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News

THE SOUND OF UPTOWN MUSIC: Old Dutch Church clock tower source of daily offerings (video)

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KINGSTON, N.Y.— Three times each day, music wafts through the air of Uptown Kingston. The joyous noise comes from the clock tower of the Old Dutch Church on Wall Street, which for at least the past four decades has been serenading the community with songs of praise.

While some around the Uptown area say they've grown so accustomed to the music they barely notice it anymore, others say hearing the hymns that flow through Uptown from the steeple each day at 12:15 p.m., 3:15 p.m. and 5:15 p.m. are a never-ending source of comfort and joy.

"It's nice," said Jennifer Deering, the office manager at Edward Jones Investment, at the corner of Wall and Main streets. "There's always music."

"It can be very calming," said Meera Singh, the vice president and branch manager of Key Bank, across the street from the church.

"It can be very calming when you're having a crazy day," agreed Sarita Plepa, the bank's relationship manager. "I catch myself singing to the hymns."

Sean Miller, a Kingston resident who operates a hot dog wagon in front of the church's Main Street entrance, said hearing the music brings back memories of "home."

"I grew up with it because I grew up in Wallkill where the church was Dutch Reformed also ... so all the music I'm hearing every day is like home. Even though home is only 20 miles away, it's nice," said Miller.

"It's enjoyable," agreed the Rev. Ken Walsh, pastor of the Old Dutch Church. "I think it picks up my day when I hear the music. Some of them are my favorite hymns."

A musician who has been pastor of the congregation for the past eight years, Walsh said he often sings along with music that streams from the steeple.

His favorite hymn, he said, is “Abide With Me.”

No one knows for certain, he said, how long music has been emanating from the church steeple, which, at 265 feet, is the highest point in the city, but Walsh said the music has been filling the Uptown area for at least 40 years, Walsh said.

“My secretary has been here for 30 years and she said it’s always played.”

The current system, which was installed at the base of the steeple about 20 years ago, is completely computerized and programmed with about 100 hymns. Each cycle features two verses of each tune and three tunes are played during each performance, which lasts about five minutes, he said.

“We don’t have any control over what hymns are playing, except we can choose the seasons,” said Walsh. Recently, the amplified bells that send the sounds of psalms through the community filled the air with the religious sounds of Lent and Easter.

Walsh said the church can also program the system to play patriotic music, so on April 20, during a parade commemorating the 200th anniversary of Gov. George Clinton’s death, those themed tunes were chosen to fill the air around Uptown Kingston. Patriotic tunes will again play on July 4, Walsh said.

Although the clock itself no longer tracks time — indeed, said Walsh, each of the clock’s four faces tells a different time — the clock chimes the quarter hour.

“Really the Uptown keeps on moving by the bell tower,” said Walsh. “They tell time by the chiming of the clock,” he said of those who work and visit the area. “They count on it.”

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