



*West High School junior Davon Floyd Jr., who sings bass in the school choir, talks with Roger Bramble, Her Majesty the Queen's Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, about the choir's invitation to participate in the London International Choral Festival. Photos by Betty Bean*

# West choir invited to London

*By Betty Bean*

The lilting harmonies of Handel's "Hallelujah, Amen" soared to the ceiling of the West High School auditorium last Thursday morning as the chamber choir gave a short concert to an audience of classmates, friends, parents and Her Majesty the Queen's Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Greater London.

Lord Roger Bramble, who is a designated representative of Queen Elizabeth, flew into Knoxville to deliver an official invitation to the West High School Choir to participate in the London International Choral Festival, which begins Jan. 1, 2012. Accompanied by Robert Bone, the executive director of the festival, the courtly English entourage charmed their American hosts.

Bramble stood by smiling as Bone cautioned the students against referring to his accent. "I am speaking in English, and I don't have an accent," he said. "It's all of you who have an accent."

He listed some of the activities West High students will have an opportunity to experience: evensong at Westminster Abbey; singing in concerts in historic venues like Southwark Cathedral, said to be London's oldest place of worship; St. John's Smith Square, widely recognized as one of the most beautiful concert venues in London; and Cadogan Hall, home of The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The students will also be part of the mass choir at the festival's gala finale.

Then he motioned toward Bramble.

"It is a truly spectacular event to which I am expecting you to be invited. I think that things are looking pretty good for you right now," he said, introducing Bramble, who is a former mayor of Westminster and High Sheriff of Greater London as well as the leading patron of the International Choral Festival.

Bramble lavished praise on the choir's performance of the national anthem: "That was smashing," he said. "Far superior to ours."

And on the founding fathers: "Your founding fathers had the wisdom to give you an amazing written constitution," he said. "Something we never had."

He explained his title by stating that the English queen is "a lady of some years" who has appointed a Lord "Leftenant" – lieutenant in American – in each county to represent her.

"They handed out a few of those to warhorses like me, and music is my passion."

Finally, he presented director Byron Davis with the official invitation. "In recognition of an unparalleled reputation. Once I've given it to Maestro Davis, there's no saying no," he said.

Afterward, choir members hosted a reception in the choir room and had a chance to chat with their English visitors.

Davis heaved a contented sigh.

"I'm relieved at this point. When we heard they were coming, we had to change everything. We had a lot of things half ready, and our rehearsal time has been cut basically in half with the change from block scheduling."

The trip will cost \$3,000 per student, and Davis is planning some ways to drive the costs down so that everyone can go.