

A passion for jazz and the word

Andy Tecson thought he might perform his jazz compositions set to a selection of Psalms once, and that would be it. That was 30 years ago. Since then, not only has “Jazz Psalms” been heard nationwide, it was the first of several of his works that have been enjoyed by hundreds of congregations, including his latest, “Jazz Passion.”

This year Tecson, a member of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Naperville, Ill., was recognized for his music ministry and other faith-based activities with the Seeds of Hope Award from Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, Ill., which funds health and human care initiatives.

“We’re so grateful that Andy uses his gift of music to bring joy to people, and also uses his gift to assist agencies like ours to care for the most vulnerable in our communities,” said Denver Bitner, president and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Tecson is an LSSI Cornerstone Society member and has

100 plus

108: Florence Williams, St. John, Poughkeepsie, N.Y. **107: Mildred Coene**, Grace, Rochester, Pa. **103: Lucile Laukhauf Shealy**, Payne, Ohio. **102: Margot J. Glavis**, Reformation, Washington, D.C.; **Sis Keisen**, St. John, Lewistown, Pa. **101: Elizabeth Bragunier**, Trinity, Hagerstown, Md.; **Ruth McKee**, Faith, Lander, Wyo.; **Leona Plaumann**, Our Saviour, Appleton, Wis. **100: Hugh Barnett**, Grace, Rock Hill, S.C.; **Violet Driftmeyer**, St. Luke, Curtice, Ohio; **Norah Hatling**, Glendale, Burien, Wash.; **Daniel Miller**, St. Paul, Dixon, Ill.; **Harold Munson**, St. Timothy, Omaha, Neb.; **Ruth Pegg**, Grace, Harlingen, Texas; **Minnie Swope**, Immanuel, Golden, Ill.



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH, DAVENPORT, IOWA

Ken Jonas (left), Andy Tecson and Bobby Lewis play at the annual Jazz Sunday worship at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa, in 2010. The three have performed “Jazz Psalms” together for 30 years.

provided a legacy gift to the organization.

The saxophone-playing, jazz-composing attorney began his ministry as a way of honoring Elsa Marty, the late wife of Lutheran scholar Martin E. Marty. He completed “Jazz Psalms” in 1982 and it debuted at Valparaiso [Ind.] University. “It was exciting to pair these ancient series of texts with powerful imagery and spectacular poetry, which remain relevant to our human experience thousands of years later, with jazz, a contemporary American art form,” Tecson said.

He thought it might not be performed again, but word spread and “Jazz Psalms” was performed in several venues.

“I don’t have time to market it, which is clearly the word of the Holy Spirit,” said Tecson, who followed his Psalms music with “The Chicago Jazz Mass,” which was first performed in 1986.

Perhaps Tecson’s crowning achievement, several years in the making, is “Jazz Passion,” which premiered in 2010. With a libretto by David Abrahamson, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Luke, Chicago, and co-composed by jazz veterans Bobby Lewis and Bobby Schiff, the work is intended to be performed by 12 musicians and 12 singers, retelling the last days of Jesus’ life.

Before beginning another challenging composition, Tecson hopes to spread the word about this one. “My dream is that ‘Jazz Passion’ could be used at faith-based colleges,” he said. “These schools’ choral program and jazz program could work together to learn the music and to experience it.” □

Jeff Favre

Favre is a contributing editor of The Lutheran.

To learn more about Tecson, visit www.churchjazz.com, where sheet music for the “Chicago Jazz Mass” can be purchased, as well as CDs of Tecson’s recordings. The composer also makes himself available to teach master classes at Lutheran colleges and universities.