as hymn-playing contests in 1945, until South’s predecessor, Dot Pray,

picked them up as festivals for encouragement and critique, rather than competitions.

Universities from across the state look out for graduating, gifted students to whom they offer scholarships. The goal for Keyboard Festivals is to encourage children to continue studying piano, and the hope is that one day those children will play for the glory of God in their local churches.

Keyboard Festivals have encouraged many kids in their musical pursuits. Former students have reached out to South and shared that their own children began piano lessons. Children with disabilities have performed in Keyboard, not allowing assumptions or difficulties to hinder the talent God has given them.

As for South, her coworkers value that the moment she leaves the Festival, she begins to think how she can improve upon her leadership and how she can enhance the children's experience next year. "This is what God has asked me to do: to shepherd those children and encourage them, and to teach them how to appreciate music and use it for the Lord," South expressed.

"I see that every time I walk in that Festival. I know my judges; I know my group leaders. We're like a huge watering can in a giant garden. I'm either watering and other folks are planting, or they're watering and I'm planting. Do I know if anybody will come to know Jesus because of Keyboard? No, not unless someone tells me, which they have in the past. But that atmosphere is one of worship.

"I have children all over this state that do not declare a church home. The field is ripe out there, and Keyboard is a large place to make the best impression that God has given me to make. I see kids who play a song for Jesus, but I don't know what it means for them. I want it to mean for them what it means for me, but I can only hope and pray for that.

"But I just see Jesus all over that place. When kids walk up

to me and say, 'We're back,' and I say, 'Yeah, you've been here since you were five and you're graduating high school!', I know it has value to them. I see parents post videos to Facebook of their children playing here one year and playing for a church the next. It's like a big circle that just gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and pretty soon it's going to cover the world. Some of those kids are missionaries somewhere, or they're serving in a church, or they've gone to do music missions. They're changing the world. I like to think of it that way."

A special *thank you* to the churches/locations in which Keyboard Festivals took place and to the leaders who orchestrated each Festival:

- FBC Tupelo (Randy Wood)
- FBC Starkville (Tom Jenkins)
- FBC Jackson (Wyndy South)
- FBC Meridian (David Bishop)
- William Carey University (Christina Mathis and Dr. Brian Murphy)
- FBC Summit (Bradley White)
- FBC Long Beach (Matthew Gaddy)
- FBC Laurel (Marilyn Huff)
- FBC Senatobia (Randy Chappell)
- North Greenwood BC (Patricia Ethridge)