

FRAME BY FRAME

Expressions of Faith | By Photojournalist Ronald W. Erdrich | Fourth in a series

“‘Sanging’ comes from the depths of your heart, from your soul.”



Isabella Matthews, right, said that if she doesn't sing she feels an emptiness inside. Matthews and Pam Wilson, at left, are co-directors of the Harmony Hills Baptist Church choir.

Feeling the harmony

There's singing, and then there's *sanging*.

Isabella Matthews, one of the directors for the Harmony Hills Baptist Church choir, can always spot the difference between the two.

“‘Singing’ people usually sing real pretty and high,” she said and demonstrates by singing “Amazing Grace” in a light, almost breathy voice.

“‘*Sanging*’ comes from the depths of your heart, from your soul,” she finishes, heavily emphasizing the “a” sound in the word. She rips back into “Amazing Grace,” pulling notes from deep within her that seem like they could knock a person down.

At 3 p.m. each Saturday, Matthews, fellow director Pam Wilson and their small choir practice the difference between singing and *sanging*. Jeremy Jay, Matthews' nephew, is the group's organist. He had taken only three weeks of piano lessons before he was recruited.

“He started plinking and plunking and we sang with that,” Matthews said. Since then, his virtuosity has grown significantly,

she said.

Wilson usually leads the choir while Matthews performs as soloist. Others in the group also solo on occasion.

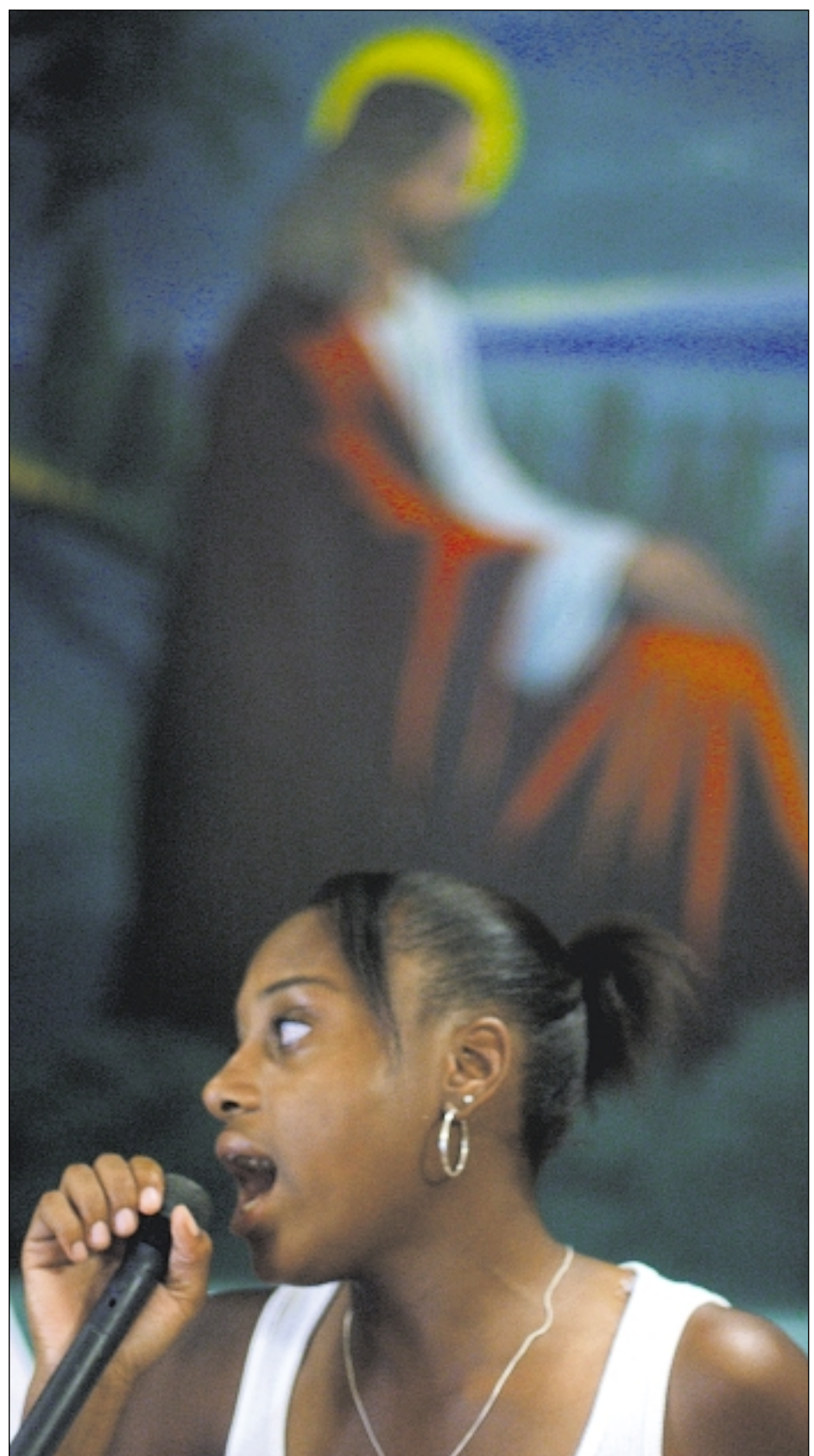
The choir has performed around Texas. In late September, it heads to Mount Zion Baptist Church in Amarillo.

Wilson said the role of the choir in Sunday services is to get “the heart ready for the word of God.” And even though the song and the sermon are selected independently, they always end up complementing each other, she said.

Matthews said she has seen the choir's songs emotionally move members of the congregation. While she claims a higher power is responsible, she also notes it would be difficult for her to sing about an experience if she hadn't lived through it.

Ultimately, that is where she draws her definition of “singing” and “*sanging*.”

“If I went up there and sang it all pretty, they'd say, ‘Sit down, Bell. We know that's not you. You're just up there fakin' and shakin,’” she said laughing.



Lakendra Matthews, 13, sings during chorus rehearsal. Both of Isabella Matthews' daughters sing in the choir.



Choir director Pam Wilson, left, leads Kieshia Matthews, center, and her own daughter Canesha Roberts, both 14, during rehearsal.

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The ongoing series covering different expressions of faith will be available online as a complete slide show. [Click on “Frame by Frame.”](#)

ABOUT THE SERIES

Staff photographers will spend several weeks looking at different angles of a single topic.