

René Clausen

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Landmark Center, July 10, 2008

Q It's been a fun warm-up exercise to get a sense of people's childhood musical experience, what may have triggered their lifelong choral passion. What was your childhood musical experience like at home, at school or church?

A My father was a church organist and choir director, so there was a lot of music around the home, although we never had a piano growing up which is kind of interesting for having a father who was an organist. I did, however, really not grow up around a lot of choral music; it was primarily instrumental. I was one of those kids who was formed by the elementary band program. I think nationwide there's been many instrumental programs started in the summer of the 5th or 6th grade year and that's how I started; playing saxophone in the summer band program the summer after my 6th grade year of elementary school. And my sisters then also started on the French horn and the trumpet. There was a system called the Rubank Methods – they were these old blue books that had all of the fingering systems, etc. – and I learned to play instruments by checking out the fingering charts and then learned to play...my instrument was the saxophone. My sister played the trumpet and the horn and then I would practice on their instruments, too, and learn how to play those instruments. We really didn't have the money to take lessons, but the band director would give me the books to take home. So I would learn to play those instruments. Then later on, when I got into high school and junior high, the instrumental directors were very gracious about letting me check out school instruments and bring them home to learn how to play. So actually all of the interest, through most of junior high and high school, was all instrumental music. I did sing in choir, but it was not the rich experience for me that instrumental music was. It makes some sense, early on, because the instrumental programs tended to start with a band director that gave summer lessons or something like this. So you could get a start earlier. Often the choral programs began later, or developed later, as voices began to mature and develop or who you might have available as your choral director. So it wasn't really until high school that choral music began to catch my eye.

Q At what point did you see vocal music as perhaps your greatest calling – I know you're also a composer and arranger, but at what point did the vocal profession really come into your mind?

A I was very interested...in high school I had a very fine director in Southern California. I actually spent junior high and high school years in Los Angeles city school district. I had a very fine high school choral director. And that was really the opening for me, starting at about 10th grade. We did great literature; we had a wonderful group of singers and a fine conductor. So that was really one of the first experiences I had. And I had kind of an interesting shaping, what wound up being a very shaping experience. In my junior year our conductor who's name was Don Gustafson – and there were several of us who were very interested in choral music at this point – and he said well at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in downtown Los Angeles, there's one of those Midwestern choirs is going to be coming – the St. Olaf choir under Christiansen. And so my best friend and I – who wound up going to college together and sang in the St. Olaf Choir together – went to the concert. It was on a Sunday evening and we're looking for this conductor named Chris Johnson. Its funny now, but we thought it was this gentleman C-

h-r-l-s J-o-h-n-s-o-n – he was obviously saying the Norwegian pronunciation of F. Melius Christiansen, or his son who I replaced at Concordia went by Christiansen. In any case we were kind of left in the dark about what that name even meant. And then we went to the concert and there it wasn't any Chris Johnson at all. It was 1968 and it was the first year of Kenneth Jennings. And that concert really blew us away. It was really...we had never heard a college choral sound like that. So actually Mike and I went to Riverside on Monday night to the choir concert and then was it to La Jolla or something on Tuesday night, but by Wednesday night they were too far away and our parents wouldn't let us drive anymore. But the two of us did go to see the St. Olaf Choir three nights in a row in the Los Angeles area and were very captivated by the precision, the beauty, the elegant musicianship, attention to all the refinements of unaccompanied choral singing that were not so present on the west coast; more of the Midwestern choral tradition, especially hearing the St. Olaf Choir – and at that point it was Ken Jennings first year, so that was still a very highly influenced by the Christiansen era in terms of sound. But when I look back at it, that was a very formative experience for me, was to hear Ken's choir and then as I said my friend and I actually wound up going to St. Olaf, being roommates and singing in the choir. We had a wonderful experience in our junior year in choir because we were going on a western tour and we sang on the same stage, together in the choir, that we had first heard them with Ken Jennings. So it was kind of full circle the way that came about; it was quite a powerful moment.

Q Talk about your time with Ken Jennings. We interviewed him about two months ago on his 83rd birthday. Talk about your years at St. Olaf and how that further propelled you on to the choral world.

A I have so much to thank Ken Jennings for. I just always felt a kind of musical kinship with him, from the time I saw him conduct. He has the most elegant, beautiful hands. Really the most beautiful conducting hands I've ever seen. Extraordinary musician. His intuition into phrasing, tone, balance, style – all of those – particularly interpretative elements of score – and then his methodology and getting that tone from the choir. I just immediately hooked into that and it felt very natural to me. Conducting has always felt not like an academic experience so much for me so much as one as my hands just went where the music told them to go. When I saw him I just felt this musical kinesthetic experience happening. And being under him and his choir and studying with him and conducting all amplified those things in my own sense of conducting style and musicianship. He was a tremendous influence on me.

Q Who else influenced your career in terms of mentors after the St. Olaf experience?

A I would still have to say that was the primary experience. I think for many conductors the primary experience, at the undergraduate level, is so important because that is where the hook comes. I think that is where you decide, where you have these experiences in performing this literature under great musicians that amplifies all that within you; it's a synergism of all that happens. So I don't need to overdo that, but I think that was a very primary emphasis for me. I went on to graduate school at the U of Illinois. That was a very different experience because there were several conductors there, you were pursuing masters and doctoral degrees – it was more academically based. I learned a great deal about performance practice issues, some aspects of rehearsal technique, of comparisons of varying points of view. When you come out of the MN Lutheran choral tradition, it's very easy to keep the blinders on. And as great a

tradition as it is, and identifiable as it is, graduate school should be a widening experience. And that's what that was for me. It provided lots of different points of view about how choral music can be made. And for anyone the widening, deepening experience of working with more than one conductor, of having various points of view, widens your viewpoint then from which you can make the choices that are going to sustain you in your musical decision making. And I found that was very important in my life, too, because otherwise you become a robot or an automaton or one who is a purveyor of only that which you have been taught from a certain point of view. So you don't know why you're making decisions. And if you're going to expand the tradition both from which you come from and that which you are engendering, it's so important that you have an intellectual as well as intuitive basis for making the decisions you make. So I look at both of those experiences as being very primal. The educational experiences in both undergraduate school and graduate school, and of course then experiences with other major conductors. Preparing – when I was at Wichita State University – prepared a choir for Robert Shaw and watching him work. Helmut Rilling came and worked with my choir at Concordia on Bach Motet and that was a very learning experience. Every time you watch another college of yours – any one of them – you learn something. There is so much to learn. Choral music is like opening a door and finding that there are two more behind it, and we learn how much we just don't know about this great art and there's always something to learn from every one that you see or meet or listen to their choirs or talk about literature; it's unending.

Q How did you come to first be associated with Concordia, and was Paul J. still there at that time or were other people between him and you?

A No, I took over for Paul J. in 1986. That's an interesting story and one I'm not quite sure I know how to answer. I was teaching at West Texas State University at the time and I had taught at two universities. I wanted to be at one of the Lutheran colleges. It was part of my background, I identified with it, it was something I really wanted to do. I saw it as a calling in my own life. And when that opportunity arose and I saw the announcement I know that was quite a while ago because a stamp was 23 cents. I recall going home to my wife and saying, well this may indeed be a Concordia graduate that they're looking for, but it's worth putting a 23 cent stamp on my credential and setting it up. The rest of that is history, I suppose. But it has been a magnificent place to be. The very, very strong choral tradition that Paul left there for 50 years – he built that program and had that same kind of magnetic, indefinable, Christiansen charisma that I think all of them had. And in their own way; they were different. Olaf and Paul and F. Melius had very different points of view about tone quality, about interpretation...I think what they had in common was these were leaders and these were strong personalities and these were people with definite opinions. But they all differed from each other. I think that is something that is really quite telling, too, about choral music and choral musicians. Even within this family of very strong musicians, they were most definitely different from each other.

Q When you came in to succeed him, you were stepping into some pretty big shoes, and not only his but by extension his father's and brother's. You were stepping into the shoes of a very prominent musical family with a 50-year legacy, or more, in Minnesota. How did you take what you found and then gradually begin to shape it in some different ways with your own ideas?

A Yes it is always a...I think with anyone coming in to replace anyone that's been there for a long time, but particularly I think it's the lengthy of tenure of Paul J. Christiansen with 5 decades there, and again his unique and very identifiable point of view about how he made choral music – it's not going to happen all at once. I remember as a matter of fact talking to the president at that time – Paul J. Dovrey was president of the college – and talked about well there's big shoes to fill here and I said, well I have big feet. And my size 14 double A shoes. And he said something really important to me at that time, which is I should bring my own shoes. So we really didn't think so much about filling shoes as bringing my own and being a teacher. I think a choral director has to think about himself or herself as being a teacher of young people and they're going to be new every year. They're going to be depending upon you for what expertise you're going to bring them, a point of view that hopefully has been tested by time and endurance and shaping and well-thought-out points of view. And that's what I think I brought to Concordia and worked at bringing them was a sense of vocalism that was based on a healthy vocal technique, that these students could use not only in choir, but in their own personal vocalism. It's always an area where choral directors tread lightly but have to also tread honestly, is how does vocal technique and the act of making personal sound impact the choral sound? And to what extent does one influence and affect the other? And developing a choral point of view in terms of choral tone; that can make a happy and healthy relationship there. I worked to increase the repertory and variety of style of music that was did. I did have a little different point of view than Paul did in creating choral tone and so again it took some time and patience to allow that to develop, to watch it grow from the inside out as I got new students every year. And allow simply my point of view how we should go about creating tone to develop within the choral ensemble. So I just moved slowly and smiled a lot. Kids are kids everywhere and I find more the same than different, from one college to another. So there's that time of just getting the belief system on your side, especially these students who had been under two regimes, of knowing where they came from, what they were facing in their college career – you had two people now that were...and have some...and various differences about them. So I knew that that was also part of what I had to understand and have patience with. But I look back at every year, actually, that I've had the choir, as being rich and robust experience. Even the very early years. If you focus on teaching and focus on what you're supposed to be doing as a conductor, which is largely teaching, then you keep your face that way and most of the shadows fall the other direction.

Q How many different choirs are there at Concordia?

A I'll give you the rundown here. We have the Concordia Choir, which is sophomores and older; and then the Chapel Choir, which is a larger group – right around 90 to 100 and again those are upperclassmen, sophomores and older. The freshmen...when the freshmen come in they go into two gender-based groups. We have the Mannerchor, which is our men's glee club or men's choir, and then Cantabile, which is the freshmen women's choir. Then additionally there's another women's choir – Bel Canto – which is the upperclass women's choir. Of course, it always seems like there's more women in about everything than men, so we have the three mixed choirs and the two women's choirs and then there are also two vocal jazz ensembles that are upper level and lower level, or freshman/sophomore, junior/senior level jazz, vocal jazz choirs that are small and specialized in that type of literature.

Q When you are building a choir – Concordia choir or any other ensemble for that matter – and auditioning singers, what are some of the key things you look for in the audition process?

A The very first thing is the ear and the quickness of the ear. I think almost more than anything else, a choral ensemble singer needs to have a very accurate and precise ear and secondly and nearly as important as that – I really think of it as a two or three step process, with two of them relating to the gift itself. Following that ear what I look for is the breadth of the technique across the range. So an evenness of color throughout the vocal range. Doesn't really do any good to be able to sing only four notes in the middle beautifully. So I look for this flexibility of technique, a genuinely warm sound. F. Melius tended to classify voices as a flute, reed or mixed, so I would lean towards especially an upper and higher voices...the very best voices are really mixed in color but toward the warmer, toward the easily produced sound. I like to think of choosing voices which can sing relatively throughout their range with an easy dynamic, and how do they come through the (word?) area in their voice, what is the nature of their vowel production? I really listen carefully to their vocal technique. Good technique does generally not stick out. Yet bad technique can be sung pianissimo and you hear it across the room. So for me a crucial element – these are really the two crucial elements I think – are the ear and the quality and quickness of the response of the ear and then the quality of the vocal technique. The better the vocal technique, generally speaking, the more that voice is going to be able to fit within the ensemble. The third part of that process does not really have to do with voices or production, but what I always call the lyricism of the personality. To be in ensemble you have to be willing to give to ensemble. There has to be that willingness of spirit; to give to a cooperative effort. You know that's a very different persona than a soloist persona, and that's not to say that a soloist cannot also sing in a choir. I think it is making that mental shift, that willingness to give that says, what do I need in order to fit within the section, and then within the section within the choir. So I think there's that part of the spirit that has to be...I think in all really good choirs and with very good choral singers there's an aspect of their soul that is very communally oriented, that has to do with "we" rather than "me," that willingness to give to ensemble. And that's why often really good choirs aren't necessarily made up of really good soloists, but maybe a combination of those types. And of course I have, I feel like I need various types of instruments within the choir and even within the eight parts of the choir, from soprano one to bass two I'll be looking for a very specifically different qualities among all of the eight parts to make the composite sound of the choir.

Q Once you have your choir assembled and they rehearse on a daily or weekly basis, how do you keep rehearsals productive and keep singers energized and coming back week after week for more?

A That's a great question. I remember when I was in the St. Olaf Choir, one of the things I always admired...well I had so much I admired about Ken Jennings, but he had the same level of expectation for us every day. I remember thinking don't you ever have a fight with your wife or your kids or something...and yet he must have had normal kinds of issues with everyday life. But yet he came into that rehearsal always with the same level of expectation. And I have carried that with me in my life as a conductor, that yes, students will have the ups and downs of everyday life – we rehearse from 4:30 to 6:00 in the afternoon every day, they've gone through the academic day. The Concordia Choir has about half music majors but half non-majors, meaning that they're going to come

from a variety of backgrounds that day, variety of types of personalities, also. Yet, when you establish right away – and I think it really begins with day one – that you establish right away when you walk into choir, this is now choir time; we leave everything else at the door. That part of the...one of the features I think of the MN choral tradition, which is so striking and perhaps separates itself sometimes from other traditions, is its discipline; it's addressed to discipline. It doesn't happen by magic. It's not like Harry Potter with the magic wand – it doesn't happen like that. Most of magic is in the work and in the daily discipline. I establish that every year in the choir. That at 4:30, it is time now to work. And it's also competitive to get in the group. There's always someone else who would like to have had their spot. I think that that has a great deal to do with the success of most of the MN collegiate Lutheran choir traditions, is they are competitively based, there's a work ethic that goes along with it and the colleges then support that with giving us the appropriate amount of rehearsal time to create that ensemble. So I think that's a real key issue.

Q You may have answered the question I was going to ask next. It's interesting to ask different people why they think MN has such a strong tradition of choral excellence. You just mentioned the discipline, which I suspect goes back to a lot of the Scandinavian and German roots. Do you have any other thoughts about some of the factors, including the great collegiate institutions? Something else about MN has kept an awful lot of those students engaged after they graduate – the non-music majors. So there must have been enough of a spark during their college years to make them want to keep singing.

A As I mentioned earlier, one of the features – among several – has been a discipline about it, that the art of creating choral music cannot really be based on an entertainment model. It's not like Nelson Riddle and the orchestra. I remember the pop singer groups that were small choral groups from the early '60's, as much...it grows out of a disciplined tradition one of the concomitant features of that is that it goes back many student generations, familial generations, with parents who sang...from the Scandinavian background and in this large area the Scandinavian roots are very strong. So that was brought with them from Norway and Sweden, Germany – so many strong choral traditions there that settlers brought to this region of the country. And these were also people who believed strongly in education and so many of the Scandinavians began, started these schools, these colleges with both academic interest and then a very natural vehicle for identification for these schools was their choirs. It might not have the wherewithal to develop instrumental programs early on – now that's not the case anymore – but early on singers were everywhere and you could bring singers together with that disciplined technique, that F. Melius for instance brought to the St. Olaf Choir. That was a unique sound. There was the Westminster school on the East Coast that had a very different approach, but one of the primary features that began this choral tradition was F. Melius kind of shaping the clay just through the dynamo of his personality, as much as his great musicianship. It was a galvanizing personality. And when you have a person that can galvanize singers into this very fundamental and disciplined approach to singing – of course he made a very impressive impression and sonority. Also – and I see this even now as we've gone into a new millennium and these students who are seemingly younger to me every year, yet they grew up singing. Many of them singing in their school choirs and their church choirs – the support that music has received in Minnesota is not all that common in many other states in public school music, where many communities feel that music programs – choral and instrumental music programs – are important. So when you learn that from an early age and you

tasted what I always call the elixir of music – choral music to me is an elixir – that once you’ve tasted it and you taste how good it tastes, well you have to have it then. And when we speak about all these other choral groups that have sprung up, especially since the ‘70’s, many, many of the graduates of the Minnesota private Lutheran colleges needed a place to keep singing. They brought with them these strong traditions and strong expectations – they had high expectations placed upon them as singers and realized that was, that elixir was something pretty good. So they want to continue with that. Earlier on I think there was also the possibility of church choirs and fine church programs, but we find that less now. There are still strong programs, but far fewer than there used to be with the advent of contemporary Christian music, the bands that...worship band experience, and the almost predilection in worship style moving, has moved largely that direction, has had a negative impact on the quality of choral church music. As a result of that, also, I’ve seen more of a push towards the community/civic organizations. We see these springing up all of the time and these are the outlets then for the collegiate level singers who have come from a strong choral background at their college or university – they’re finding these semi-professional groups populated by these singers. And I think that’s wonderful. There’s still a part of me, as a church musician in my soul, that feels badly about that and I’m hoping that the quality of church music will turn around. You see evidences every now and then of that happening, and of course there are the pockets, yet of very strong programs. But I do think the reality is that with all of these singers coming from a strong choral background at their college level are now populating these other ensembles, these civic and community groups that have a high level of singing.

Q Very true to me, from my experience. Talk about repertoire – how do you go about selecting a good variety of repertoire that is appropriate and challenging enough for the kids you’ve got to work with?

A Repertoire and choosing repertoire is always one of the most difficult, yet enjoyable, jobs that I have. The two most difficult are choosing the choir – I always find that the most difficult process – and then choosing literature. You’re doing it all of the time and I would guess that most of my choral colleagues would chime in that you’re always looking for quality new music. Of course we have the whole European background. We’ve had five centuries of choral music – mostly from European background – that still is a rich tradition from the early Renaissance through the early 20th century. However, since...move into the 20th century and beyond, and now into a new millennium, the choral music influences have become, and the influences upon choral composers or those who write music for choruses in particular, has really widened. Normally choral music falls behind instrumental in its level of technical difficulty. It just tends to be more conservative compositionally than instrumental music does – historically that’s true. However, as more and more – especially the college choirs and university choirs in this country – have gained technical expertise, more of the music written in the last 40, 50 years for choruses has increased in its level of technical difficulty, has become more idiomatic to the voice, making use of even a non-traditional vocal sounds, and the width and breadth of vocal technique that has placed far greater demands on the choral instrument – both in terms of hearing and in terms vocal technique, expanded ranges, expanded density of sound, chord clusters, dense chromatic writing, more rhythmically advanced – I would say luxuriant writing in terms of rhythm. Generally a higher level of difficulty in this music. so we have that component that is there, and among many younger American composers especially.

Q You were just talking about the more recent evolution of choral music as a little more complex.

A Well, the other major influence is ethnic of all kinds – world music, sort of sometimes it's called world music, however we would like to term that – but as the world as grown smaller in terms of our communication as a world, this area in choral music has grown exponentially. Since I was in graduate school I'm sure that has changed dramatically. I'm sure now in academic classes and literature, ethnic musics of various types would be a required component of what conductors have to study. I find that is another feature of literature that is prevalent in choral music programs all the time. You look for the presence of ethnic music, of music beyond language, beyond the romance languages and German and Latin and what we tend to think of as the four or five major languages that choral music is written in. Now we're looking at pieces that may be in Haitian Creole, or Swahili or various kinds of world languages that never were thought of before. So we're seeing all these influences and so there's much to look through and to wade through.

Q That raises the question – with all those possibilities, where do you even begin to start to look for your repertoire for your entire season? With all of these sort of obscure languages and nationalities and musical styles, where do you get your resources?

A Well a couple of sources are very important, I think, for any modern conductor now and then. The presence of the Internet is really helpful. Most publishing companies have websites and many of them now have sound files and PDF files that you can download and listen to, watch the score or look at the score, and listen to the recording right there. There's advantages and disadvantages to that. I've seen many of my young students have less ability to read open score or to go and peruse music at the piano when they can simply put on the publisher provided CD. So whereas there's advantages to that, there's some skills that I find I need to teach that we still need to have conductors learn. But I think that tool is very important. Also, the publishing companies are very good at getting out new issues and new scores to conductors. I'm always getting new packets of what are called NI's – New Issues – from most all publishers. Getting the music, getting a hold of the music is really not the issue. The trouble is there's so much that it takes a lot of time to sift through it. Because something is new, does not mean its good. Quality does not necessarily, is not necessarily concomitant with it being an excellent new piece. Because something comes from a new performance tradition, again, does not mean – when we're bombarded with all different styles of music – a lot of work has to go into finding pieces which also represent musical integrity, compositional integrity. Easy to produce – as a composer its easy to produce something new. It doesn't mean that what you've produced has a high degree of musical integrity, compositional quality. So I find for myself it is simply not worth the time to do music you're not convinced you want to do. The first thing I try to teach my choral conducting students is don't ever do music you don't love, because you will not be able to sustain your interest in it with your choir. If you love it, they will. They might not right away, but you have to love the music that you do. So in choosing literature also, for myself, it is not only that aspect of it that I've got to keep in mind the several different strands. I may be preparing a tour concert that has to wear well in the voices for maybe 15 or 16 concerts over 16 or 17 days. I have to think about what will keep an audience attention and musical interest. It can't have simply one point of view. I need to be able – not only for my students' sake, but the audience sake – to present a variety of different styles of music, of different languages, of presenting them with a meal. The way we

would have various parts of a very good meal, I look at it that same way. But all of them, every single piece, needs to have its own musical integrity and its own style and stylist consistency. And that just takes a lot of work. And then, obviously, shaping it into the choir that you're...do I have enough low basses to do this piece, do I have enough soprano ones to sustain the high A for 16 bars? And various composers will write – when you look at the style, compositional style of various composers – they will also have predilections and bents upon how they write for various sections. So making sure I'm choosing literature that fills all of those needs.

Q I'm going to kind of a more basic question: there's a book I read called, *How Can We Keep From Singing*, written by a friend in the MN Chorale, actually. But it talks about people's innate desire for the sense of community, camaraderie, producing something that is beautiful. From all your experiences, what do you think are some of the reasons that people just like to sing, particularly in groups?

A I think the voice is the first God-given instrument. We can...we sing because we can. Some of us sing better than others, but it's amazing what percentage of the population really can sing. It is not very many people that are truly tone deaf. They may have had other experiences, which may lead them to believe that, but really relatively few people can't carry a tune in a bucket, so to speak. I think that ability to distinguish pitch and create pitch is truly a miracle. When I have times in my life where I've lost faith, I often go back to the miracle of singing, believe it or not. And it comes from a National Geographic special I saw once in which there was a gentleman scientist who was going to try and approximate the human voice with machines. So he shaped a human pharynx out of a block of clear plastic and literally carved it with exacto knives to look like the human pharynx. It was clear so that you could see the outline of the shape of the pharynx. Then in the back of the throat of the plastic pharynx he attached a double reed, something that looked approximately like the vocal folds, somewhat similar to perhaps an oboe reed or a bassoon reed. And so then he had the pharynx now and then he had the reed or the vocal chords, and then attached a black tube – I remember seeing it sitting on a desk – and attached to it a black tube, a flexible tube that was connected to an air stream, which was some kind of generator of a constant air stream. So had gone through all of this process and then turned on the generator which generated the air flow which made the reed vibrate which was amplified by the pharynx to make this one, ugly sound. When you heard it, it sounded like someone playing a crumhorn for the first time and it was coyote ugly. But I have often thought about that because what a human being can do, in terms of creating pitch, has to happen in a split second and happens only in their mind. That we decide to go taaa and create that pitch – the vocal chords have to be vibrating at the exact right level to sustain that many vibrations, we have to have the right air flow to sustain that pitch which we have started. When I look at just creating one pitch, from that which we hear, and then creating that pitch and then to do it very quickly as singing a Bach motet or whatever – to me that's virtual proof of the existence of God. It's a miraculous thing that human beings not only can create a pitch, but create beautiful pitch. And this natural thing – this is that first God-given instrument – and then when we put these voices together to form again our most natural sounds, our most basic vowel structures what have we found out? That's a beautiful thing. There is something so earthy, so incredibly indelibly mixed, I think, from that which is our soul. Your voice is your mind, really. Your voice is your mind. When a conductor talks to the choir its very, its different than an instrumentalist talking to the orchestral conductor talking to the orchestra, except for in the most professional of terms – when you have a professional choir and you don't need to worry at all about their

vocalism. But yet even I think when I work with the most advanced type of voices, I find myself still using imagery which goes to there, which then produces this. It's a mistake not to think, I think, that the voice doesn't begin in the mind and then when the mind responds to the image that you have placed there, then the technique follows that imagery. If the technique's not there in the first place it can't get there. But I am so convinced that the intuition of what a great conductor has is the intuition into being able to get into the mind of the singer, who imagines that sound, and then from that imagination creates that sound, which then when it's together in the choral sound – sometimes I will stop in my choir when it is just right and I'll say, this is really living. I can't imagine anything better than this. Just to hold an eight part E major chord on perfect vowel, perfect intonation – it is what the Japanese call center in their life. It returns you to psychological and even physical center. I think there is a reason why when we look at a spectroscope and we play a pitch into a spectroscope which makes a picture of that sound and we look to what happens with dissonance, and the picture, the actual picture of what happens with dissonance and then what happens with consonants the picture straightens out. Why do we have, why is a perfect 5th sound the way it does on a spectroscope? Why does it look – not only sound, but look – the way it does. There is such a thing as harmony of the universe. I believe that; that there's this harmony, the harmony of the spheres that unaccompanied choral singing can lock into that harmony of the spheres, that pure pursuit of unified perfection. You can't put your finger on that. Why do I think that's beautiful? You can't really know. And there's a part of me that says as a conductor, if I ever really figure it out it's not worth it then. It's part of not knowing why, what creates beauty and why does...these are just whirring sounds in the air, really. These are whirring sounds in the air. But yet, that coalescence of these vibrations somehow has made meaning for us. And it's that journey in finding all of that, that I find extraordinary.

Q Great description. That was wonderful. Is there a particular story or incident that you can tell that just gives evidence to the power of choral music, either an experience you had as a conductor or that one of your singers afterwards told you how much this meant to him or her?

A I think all of us who do choral music have those experiences. I would share with you one that always, whenever this question is asked of me I go back to it because it was, for me, that way. It was just very powerful for me. It happened in San Diego, CA, a number of years ago on tour with my Concordia Choir. We were singing at a downtown San Diego church, an evening concert after a very long day. We had also sung several services in the morning and so it was a long day. We had done a group of pieces in the set before the intermission, which were all about war and remembrance. So these were pieces that were very powerful, emotional pieces. And one of them was a composition that was brand new at that time; a composition of mine, called (name?). I wrote it about a month after returning from Auschwitz with the choir, the Concordia Choir was on tour and we spent an afternoon at Auschwitz. For anyone who's ever been there, it is an experience that you don't ever forget. I believe it emblazons upon your mind the things that you see and behold there. And when I came home from that trip, I knew that I had written out a lot of my thoughts and just kind of shedding these thoughts into prose, but I knew at some point I wanted to write some music that would say something about how I felt. And most of the music that has been written about the Holocaust – first of all it's instrumental – and most of it is dramatic. It wants to depict the horror and the drama of those events. And I chose to go a different route in (name?), which is written on a John Shepard late 16th century text, which is just really a couple of lines of text with...which

means they shall have peace, or let them be in peace. So I built a rather lengthy unaccompanied choral work, really not about recalling the drama, but that may these souls simply rest in peace. That was the final piece in this set and I usually spoke about the set and introduced it to the audience before doing the set. Well that's all the background to lead up to what actually happened. I remember we did the set and...as per normal, and I went back to my dressing room and I just couldn't wait to get back to my dressing room. I was really tired and I looked forward to those 15 minutes where I could be alone in my dressing room. And I got back there and there was this woman standing outside my dressing room door. I said, no; not now; I just need to be alone. So I was kind of irritated. And I'll never forget her. She was a small woman, looked rather European, had on a purple hat on the side of her head, looked maybe mid-'70's, very expressive eyes, older woman. And she was there at my dressing room door. And I looked at her thinking...I was thinking about myself. I want to get into that dressing room and just rest. And she looked at me with huge tears in her eyes, huge tears in her eyes. And she rolled up her arm and there were the numbers – her Auschwitz numbers. And I just went numb, practically numb. We just hugged each other. She said – it was very personal in a way – she just said, I've just never been able to let go of certain things, and you've helped me do that with your music. And she wrote on the program about her brother – Mordecai – who died in the camp, all of her relatives, parents who died there. I still have that program, where she wrote all the names down and when she was there. It is one of the times in my life when I look back and I thought, both the choral performance and a piece that I had written was able to help someone. I can't think of a better reason to write or to make choral music in our society, if it be not for helping make us more human. Then I remember just feeling embarrassed because I didn't want to talk to her at first, you know, and then it was just an extraordinary moment with this person that I just will not ever forget. And she didn't need...we wound up talking, obviously, but the first thing she did was not to speak to me but just to hold out her arm. And when you have that kind of visceral experience, you can remember every detail of what happened. I look back and I figure I learned a lesson and I learned also about why do this and why work hard to make choral music? It has to really be about empowering people, about making people more sensitive to each other. I've always thought about – I try and teach both in my choral school that I do for adult conductors and to my students – there are two types of choral musicians. You'll either try to be impressive or expressive. And those who usually try and be impressive are just that, and they're never much more than that – just always trying to make impressions. But if you work towards being expressive of the music, let impressive take care of itself. The parallel to that is I think about window and mirrors. There are mirror conductors and there are window conductors. And the mirror conductors are always shining up because they see the light reflecting off of them. But mirror conductors you tend not to notice; you tend to see the choir through them. You tend to hear the choir. You're focusing on the music. You shine by reflective light. I think those are two things to keep in mind for all of us who do this – impressive versus expressive and windows versus mirrors.

Q It's coming from inside and its expressive and not meant to impress...

A Its something I think about all the time because you keep your eye on it, keep your eye on the ball – it means you're recreating the composer's intent. And if you're recreating the composer's intent, then you're the conduit for making the music happen, or allowing that music to happen. And as soon as conductors start to look like they're impressed with themselves, it generally shows up.

Q An audience can usually tell.

A They can tell all the time.

Axel Theimer

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Golden Valley Lutheran Church, April 27, 2008

Q Talk about your experiences growing up in Austria. What was it like and what kind of music surrounded you there?

A My parents managed a home for children in the summers, mostly in the summers. Originally my parents were from, lived in Czechoslovakia, in Bohemia, and at the end of the Second World War they fled and fled across the borders to Austria. Since at that time they were not Austrian citizens, they were not able to get work and through some connections they were asked to manage the children's home, which was from the city of Innsbruck in Tirol. The children would come for three weeks, in the summer especially, in order to get away from the city and enjoy country life and get more food, really. A lot of them came very, very starving and then the city provided the food. So after three weeks it was the goal to have everybody leave having gained at least seven or eight pounds or hopefully more. There were quite a bit of competition, like who could gain the most weight in that short time. But it was...the home was up in the mountains and about an hour to walk from the train station. There was a lot to do outdoors but there was no radio and there was no television, so there was a lot of music. There was campfires. So my earliest exposure to music really was joining or hearing a lot of kids sing folk songs and play the guitar. My brother and I, we were very little at that time – I was born in 1946 – and we were exposed to music a lot in that kind of context. When we were a little bit older – I was four, I remember that very distinctly – my mother who always was very interested in exposing us to music and giving us some music education because music had played an important part in her life, not necessarily as a performer but as a person who enjoys music and had studied music. My parents bought a piano, an ancient...well an upright piano, and we were so excited when it was brought up the mountain. It was actually on a horse cart and drawn by a horse. That was really the beginning for formal music education. My mother encouraged us a lot. There was never, you have to do this, but encouraged us a lot doing this and she played some piano so in a moment you see another alter parent play, you want to do it too. So it was really a way to get us to enjoy music. Singing continued and then we started to be enrolled in what we call the Music college, or kindergarten – a musical kindergarten – where we would travel a couple of times per week to a neighboring city – to (city name?) and we would spend the morning just making music with other children. When I was 4-1/2 or 5 we started taking piano lessons, which again were down in the valley, so we always had to walk. Down was always much easier and on the way up then again about an hour to get home. I had a wonderful piano teacher. She was...these days I don't know what I would think about her. I remember she was a very mystic person. The room where we had piano lessons was all dark curtains, heavy curtains, and she was a lady...long, gray hair and she wore always some large but very dark not really in your face jewelry. These days I would expect that there was incense

being burned as well. But she was wonderful. She encouraged, again, just playing the piano. I think I've been so fortunate over the years that as important as it is to play, eventually you arrive at something that is "correct" that the road how you get there...there are so many different ways that you can arrive at...not a must, not a drive, or this is wrong, this is right. It was always, you do, already what you can and I remember most distinctly at the end of every lesson we would play four hands. That's how I learned sight-reading. She would play very slowly her parts and I had no clue where we were and occasionally I would, she would just keep on playing and I would keep on reading and then I could play a note and I was right with her and it was one of those exciting moments because I know I had hit something and it fit and she was never saying, oh why can't you do this? Or you should practice more. It was really always encouraging, do what you can and always being very, very encouraging and very positive. And that has stayed with me, I think, in my approach in music making that I have arrived at a point where I say – especially when it comes to performances, eventually – wherever you are at that moment, as long as you know you have put your time in and you have spent time with the music and learned it, now it's time to share with where you are at and not making a huge effort to do everything right at that moment. Because I would feel that this will, it would interfere with the experience, experiencing the music.

Q How were the opportunities in the U.S. different than in Austria?

A I was amazed at how much music there always was in the high schools and the grade schools and junior high, because back home in the school system you get a general music class but you don't get all of the performance opportunities that you have here. If you want to do that, you have to join an organization that is outside of the school system.

Q Talk about your experience as a member of the Vienna Choirboys. How did you get into that and what was that like? How old were you when you entered that?

A About the Boys Choir...If I would have the chance to do it again, I would do it exactly the same way again. We heard them perform in Austria... We heard the Vienna Boys Choir perform in Austria, in Tyrol actually. They came and performed there and again my parents said – both my brother and I – if we wanted to go and hear the choir and we...I don't think we had ever heard about them. I think we were maybe 6 and 7 years old, or 6 and 8 I think we were. And we heard them and it was just a simple question on my mother's part – if we would be interested in joining the choir and trying out for it, and you know as a 6 or 8 year old, you have just heard a wonderful concert and you like music, you like singing...it's like, you think we could do this? So we traveled to Vienna and tried out and my brother who is a couple of years older, he actually...I think we tried out in the spring and in the fall he moved to Vienna. Then I was too young at that time so I stayed in Tyrol yet and then a couple of years later we

moved to Vienna, actually, and so then I tried out again and I joined the choir. I was seven at that time. You joined a training choir. And from that, you stay in the choir...first of all, they find out if you fit, if you can get along with the group and so on and how your musical development is going. And you stay in that choir until there are rooms in one of the traveling choirs. There are four traveling choirs. So when I was nine I was not even...I was not done with grade school at that time, I was in the beginning of fourth grade. The question came up if I wanted to...it was not asked of me first but obviously of my parents, if I would be available already to join, which was unusual. Usually you finished grade school first and then when you went to fifth grade, which then included the boarding school for the choir. So I actually joined in fourth grade and the first thing I did is I went on tour for three months in the fall of...it would have been in 1955, and I missed my first three months of school in fourth grade which stayed with me as a little bit falling behind in some academics for the rest of my life, I think. But it was a three-month tour through Germany, northern Germany, and also into Belgium. From then on, I stayed in the choir and then in fifth grade you move into the boarding school and then you change in the choir, you stay in the choir until your voice changes, which for me was age 14. I had so many incredible experiences. Not just seeing the world, but musical experiences. To be able to be on the Vienna State Opera Stage in operas like in Carmen or The Magic Flute, or sing under the direction of Karian(?) or meet Bernstein. You know, those experiences are just phenomenal musical experiences. At that time I don't think I had planned to possibly stay in music. My brother, who had graduated before me then, was the one destined to continue music. It's always been thought, if one is in music that's enough. The other one should get a real job, a secure job. So he ended up being in music and he followed that course right away and I did a little detour. I went first to veterinary school for a couple of years in Vienna, but continued my musical education. At that time I was taking voice lessons at the academy in Vienna and I had continued my piano studies. I had also joined the adult male chorus from the Vienna Boys Choir – it allows you to continue to stay in touch with the organization and perform with them and do recording with them. Then was asked if I would like to direct the choir. I said, well I've never really conducted much before, but I certainly will try it. And they just said, well you play the piano, right? You know how to sing. So you can conduct. So that was my first conducting experience when I started to direct that choir. During that time the Vienna Boys Choir together with the Chorus Viennensis which is the men's chorus, they had just begun the recording of all the Bach works with Concertus Musikus and Nicholas Hannenkur(?). So the first thing that I had to prepare the choir for was the B Minor Mass recording. I thought, you know, I didn't even know the importance and the magnitude of it. More or less you are a young, young kid and so I think I just walked into this entire process without any fear and any kind of hesitation. So the first thing was the B Minor Mass, the second thing that we recorded was the St. John Passion, and along with that several cantata's every month. I prepared the choir for it, and then also was able to sing with the group during recording sessions. So again, just great experiences by the way, and then through the choir I had the opportunity to join the extension choir in the

Vienna State Opera so whenever they needed additional singers for large productions, I was able to join. So I did Flying Dutchman, I was one of the ghost seamen, so again just incredible opportunities. And still at that time I was pursuing the goal to become a veterinarian until I received – literally out of the blue – an invitation to come to the US and come to St. John's and take over the position that I am still having right now, where I am still at, which consisted mostly...well foremost to conduct the male chorus, the St. John's Men's Chorus. The connection was my predecessor at St. John's had been my conductor in the Vienna Boys Choir and he came to St. John's in 1958. Because of my work with the adult choir from the Boys Choir, those gentlemen seemed to give him pretty good reports of what was going on and because of that and because of the importance of the Men's Chorus and the tradition of the University, my name was put into the pool to be considered for the position. I got it and that's 39 years ago.

Q Great story. Now when you arrived in MN, you were surrounded – here you are at the Abbey of St. John's – you're surrounded by a state that's very heavily Lutheran and very influenced by the Lutheran church and a lot of great conductors from Scandinavia and Germany. What did you think of the choral music scene in MN when you first arrived? What surprised you?

A What was exciting was the choral life and the choral tradition in this state. People are always so envious, it seems, of the musical tradition of European countries, and so envious of the involvement of people in music and the interest in music. Then when I came here and I found out what all is offered in music, on the grade school level, in the junior high and senior high with all the choir programs, the instrumental programs – both orchestra and band – I had nothing like this in my high school, once I had left the Vienna Boys Choir. The university – they might have a university choir. But if you go the university and you study music, you study musicology at the university. If you want to study music, you go to a conservatory or you go to a music academy. So although it has been a little bit more combined right now in Austria, at my time in high school we had two hours of music, of general music, a week. But when we wanted to participate in music there were organizations outside of the schools that were available to us. One of the biggest choirs which is for the musical youth and what is even more important we had, through the schools, the opportunity to attend concerts, theater, opera, chamber music, chamber music, solo music, recitals. And we got...the opportunity was given to us to do this for very, very little cost. And there were entire groups from my high school, we went together to those concerts and it was not something that you just did occasionally. Because of the overall attitude of the country, of respecting and really being supporting music and having it so much a tradition, we just continued to live the tradition and made it part of our lives. So that surprised me that on the one hand you have such a saturation of musical life in the high schools and all the way up to high schools, but the country as such doesn't seem to pay as much attention to it. So there is a little bit of a disconnect there. On the other hand, what the universities and the

schools offer in regard to choral music, I was just astounded. I was just thrilled because what a great tradition to come to. At the same time, then, I obviously came from a little bit of a different attitude toward singing and to music making. I think if there were some challenges for me it was to find ways to incorporate my own beliefs in singing and my vocal background and see how I can incorporate it in the music making of the choirs, which in some people's tradition, they're not necessarily vocal traditions, how singing in choirs sometimes used to be approached. I think we have come a long ways. I think the education and how the voice works and how we use our voices and how the voice can be used also in ensemble singing, what some people would say the natural way so that voice teachers don't have to worry about their soloists be members of a choral ensemble and running into vocal trouble. I think a lot of this has just about completely disappeared.

Q What is your philosophy about choral singing? How may it be a little bit different than what other conductors might bring?

A My choirs make a lot of fun of me, I think in a goodhearted way. The main phrase that I use a lot is to sing much more on the breath. If there is one major difference, I think, what I'm promoting is that we can sing long phrases without having to go into a particular way of controlling our breath, which a lot of singers could interpret as holding the breath back instead of approaching it from using the breath. I compare it a lot of times with string players. If you watch somebody play a string instrument, before they start to play, before the bow touches the string, there is movement and the bow starts to meet the string while its already moving. If we can think about singing the same way, that as the vocal folds come together, there's already the sense of breath flow and direction in it, not first closure and then like popping it open. So you're going to get a very, very different approach to singing, a very different tone quality, as a foundation of your singing. I think some other people prefer to have first a little bit of closure and then a different kind of onset or attack. That changes for me something very fundamentally about music making because I will base all my singing and all my music making on the energy flow and not energy control. So the breath flow becomes the foundation, not the breath control. You take more chances this way, at first. But once the singers have experienced that and if we also consider that as we become expressive singers or as we are expressive people, the most expressive part of our vocal instrument is how we use our breath. If we want to have something more intensely communicated, we change the amount of breath that we send through our voice, but it's always the sending and never the controlling. To make this a very consistent part of our singing no matter how loudly or how softly you want to sing or how short a note you want to sing, that no matter how short, there still has to be movement in there otherwise it becomes a controlled and what I call a clipped sound, which interferes with the flow of the music and therefore with the expression of your emotions.

Q Talk about Kantorei and how Kantorei is distinguished from other choral groups around here.

A The distinguishing factor may be some of our choices of music, our focus on music from the 19th and 20th century central Europe, like music from Germany, Austria, Czech Republic. We do music from France and we have also done music from English, so that we are not in foreign languages all the time, but especially from, more from central Europe, which I think is a difference from many of the groups that are in the state. Each one seems to have found a niche and I think that's, again, one of the great things in the state. The other difference might be the foundation of the vocal approach that I am promoting. We get...many times the reaction from audiences, not just...and I know a lot of other choirs get it too, and when I hear other choirs perform I love what they're doing. It's not a qualitative statement, but really just a distinguishing statement that our approach to singing a thing makes a big difference in what people hear and how they are being communicated with in a performance. Again, there seems to be less control in our singing, which I think in the way we are trying to promote it, I think is a good thing because again, it allows you to express yourself without being worried about what I have to be in order to be in tune or in order to be rhythmically correct or in order to have really clear diction. I firmly believe, for example, that if I promote singing that is based again on singing on the breath, what is never going to suffer is my diction because any time I produce any kind of consonant it is part of the energy flow and doesn't have to be exaggerated in order to be understood.

Q Briefly describe what is Kantorei and what do you specialize in?

A Kantorei is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. We started as an alumni group from St. John's and St. Ben's and have since grown into a phenomenal – I would call it professional group, but I still call it semi-professional because we don't get paid – a phenomenal group of musicians who love singing, who enjoy the particular literature that we are focusing on, which is the 19th and 20th century music especially from German descent and Austrian music as well. So we do Bruckner, we do composers that we think everybody knows about but does not hear enough music from. So this would be our focus and this is Kantorei's mission, really, to promote this music and to make more people aware of the rich heritage that comes with that music. If we go back into the background of MN and the heritage of MN we know that the majority of Minnesotans point back to a Germanic heritage. So we are hoping to make some connection to that part of the population of MN and then obviously everybody else as well, because so much of the choral tradition that is part of the MN choral tradition is also based in the German heritage.

Q When you're auditioning for new singers, what are you looking for in a potential singer?

A We're looking for good musicianship, ability to sight read, to learn music quickly, good ear, sense for language, and then vocal flexibility. And what I mean by that is, again, the capability and the willingness of the singer to be flexible in their approach to singing because everybody who has started in this choir, or is in this choir right now, comes from a vocal tradition which might be different from mine, so I need to feel as I talk to the people, as I listen to them sing, I need to feel and hear that there is some interest in exploring other capabilities of the voice – not just being committed to one way of singing, which represents one idea of choral singing.

Q How do you organize a rehearsal and how do you keep singers engaged and energized during the course of a 2-1/2 hour rehearsal?

A Well, yes our rehearsals are 2-1/2 hours long with a brief break in the middle. First of all, we are not rehearsing with piano, which we have been doing now for two years and it has changed our capability, our trust of our own voices. We also do not rehearse in sections. We are rehearsing always in mixed position which, again, challenges everybody to commit to singing right away and not listen to somebody else first and get help from somebody else. They are becoming much more confident singers, much more confident in their own ability. That, I think, becomes already a challenge that keeps everybody a little bit more alert. And then I also think, again, that my approach to saying, I want you to sing and trust that what you think you are saying is, "right," that in our rehearsal I don't expect anybody to sing anything wrong on purpose. I want everybody to feel comfortable to sing and then if we need to change a note, we will change it and I will not call it a wrong note or I will not call it a mistake. I will provide, hopefully, what I would call a more positive learning environment, which allows everybody to gain confidence and sing without hesitation. If a note needs to be changed then we find out which note did you sing and not it was a wrong note, but what did you sing? What's the reason why you possibly sang this note? What led you to this note? So it becomes more of a learning process and not just me telling them, that's a wrong note and then go to a piano and say, this is the note that you should have sung. So I think there's a different kind of engaging of the singer in the learning process and they're taking on more of the responsibility without being afraid of singing something wrong. I think in the moment to provide this kind of learning and practicing environment, the people who are involved in that kind of process are staying mentally engaged in a different way and it provides a different kind of challenge and engagement which, I think, never becomes boring for the brain and if the brain is not bored then the rest of the body is not bored either.

Q I know you've had collaborations with other choral groups or musical groups in MN. Talk about the nature of the choral community here and whether it's easy to collaborate with other groups from time to time.

A Kantorei has been invited over the years to sing with several ensembles, most often actually with the MN Chorale when there were performances of large choral works. We have done some Mahler symphonies, we've done Beethoven 9th. What incredible experiences. And I have to say that whenever we did any kind of cooperative thing like this, it's been just the most wonderful experience for all of us. Artistically, I think Kathy Romey is such an incredible colleague. She will bend over backwards to give you the opportunity and to include you and to feature music, which I think is what we all are supposed to be about. The same when we had an opportunity to work with choirs – we have done some work with VocalEssence, which at that time was still the Plymouth Music Series and so we have done some things with Philip Brunelle and the same there – it's been always great. I think we all know that we all in so many ways we need each other. We are in this together, we are artists, we are sharing the love for an art form which is so old and has such a long tradition, which it is up to us to maintain the tradition and to get more people involved and interested in and excited about. It would be just a foolish thing to not appreciate what everybody is contributing. There might be differences in our approaches, but thank goodness there are. Thank goodness if two conductors get up and conduct the same piece of music, there ought to be differences. We should not look for similarities. We should look at what everybody else is contributing, what ideas they have. We are all eclectics. We have stolen everything that we know is coming from somebody else. If we see ourselves as an island, as a unit by ourselves, its time to quit.

END

Weston Noble

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Hilton Hotel, December 21, 2008

Q I've asked everybody questions about their earlier years in music.....talk about the track you were on and how that experience may have shifted your direction.

A I'm at a point in time in my life where I like to reflect on certain events that took place and the meaning of those events, which I didn't understand fully at the time. I entered Luther as a hopeful piano major and I had started piano when I was five and so on and so on. One day our men's chorus director asked me if I wanted to take the rehearsal the following day because he was going to be gone. Oh, yes of course I would do that because anything that had to do with the word choir did something to me and there's a Norwegian hymn that talks about behold the host arrayed in white and the heavenly choir. Well, that became my favorite hymn. So we went up and had the rehearsal. I don't remember what piece we sang. I know that I was very energized and excited that I could do this. Following the rehearsal I went back to my room, which was in the same building and sat down and I said to myself, you know, this is what I must do. I am going to cease striving to be a pianist. I have not felt like this in any other way or matter of contact with music. So this will be it.

Q So you went to Luther and then you almost went to Juilliard but decided to teach, look for a high school teaching job. You got the job in Luverne, Iowa. Talk about what you were doing in Luverne and the phone call you got from Luther.

A Again as I reflect upon my events in the past, I was all set to go to Juilliard when I was discharged from the service. I was very excited about that, of course, and so in the beginning of September, one Monday morning, I was going to leave on the noon train. And I was packing, but I was having some trouble packing. And all of a sudden I sat down on the edge of the bed and I said to myself, I'm not going. And I surprised myself by saying that. And I went downstairs to my mother and I said, Mom, I've decided I'm not going to Juilliard. What? You're not going to Juilliard? No. What are you going to do? I'm going to find a high school that needs a music teacher. And this is in September so schools had started. I'll look in the Des Moines Register and that's what I'm going to do. Now as I reflect back, why did my mind come to that conclusion? Because I didn't have the depth of perception to understand that. Now I know. Who has the choir at Juilliard? How important is the choir at Juilliard? Do they tour? Do they sing in like (?) places like that? It was just no, no, no, no, no. But I, my mind was guided to realize what I needed right then was experience to go out and start, in a sense (?) you know? Well, now it's the most understandable thing in the world but at that time it was quite a major trauma in my life to make that decision.

Q So you had this job in Luverne and then one day Luther called.

A So I found the job in a little town called Luverne, Iowa. There were 93 in high school. The most expensive meal I could buy in town was a 75cent steak. Of course, this was in 1946, but... But they had kind of a nice little music program going there. Well, so I knew that what was important was also my advanced degree. So after teaching at Luverne for one year I decided to go back to enter the University of Michigan and pursue my Master's degree. I went back to Luverne for the second year, went back to Michigan then for the second summer and was ready to stay and finish my degree.

Well, one day in July the phone rang and it was the dean at Luther saying that the choir director at Luther College – of the Nordic Choir – had suddenly resigned because his wife had been accepted at New York City Center in New York. Well who's going to turn that down? So would I consider coming for a year? So I went to all of my instructors throughout the week and asked them what I should do. And it might surprise people to know that every single one of them said, stay here and finish your degree. Until Friday afternoon – I had a piano lesson from Mary Muldowney – so I asked her and she said, well what do you really want to do? I said well I really want to teach in college. Well, for goodness sakes, take the job, get some experience. You can always come back and do your graduate work. I remember running down two flights of stairs and calling the dean and saying, is that job still open? Yes. Well, I really would like to accept the offer. And that's history. Remember...I remember that that was going to be for one year. Turned out to be a rather long year.

Q You were there for better than 50 years. Were there ever times during that tenure when you felt like things were becoming a little bit repetitive or too predictable?

A How does one handle routine? When you've had the same position for 57 years, there's an element of routine involved. And I've been asked to reflect on that many times and I think I have somewhat the answer; I'm not sure. But part of the answer has to be that I'm a Type-A personality. Ok, I Type-A personality, once they have a commitment they'll follow through and they'll do it and they will usually take care of all the details involved. There's something in me that gets satisfaction about repeating...if I can just improve it, just a little bit, you know? Or do this a little different and see how it affects other things. So that has to be part of it. I just get a sense of satisfaction out of that. The other part, of course, has to do with the excitement of seeing students respond. And yet when I reflect on that, that could take place no matter where I'm teaching. So it has to then boil down to the second major point and that is I truly felt a mission to make Luther the finest school it could be. See, the music Luther started in 1904 with a Norwegian sailor who decided he wanted to become a minister and chose to come to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. And he was a fine musician. And the result was being he was such an outstanding percussion player and all, and his father was the head of the Norwegian Opera also. He built or was able to bring together an outstanding concert band, which toured Europe – 1914 they were already that good. Remember there were no high school bands at this time. And in 1936...in 1925 they were booked in a town – Minot, North Dakota – the night following an appearance by Sousa's band. Well, nobody's going to come and hear the Luther band. They were kind of bummed out. They had a larger crowd than Sousa did. Sousa kept his band over to hear them because he'd heard so much about them. And that night the piccolo part on Stars on Stripes was played by a tubist. And even in our present day and age that would be an accomplishment, let alone 1925. So I knew that I had a foundation that was solid in the alums and I had been a member of that band as well. So I just felt almost a mission, a calling to do everything I could to restore that from after the decimation of the war. And I think that's the reason that I have been able to repeat and repeat and repeat. And every so often finding a benchmark...see that's a little bit harder than it was before and this is a little bit easier than it was before.

Q There seemed to be a bit of a pattern in your life and this is that you have perceived some kind of calling.....

A I mentioned earlier that for some unknown reason I could not pack, and I didn't really know why but I sat down on the edge of the bed and I said, I am absolutely convinced that there was divine intervention at that moment because there is a plan and in this plan certain steps have to be taken. And if we – I want to say allow that, but sometimes we don't even really know its happening but as we look back it seemed about the logical thing to do. When I did, then, come to Luther to be on the faculty and could be there as it ended up for many years, more and more and more I saw that this was absolutely to be my purpose in life. Would I not be tempted to go to Yale or would I not – and I had an opportunity to apply – and other schools like that? I had answered in my letter to Yale in 15 minutes that I would not come because I could not be who I really feel that I am. Not just externally, but internally – the very core of why I exist, so to speak, or the plan that is for my life – and I could not fulfill that at those schools, flattering as it was. I don't think there's any question at all that that's the case. And now that I'm in a different phase of my life, which is moving around now to several schools, I'm asked well, what are you going to do next year? I say, I'm just as anxious to find out as you are. I don't know what I'm going to be doing next year. God knows exactly where I'm going to be next year. So yes, that's a very core principle in my life.

Q What do you think it is about singing in a choir that seems to attract so many people and gives them fulfillment?

A I was a band director for 25 years at Luther, as well as being the director of the Nordic Choir for 25 years. I enjoyed both of them and particularly understand, though, that I would enjoy the Luther band so much because I was a member of the Luther Band and that's the rock upon which the Luther program was founded. But I found an added ingredient in choral called the text. And I also found that the voice is absolutely the essence of intimacy. My clarinet isn't quite the emphasis of intimacy, but the voice is. And I was able to take the demands of rhythmic solidity, which you get from the instrumental, and then add to that and that is why I have found deep satisfaction in the choral. Well then, if I want to transfer this satisfaction to another person and I'm dealing with the most intimate part of who they are plus a text that is worth reflection, then the answer becomes rather obvious. Just this week, if I may, I was recognized by the leading instrumental award that's given in the United States. So you see, the instrumental part of me is alive and well even to this day. It wasn't an exclusion of one or the other; it was just the wonderful building of one upon the other – taking the strengths of one and bringing it into that area and vice versa. Music is music, you know? But the intimacy...I was just talking in the rehearsal yesterday from the Sing Along Messiah – the cellist was sitting right in back of me and I turned to him and I said, you know if I could start my life all over again I'd like to be a cellist. Now I didn't totally mean that. I didn't want to conduct. But nevertheless, rather than being a pianist or something.... And he said, oh absolutely. And I said because you can express any emotion you want with that cello – you can be pensive and reflective, you can be sad, you can be happy, you can be joyful. It is so close to the human voice. And he said, I couldn't agree with you more. So there's other examples of where the instrumental and the choral come right together, you know? But I find that avenue – I'm repeating here – of the intimacy of the voice plus the text. That's pretty hard to beat.

Q Numerous people that we've talked to referred to F. Melius and what he did....but nobody's actually said why he's important. You knew him....talk about your perception of him.....

A As one studies the history of choral music, you see that in the late 1920's, acapella singing really...well before that they were singing societies because they couldn't sing in tune so they sang with an orchestra. I'm being a little simplistic, but still, in essence. But along comes a choir that can sing acapella and sing in tune. And I'm not quite sure what there was in F. Melius's thinking that led him to the purity of the acapella. Now Paul J, in some ways wouldn't even allow an instrument around – it just had to be so purely acapella. Or can it be also that this was F. Melius's way of reaching the parishioner in the church and going out to the churches and giving a gift to the church per say? Well, I think that's true. Then add to the fact that Bach is the great Lutheran musician. So there's something in the genes of the Lutheranism, you see. Well look at Martin Luther – music is second only to the word. So here is a church willing to sponsor this choir, to bring them into their community, to edify them. Now I was a Methodist. That's not in the Methodist genes. Of course they appreciate music. Then also the strong ethnicity of the Norwegians and here was a gift that was particularly unique to the Norwegians. I'm going to segue here just a little bit, but I've always found it so interesting – why did F. Melius and then Carlos Sperati who founded the band at Luther – why did they both come from Norway? Why not Sweden or whatever? I haven't figured that one out yet. So having a receptive church, used to singing chorales – Bach chorales and things like that, wanting then to enlarge this as much as possible – a receptive administration at St. Olaf that said, yes we will send you to New York; yes we will take the risk of you singing at the Metropolitan Opera House – filling it the first time. Well, the word just starts to ripple all around. And that was in the early '20's, I think. So the acapella tradition, then, was beginning to become a germ in all areas of acapella music and that's manifested in about 1928 at the National Convention of Music Educators.

Q In a couple of sentences, why was F. Melius so important....

A We must remember of F. Melius and the Portsmouth tradition, that on a sabbatical he went to Leipzig, Germany, and St. Thomaskirche, and he heard the men and boys choir there. And he came back to St. Olaf and said, well you sopranos you're going to sound like boys. It might be a little simplistic, but that's basically what happened. Now that promotes excellent intonation and you put those two together and the acapella tradition – because he was the violinist and had a very fine ear. All those ingredients together, plus a receptive church and administration established a camp of singing. We call it Camp A, which is the – I'll use the word "straight tone" – versus the choir that was really growing in those times which was the Westminster choir, now the Westminster Choir School in Preston, NJ. They had a totally different type of sound. They were singing with an orchestra so they had to have a big operatic sound. That's Camp B. These two camps start to really grow side by side and F. Melius championed one of those schools of thought. It was inevitable that he would have such a profound influence. Plus, his faith.

Q If you were to describe to somebody the essence of the F. Melius sound.....

A To characterize that sound, it was to be as pure as it could possibly be. And if you take that approach and put it in the realm of theology, then whatever gift we give back to God must be the finest that we can perform, in a sense. And that was very much in his thinking. It was very much in Olaf's thinking – Olaf Christiansen – and why not? He's the son of his father. So the desire for perfection, which the so-called straight tone allowed – versus the wider vibrato of the other school...the two just melted right

together. And the St. Olaf Choir was born in the church, wasn't it? They were basically a church choir that finally decided to go out and become public. Well it couldn't fail; just couldn't fail.

Q How would you describe the evolution of the St. Olaf choir sound over the decades.....

A An individual is an individual that makes his or her own stamp upon a product and it's inevitable that this stamp is going to take on different characteristics. This was a natural evolution of the growth of choral music, the growth of sound concept, the growth of repertoire. Really there was very little choral repertoire at all. That's why F. Melius arranged the church hymns so much, and John Finley Williams did a lot of his transcriptions or editions I should say...well these bring about different things and you don't really sing a Brazilian psalm with quite the same style. So those things kind of come in through the back door, so to speak. And then there becomes an awareness of the strengths but maybe certain limitations of a certain style. So we make adjustments to accommodate this and gradually you have an evolution that the desire for perfection is just as strong in that school of thought now as it ever was. It has not changed. But in bringing about the element of perfection, the approach to the tone, to the aspect of rhythm – and here I must interject – comes along the great Robert Shaw. And what is Robert Shaw's great gift to music? It's rhythm. What is the St. Olaf choir's gift to music? It is tone. And then if these two streams start to come together, there's going to be a little change and maybe a change for the better. And I think that's exactly what has happened.

Q Tell that again...what Jennings had talked to you about....

A I was with Ken Jennings in the receiving line where the Westminster Choir had sung, in Rochester, MN. So I was right in back and I heard his comments to (name?) and he said, you know, I really think that maybe you sing more like St. Olaf than we do now. But we introduced some opera in the interim at St. Olaf and I just can't get those sopranos corked back up again. I really think I'm giving it exactly what he said so that I wouldn't embarrass him.

Q During your 57 years, you had lots of rewards....what was most rewarding?

A Music affects people differently and they express their being moved in different ways. Of course we remember some of the dramatic ones particularly. The captain of the football team felt that he had attended enough Messiah rehearsals that he could sing in the chorus. I had no limitations on the chorus; it was open to anyone and a large segment of the student body would participate. So on this one Sunday afternoon, after the Saturday game, he sang. Came leaping out of the bleachers afterwards and came down and grabbed me with those big muscles and hugged me and he said, Mr. Noble tell me what happened to me. I've never felt like this ever, in my whole life. Now tell me right now, why couldn't I even feel that I was up there on the risers? Well, am I exaggerating when I say that changed his life? No I'm not at all. He'll go to every Messiah performance that he can find to find that feeling again. Will he find it again? Not as easily as the first one, but it'll be there. OK, but then you might also see the quiet performer and you just see a little trickle coming down their eye and they have been just as moved as this football player. Now the football player says, I never felt like that when

I made a touchdown. Of course not. That's an adrenaline rush that's from a different source. But when you get this kind of a thing in music, call it a joy rush, call it goosebumps, call it tears, whatever. All of a sudden we have, just for that moment, become whole. That's why we never forget it.

Q If you were mentoring to an aspiring young choral conductor today...

A I was being interviewed for a DVD three years ago and my interviewer was an exceptional person. First of all, he was an amateur musician. Secondly he was a Christian. And thirdly he was a devotee of Carl Jung and that fits me to a "T." So he said to, now give me the main characteristic of an outstanding choral director. Now that could be band director or orchestra, but lets take the situation of choral right now. So I started to poke there for this, and I said this, and I said this. And he looked at me and he smiled and he said, Weston are you trying to say "**vulnerability?**" And I didn't expect that at all, but I distinctly remember a chill going from my head right out through the bottom of my feet and I knew that was right. So my next challenge then was trying to verbalize for myself and for others why vulnerability was the key, not piano playing, not ear training, but vulnerability. Well now, this is my answer to that in a lecture – one has to constantly be checking on their inner person, checking upon your soul. Because if you go to the podium, you're going to take those problems right along with you, and if you take those problems with you then you're negating a certain area where the power of the music is diminished. So this is a constant study and I have felt this very much in my life – that I must do everything that I can to deal with my shadow, which could threaten something on my effectiveness at the podium. Now that's quite a trip and that's quite a journey. The second one is that I must, then, be vulnerable to the score and I have to look at that piece of music and say, what is the composer trying to say? Why did he or she write this. What analogy is present? How can I, in other words, discover the emotion that's there? Well my creed says that a choir sings with emotion and the tone, which we want, only through the gift of imagination. You have to imagine the setting of that text, what is going on in that text, what the composer may have been thinking about. So its vulnerability, then, to the score; just the studying of the score. And the third element if we must be vulnerable is with your choir – to set up a relationship of vulnerability with your choir. And in that relationship it can be explained by one simple word – love. And if any member of any organization or any student knows that the person in charge has a high regard for them, wants the best – in other words, loves them – then they become vulnerable with their feelings and you get a really special experience. So I would say its vulnerability. I wouldn't have said that for years, but now I do see its true.

Q It's like a certain letting go and trust..... So when you step up to the podium today, what are you feeling?

A I want a feeling of a surge..... When I start to conduct, I want a feeling of deep excitement within me. And that excitement is if that is translated out to the singer, he or she may have a moment that truly will change them. And I want to take then that text and give it all of the power that it has. But that power really is going to come out of me through my beat maybe, but more than that through my eyes and my face. So I want to be in the best position possible to be the go-between, the transmitter of that to the student and if I see one face that I know is right there, a spark can go on, then it becomes history.

Q Is there anything else that you would like to say to a young conductor?

A You know...what can we do to improve our capacity to respond. Because that...Jung calls that the feeling function, and that does vary from person to person. But what can we do to make it grow and to make it blossom as what we would like it to be? We must expose ourselves to as much beauty as we can. We must go to the Metropolitan Opera, we must listen to Richard Tucker sing about Mimi dying at the end of the opera and we must be willing to cry. Nordic Chorus would see me cry a lot. That's when the magic can happen. We must go to art museums, we must read good things, we must surround ourselves in this because we can't just be involved in some negative things and then all of a sudden step to the podium and there it is - um um. It's checking carefully what dominates our thinking and dominates our thoughts. That plus the constant inner search.

Q You've done a fair amount of that, it seems.

A I'd like to have you ask me one question. You should ask me...well I'll just ask myself the question: **what is it that causes a physical reaction when this happens?** I've read and read and read and I've never found one single hint as to why we do that. This gets maybe...you'll have to judge when it gets a little bit too technical, but I'll give it a try. I have been fascinated by the nature of a musical experience, as we call it, when it's manifested in the body. How does this happen and why is it so important? I see our lives as a pyramid and the pyramid has three sections. The top pyramid I label spirit; the middle pyramid I label soul; and the bottom pyramid I label body. Now going back to spirit – it can be a small “s” because the Egyptians were concerned about the spirit of the Pharaohs so they built the pyramids. It's always been there. Or it can be a capital “S.” We go to the word soul – I use the Greek definition, which is our mind, our will, and our emotion. The body is the senses. OK? Now there is a relationship there that is not mine, but it's not thought of and found too much – the spirit, which is here, has the ability to inspire the soul. So, the spirit is touched and the emotions in the soul or even the mind and the soul are inspired. OK? Then the soul, which is inspired – it has a definite function. And its function is to rule the body. Well the soul, then, as it rules the body you get tears, you get joy rushes and so forth. What starts this in the spirit – that to me is an element of individuation. It could be the pitch of the moment, it could be the tambour of the moment, it could be the rhythm of the moment couldn't it? Any element of music could set that off according to the individual. But when the spirit inspires the soul and the soul rules the body, then we get this. We are for that moment in time, whole. Everything in our person is all lined up. And that's why we never forget it because our life is a search for wholeness every day, isn't it? Every day we search for that. But when that happens, it is so powerful that we never forget it. My first one was at 8:20 in the morning, May 5th, on a Monday, in 1936. And that's why I'm talking to you right now. I was whole for that moment. I didn't know what it meant, but I knew it was something great.

Q How do you account for the fact that it's an individual thing....but it seems like some people don't get the same kind of wholeness as others.....

A Go back to the spirit for just a moment and that can be it affects people in such different ways. Here I happen to be a devotee of Jung because Jung says we live on these different levels each day – one, the intellectual; two, the sensations; thirdly, the intuitive; and four, the feeling. Well maybe certain people who have the real gift in the

intellectual, they don't quite respond the same way in the feeling area. So its these other areas in which we are reached that figure into that. We were on tour and this one person was giving his devotions and he said, I'm so jealous. In a concert I see Weston Noble crying and I see you people crying and I just can't cry and I'm really jealous of you. And at that moment he started to cry. See he let those feelings free and he cried so hard that we had to start the concert late. That's somewhat the answer to that, I think.

A Another interesting side to that is the fact that maybe the person that is not affected by a performance just plain has a headache or just has had a bad experience that day or something like that, you know? And here I am, my first experience comes the day after we got a Division 3 at contest. Well, the director wasn't inspired at all.

Q Do you think some conductors never allow themselves to be vulnerable because they think they need to be in control?

A Oh, of course. It happens all the time.

Dale Warland

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Landmark Center, Saint Paul, July 10, 2008

Q Just a little bit about your childhood musical experience – what was it like in your home or your school or church growing up? What was your musical activity at an early age?

A I grew up on a farm in Iowa and all our relatives were farmers and closest friends, of course, were farmers. But music was very important in that entire community – in schools and churches, in the homes. Music was very important to my family. They were very amateur in their approach and their experience. My mother played piano to some degree. My father was a self-taught trombonist and played in a band. But the school, the little country school – I went to a one-room schoolhouse, as well as our church in a village about 3-1/2 miles away, was really our cultural center.

In the church, music was very important. We happened to have a very dynamic, talented organist and choirmaster who inspired everyone. She was a brilliant musician but also had a charismatic personality that just inspired everyone that came in touch with her. In our little country school, one-room schoolhouse, we sang every day. In my case I must have had a very loud voice because the teacher would put the 7, 8 other students on one side of the room and me on the other and we would sing canons and rounds as well as folksongs and hymns. But every day we had a portion of the time spend in music, singing. I could extend that.

Q Talk a little more about the church music experience.

A My church background is Lutheran and the inspiration that got me involved in music initially was the choir director/organist in Badger Lutheran Church, village church that really became the cultural center, also, of our community. But the organist/choirmaster – Ann Severson, I'll never forget her – she gave me my first piano lessons, she involved me very early on in singing in the choirs and that was the inspiration, that was the spark that got me going.

She also had gone to St. Olaf College so that was always in the back of my mind – if that's the fountainhead, I want to go there some day. And sure enough I did. In high school, band was still a very important part of my life so I had a tough time kind of choosing between the two as time went on. I did both, of course, for several years but then eventually choral music won out, partly because of the personalities again, of the organizations that I was a part of. It's amazing. Then going to college I, from the very beginning, I knew I wanted to be a choral conductor – a college choral conductor. So that was my goal from the very beginning.

Q Could you reflect upon your St. Olaf years and who you studied under at St. Olaf?

A St. Olaf was really an inspiration. There's a very nurturing kind of faculty there and still is. And not just in the choral aspects but I had a theory teacher, theory composition teacher, that was as much a mentor to me as the choral people. But certainly Olaf Christiansen, Ken Jennings who had just come onto the staff at that time, was an inspiration and a real supporter of my work, G. Winston (name?) was the theory person that I'll never forget. Ella (name?) Roe, taught voice and was an extremely nurturing kind of person, great passion for singing and a great passion for choral music as well.

Q Take us chronologically from graduation at St. Olaf up until the point where you got involved with Macalester.

A I was in the Air Force immediately after my years at St. Olaf and organized a chorus and brought some notoriety to the base that I was stationed at.

It turned out it was a great, great experience for me but it was also great for the base. The commanders always get the reports about the GI's who do bad things and not enough of the good. So I was in good stead with the base commander and had all kinds of support. But that was not my job. It's just that I did that on the side and it was a great experience. I went from the Air Force immediately into graduate school at the University of MN and supported my schoolwork with a full-time or nearly full-time position as director of music at University Lutheran Church of Hope in Dinkytown, part of the U of M campus, almost. But there I worked very actively with the choral department but also with composition and I was given a position as assistant conductor, as a graduate assistant I should say, to the choirs during my time there. Wally Collins, Walter Collins, Paul Fetter, Dominick Argento, were some of my key mentors during that time. But while I was at the U of M I also organized, or was asked to organize...start over. Also while I was at the U of M and working at University Lutheran Church of Hope, I was asked to take over the Arbach Singers, which was a semi-pro group – professional level certainly. They just weren't paid very much. Their mission was primarily recording choral music and a great experience. Again, working at the professional level, working on recording, when I was only in my early '20's, was a great experience for later on. I went from the U of M to the U of Southern California to begin my doctorate work and Dr. Charles Hurt was probably my key person there in choral music. But I also had other mentors – Halsey Stevens, Ingoff Dahl, Gwendolyn Kalofsky – wonderful teachers and truly inspiring and again very nurturing in their help. And of course you learn most from your colleagues that came from all over the country. So I learned as much during my doctoral work from my colleagues, fellow students that came from other parts of the country with great experience, as I did from the faculty.

Midway in my work at USC I took a one-year position conducting and teaching in northern California at Hubble State College. Part of my job was to lead a chamber, organize and lead a chamber group, chamber singers. And that was really my first full blast college position and I loved it. Having, again, the experience of working with a chamber choir was exactly what I needed to fine-tune the things I'd picked up along the way. So it was a one-year great experience, great support. Then came back to Los Angeles to finish my doctorate at USC and took a position then as head of the music department and choral director at Keuka College in upstate New York. It's an all women's college near Penn Yan. I knew that that was not the place for the future so I immediately started applying for other positions because I was limited to only working with women's voices, which was wonderful in itself but it's a dead end, or was seemingly to me, for my choral dreams of what I wanted to really do with mixed voices. But I learned so much repertoire during that time. I learned, among other things, that some of the finest repertoire is written for women's voices. Some of our great American composers wrote for women's voices because they were also in colleges that were...where the enrollment was strictly limited to women's voices. So that was a good experience. But then I came to Macalester College in 1967 and that began a 19-year tenure, an ideal job in a lot of ways. In an urban setting like the Twin Cities, which offered so much, a school that had very bright students, I was able to have a large chorus, do the major works with orchestra and a chamber choir – a capella primarily – that toured extensively, and work with the brightest students that you can imagine.

So it was an ideal place to grow and that's where I really honed my skills. And I didn't work any differently in those days with college students than I did later on with professionals – the same principles. So again, it was a great growing experience to be at that college. Then during that time in 1972, I began out of a need or needs in this community, to form the Dale Warland Singers. At first it was a volunteer choir and eventually...because I had in the back of mind always wanting to recognize the talent and experience and all the work and expense that went into becoming a good singer. So as early as I could I tried to pay singers. It was very limited, of course, in the beginning but eventually we were able to go to a pay per service and establish the first professional choir in the Twin Cities. As far as I know it was the first professional choir. I'm to this day very proud of that because it means that we take choral singing as important as we do opera or symphony orchestra, and well deserved. These people are bright people who have given up a lot to develop their voices, their musicianship and should be recognized just as much as the first fiddle player in a major orchestra.

Q Could you elaborate when you said the Dale Warland Singers arose out of a need in the community.

A I mentioned that the Dale Warland Singers really grew out of a need in the community. When I say, need or needs, people would come to me and ask for

professional level group of singers for a project. I can remember the Schubert Club – Bruce Carlson – inviting me to put together a group of men's voices to sing some Schubert works with Ernst Heffliger, who was coming to town to be a part of their season. Minnesota...it was Center Opera, now MN Opera, came to me and asked to do a concert version, furnish the chorus for a concert version of Von Williams, Sir John in Love. Subsequently other things came along just like that. We gradually went from calling the choir, the new opera chorale, or the humpty dump singers, to finally I tacked on my name just because of convenience, and the Dale Warland Singers were born, I guess you would say. But it came out of a need in this community for professional level singing. And of course we'd get a fee, a small fee, and I distributed that maybe \$5 per person – it was pretty meager, but it was a first step and it was first recognition that there is a difference between college voices that are not quite developed – certainly musically, you can do anything with the college/university level, but you simply don't have that advantage of maturity in the sound that you can get from adult, well-trained voices.

So we went from project to project to eventually organizing, and all the things that go with officially becoming an organization in a state like Minnesota, where we not only did projects but we also then started our own little season. But very soon we were asked...before we had fully organized we were also asked to do a full concert at the Walker. For instance, knowing my interest in 20th century music – at that time – now it's the 21st, but....start over
Knowing my interest in 20th century music the Walker Art Center asked me to put together a concert as a part of their series of 20th century music and I did. And that really kind of solidified my wanting to have a professional choir that could cut anything and my own personal passion for new music and the music of our time. So it sort of re-defined or defined this without my imposing on it at that time. However, the pressure was always to do music of every period and so our concerts would cover the gamut pretty much. Nevertheless the thrust was always the new, always 20th century and then 21st century and always commissioning and that started very early on. And over the period of our existence we commissioned some 270 works. And its amazing how they add up but we just did it casually and of course later on it became a serious part of our budgeting and our whole organization.

Q The Warland Singers was just one of several groups that got their start in the late '60's to the mid '70's. Plymouth Music Series and MN Chorale are two of the ones that come to mind – both were formed during the same time period. The Bach Society had been around and was still functioning. Why do you think there was such a surge in interest in high-level choral singing during this early '70's era?

A I think during the late '60's, early '70's there were several of us that were choral conductors that were just itching to make great choral music. So I think leadership had a lot to do with that. And we each had our own kind of passions

of the style of music or the repertoire that we wanted to do, so that set us apart in some ways – not in our ultimate goals, but in the repertoire we did and the programming we did, and of course then the audiences that we attracted. I know it was difficult in the early days for me and our organization to have big audiences, partly because we were naïve enough to advertise – we’re doing great new music! That scared people away. We got the reputation of doing new music and everybody associated new music with something very boring and esoterical and probably bad twelve-tone music. Twelve-tone music is great, but sometimes we don’t realize it until we’ve after we’ve heard it, how great it is. But just that was...until people trusted us, that our programming was always going to be at a high level performance wise and the repertoire was probably going to be pretty good – we had a little rough time to fill our houses. But as soon as people trusted us, that what we did was first class, then we had no difficulty. Same way with touring. We...Columbia Artists took us under their wing and thought they would have probably a tough sell. They sold us out immediately. Our reputation had spread so quickly around the country that every house we sang with – with very few exceptions – was full, standing ovations. It was incredible to see that people around the country – through recordings, through radio – we had developed this nice reputation.

Q In this community, with its richness in choral and other classic music resources, in this environment with a lot of other choruses – how did that impact the way you functioned and the kind of repertoire you may have chosen or the type of collaborations that may have been possible? How did this rich choral environment affect your particular ensemble?

A With so much activity in one community, there are bound to be issues and even problems that can come up. With several wonderful choirs sprouting up in the early ‘70’s – late ‘60’s, early ‘70’s – there is certainly going to be some competition for audiences, some competition for funding. So that in some ways was a problem. Otherwise it made the whole community recognize that we have a lot of wonderful activity going on. How can we support it? It was all done with a good attitude. There wasn’t this dog eat dog kind of spirit in the air and there never has been. So that’s one of the things that’s unusual, I think, about Minnesota and the Twin Cities in particular is that there has been a very positive attitude about supporting lots of groups. What we all had to learn to do is define our mission a little bit more succinctly and with a keener focus. I know that when we went from trying to please everyone – with showbiz and Bach and Mozart – and really focused on music of our time and especially new music – until we did that we were floundering in a lot of ways. People didn’t know what they were going to hear when they came to our concert. They knew it’d probably be pretty good, but as far as the repertoire and focus...so I think that forced all of us in this community to really think about do we want to be when we grow up with our repertoire and our focus.

Q Once you came to that focal point in your mission, you commissioned over 200 works and did a lot of other new music. How did you go about programming a concert to achieve some kind of balance and variety and maybe a few commissioned pieces? What was your process?

A I do a lot of sketching, a lot of digging. When it's music that I have commissioned I....to me, what makes a choir and what makes a conductor is the repertoire and the programming. If a choir sings comic book music – and there's nothing wrong with comic books – they're going to maybe be a comic book choir. If they sing Shakespeare it's quite another thing. If I, as a conductor, only do comic book repertoire, I'm going to be a different kind of conductor than if I conduct Shakespeare, so to speak. So I've always felt the importance of digging, digging, digging, searching, searching, making lists, making lists, making sketches of programs – sketch after sketch after sketch – until you get what you think is a program. And of course you have to take into account what's the occasions, who, what's the audience you're shooting for, and so on. But people say all 20th century music...how can that be interesting? But there is such a variety, unlike any other period in the history of choral music. The 20th century and the 21st century has more variety than any other century. So there's no problem with programming. There's such a variety. And of course some with instruments, some without, the textures, the texts and the various parts of the world – composers are influenced by different cultures. So programming is not a problem with doing music of our time. There's too much of it; you just have to sort it out. Not all of it's good.

Q When you are considering a commission and you are talking with the composer, what kind of discussion would you typically have about the parameters or the outline of what the piece might be?

A I think the composer must always know what the occasion for the performance is going to be and they need to know your choir. So if they haven't heard you live, you need recordings so they know what the occasion is, they know what the group they're writing for. But then you get just very nitty gritty – how long is the work going to be, any instrumentation, how much rehearsal time. We've gotten caught – just with that element of rehearsal time. Quite often composers, when they get a commission from the Dale Warland Singers, well they can do anything, so I'll write my most challenging work. Not knowing that we have some other music to learn in that program. And we've had two or three occasions – maybe more – where we had to abandon either the entire piece that was commissioned or part of it, because the composer shot his self or her self in the foot making it too much, too demanding for the time of rehearsal that we had. If we would have had – in a couple cases – taken all six rehearsals just on that piece, and you can't do that. So a composer's got to be made aware or made to be realistic about what a choir can do at a given time. So you talk about the duration, the nature of the text of course is key, who's going to choose the text – and that's usually the composers, but it always has to be approved by the person

who paid the money for the commission or the conductor and that usually is it. But you lay out those parameters. Once you've agreed upon it verbally, always put things in writing so there are deadlines that have to be met, of course text and who's going to own the copyright, how's it going to be reproduced, who's going to pay for the reproduction and so on. Just nitty gritty details. But that...the whole commissioning process has always been one of the most enjoyable aspects of my life. Working with these creative individuals around the world is just so stimulating. Then staying in touch with them or seeing what happens to their careers. We've commissioned a lot of people that are emerging and names that were totally unknown when we found them – or we take credit for finding them – and then see how they become household names. Stephen Paulus, Carol Barnett, Libby Larson in our own backyard, but Eric Whitacre is one of the big, the names, Jennifer Higdon, people that were totally unknown, emerging, are now world famous.

Q So far we've interviewed Stephen Paulus, Dominick Argento, Carol Barnett and Abbie Betinis. Can you think of a particularly satisfying experience that you've had with any one of those four composers?

D We've been very lucky in our own community here to have truly outstanding world class composers – Dominick Argento, Paul Fetler, Steve Paulus, Libby Larsen, Carol Barnett are some of the ones that I've worked with. And then emerging ones like Abbe Betinis and it's been a delight to work with all of them and see their careers go, and go so well. I've worked primarily with Stephen Paulus. I think we've commissioned some 40-50 works – some are short, of course, and some are arrangements when I was works, but some are semi-extended. Many wonderful experiences working with the names I've just mentioned. I remember one funny incident with Dominick Argento, who is very precise in everything he does on his scores. I mean, you can't question anything. Everything is done with careful thought. So I always took his scores literally note for note – whether it be tempo or whatever. Well I had internalized the tempo on a new work that we did of his and he came to one of the rehearsals towards the end and he said, that just seems too fast or too slow – I don't remember which way it was going but – and I said, well Dominick are you sure because I have just internalized this and I checked it on my tempo watch and it was right on. And he still argued. He said, that's just too fast. And it turns out he had to set his tempo the old Seth Thomas, metronome you see on everybody's piano, that was calibrated about ten points off. So he had to swallow his own pride on that one and buy a new metronome. But that's just one of the many things that can happen with, when you get close to performance with a new work.

Q Let's switch gears and talk about the auditioning process. I think a lot of the artistic quality of the Warland Singers certainly had to do with the particular combination of voices that you put together. Talk about how you went about assembling the wonderful ensemble that you had.

A One of the ways of looking at choral music or choral conducting is building. I like to think of building the instrument number one, building the repertoire and of course the programming that comes with it is number two, and three building you the musical leader, you the conductor. The first step – building that instrument, and I look at the choir as an instrument, it's putting together a team is another word, where every part of that team is important – if you take it seriously and if you don't start with a well constructed instrument, regardless of what level because we don't all have the luxury of choosing our favorite singer in the world to be in any given section. We take what comes to us and we choose what we think is the best mix. So what I look for in putting together that instrument are three basic things: one is innate musicianship, or musicianship number one, but part of that is both innate and developed skills. Secondly the voice and is that person singing correctly? That's the primary thing. And of course the sound and everything that goes...and you're looking and listening for a voice. And third, personality or attitude – can I live with that person for a year? So those three aspects and you can't discount the importance of any of those three. You may not get all three quite up to what you want, but at least you're looking at those things. So in the preliminary audition, after I've looked at resumes, we listen to somebody perform one or two works; one in a foreign language, to see if they're musical and above all do they communicate when they sing? Because even though you're lost in a chorus, so to speak, we still need voices that know how to visually but especially sonically communicate with their singing. So how musical are they, do they communicate, is that first part. Then we have a second stage to that preliminary audition where I am concerned about personal skills as well as getting to know the person, to answer that big question – can I live with this person for a year? Ear is very important.

Tonal memory is a part of that. How...what...just their general musical response, so I create melodies at the keyboard and ask them to sing them back to me. How really sensitive are they musically? And then how well do they read both tonal music, very simple tonal music, and atonal? Can they read intervals? Because we, having a professional choir, you need the skills to cut anything basically. You can't just pound out notes on the piano. You've got to have people that hear it and can sing it without any assistance.

Or in a given recording session or broadcast situation where you say, you take this part Mary, you take this part, and lets go. There's no wasting any time. So then if the person comes through that and there's a very promising candidate in the overall picture of those that have auditioned, then we bring them back for a final...what we call a recall or a call back and I listen to voices individually and in combination until I build what is a good soprano section and a good alto section and so on. I turn my back and my assistant assigns numbers to each candidate and I call out numbers – number 1, number 2, number 1 and 2 together, and so on until I've created what I think is a good – as objectively as I can – a good section or all four sections.

Q We've gone through the audition process. How did you go about planning an effective rehearsal?

A Rehearsals are where it all happens, so care – and we all need reminding of this in the choral conducting business – care in every aspect has to be priority. And you've got to make that a priority in your own life, as a conductor. People around you need to understand and most of them don't. I used to get telephone calls when I was still doing Macalester and doing the Singers, mid-late morning and they'd say, oh you're home. Yes, I'm at home. You're...obviously they're thinking you're goofing off and I'd already been to my office probably a couple hours earlier in the morning, came home to study for rehearsal I had a noon, and I'd say, well I have a rehearsal. Oh, a rehearsal. For what? I have rehearsal at noon. Oh, studying? Yeah, I'm....most people don't understand that a conductor just doesn't walk in. There's a lot of study and the more study you do, probably the better rehearsal you're going to have and the better concert you're going to have ultimately. So a rehearsal for the singers has to be some...has to be very well planned so that they know you're serious about it. And I always put on the blackboard in the rehearsal room what we're doing at a given minute. I mean, at 7:00 vocalizing, at 7:05 page 1 through 13 of the Bach whatever. The singers will right away know that you've got some method to your madness. Above all you have to come totally prepared. You must be prepared and as soon as you show that you're not, you're choir's going to lose the confidence. They're going to have much greater expectations of themselves if you expect a lot of yourself as a conductor. They're going to see that this conductor means business, he's hoping, she's hoping that we'll get something really important accomplished during this three hour session. Starting on time, ending on time, having treats, making the atmosphere pleasant, good lighting, good ventilation, places to park – all these seemingly mundane things are also important. But above all, having good music, and you're well prepared and well organized, is important. It's also important that the...just reinforces what I've said, it's important that a choir knows way out – two, three months if necessary – what we're going to do on a given day at rehearsal. That on Monday September 13th we're doing these three works or the sections from these three works. So me, in my home preparation as busy as I might be as a tenor, I can have this all ready to go – I come to that rehearsal prepared. That's a huge thing. And a lot of choirs – including church choirs – never think of it. Why shouldn't a church choir come prepared to a rehearsal just like any professional choir?

Q In terms of your own score preparation, if it's a piece that's new to you, when the score arrives, what do you do? How do you prepare yourself to really get your head around the new piece?

A I tend to work at the keyboard a lot. I have some facility, but not probably good enough, which can be an asset and can be a deficit too I guess. But I like to look at the overall, first of all. That's just fun to do. But I get to the details very

quickly – both my own study and also with the choir. I think only after the details are in place that you can start really making music. I'm talking about knowing all the phrasing, the divisi assignments, confirming the dynamics are there – you may want to change them slightly for whatever reason, because of (word?) or whatever, and unifying the pronunciations. So right off the bat you're all agreeing on one pronunciation or at least you try one. But I really like to have all the details in place. I sing every line, I play every line, I conduct every line, I conduct the whole thing – practice, I mean at the keyboard. So I internalize even before that very first rehearsal. It's very important that the markings get to the singers in an efficient way, in advance if at all possible. When I say markings, the divisi assignments of course, so I know what part I'm going to sing if I'm a second soprano, all the way through the piece, all the phrasings, all the pronunciations – the things that we just mentioned.

Q Talk about the long relationship you've had with the SPCO. Perhaps you can recount that first St. Paul Sunday Morning experience, but talk about the long history that you have had with the Chamber Orchestra.

A The Dale Warland Singers were very fortunate to have invitations to collaborate with the SPCO since practically the beginning. It was especially exciting during the sort of rebirth of the SPCO when Dennis Russell Davies came to town, who had the same passion for new music and music of our time that I had. So we did a lot of wonderful things with him. But over the years of the Dale Warland Singers existence, we did some 40 collaborations, all very exciting. So when I was invited just this past year to put together a professional choir for the 50th anniversary of the SPCO I jumped at the chance to work again with that wonderful orchestra. The organization is outstanding and the players are outstanding.

Q Talk about the repertoire that you're preparing for the season – there are three programs, as I understand it.

A Yeah. There are three-concert program spread out through the season. The first involves Scottish work, a Scottish composer – James MacMillan – Seven Last Words from the Cross, paired with Handel Ode to St. Cecelia. That's conducted by Douglas Boyd, who's from Scotland. The second project is the Haydn Creation with Nick McGegan, sung in English. And the final is a romantic program, Mendelssohn Midsummer Nights Dream and the orchestrated movements of the Brahms and that's conducted by Hans Graff. So it's a nice variety spread out throughout the whole year.

Q When you are preparing the chorus that will ultimately be conducted by another conductor, how do you communicate with that conductor to make sure that what you're preparing is in sync with what they're going to want?

A Working with a guest conductor can be tricky, especially when they're way across the globe. But it's very important, if you can, meet that conductor. It's very important to get his or her markings, if that's possible. Or at least communicate and say, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to go my own way and then you take it or leave it when you get here or do you want to send me the markings? You have to just work on that. In the case coming up, working with Nick McGegahn on the Hayden creation there are several translations, several texts I should say that can be selected. Are you going to use one single one that's put out in the music that you hold in your hand or are you going to find some other setting, some other text that's more agreeable to your tastes or what you know historically? So things like that have to be settled beforehand.

Q The Warland Singers did a lot of touring and a lot of recording and a lot of broadcasts. Can you think of a particularly memorable occasion from either a recording or broadcast or tour that just was so affirming to you and what you were doing and what your vision was...that was just very satisfying to you?

A It's difficult to point out just one experience that was above every one else when it comes to extraordinary performances by the Dale Warland Singers. I think in 1985, when we were invited to sing for our colleagues from all over the country as part of the final closing concert in San Antonio, TX – it was the ACDA, the American Choral Directors Association final event. And we were actually substituting for the Moscow Chamber Choir, who couldn't make it. We just happened to hit a great night as far as our performance level. I think we knew who was in the audience – that made a difference, including Robert Shaw – but the repertoire we did we believed in so much and it was pretty much unknown, a lot of it. So we were excited about the repertoire we were presenting, we had prepared it well, and we had an audience that was so receptive. It was just...and everything came together. That's hard to top, when things like that happened. But I've had concerts where just very few people were in the audience. And I'll never forget them – with both the Dale Warland Singers and my college choir. We were in a little town in Poland and it was a radio broadcast – I think a live performance – I don't think we ever have sung better. But you know, I don't know how many people heard it; I don't remember the dates or the exact town. We sang in a little town in Illinois with my college choir, too, where I remember being so excited I picked up the manager and lifted her up in the air and she weighed a good amount – I was just so invigorated. You just sort of become superhuman when something like that happens. But there have been...back to the Dale Warland Singers I think also of singing in Kansas City in 2003 – one of our last touring concerts. Again, we got a standing ovation before we started to sing – as we walked into the room. People knew it was one of our last concerts and that just electrified us. We sang one of our best concerts ever that afternoon.

Q Talk about the whole aspect of making a recording. How many have you made over the years. Dozens?

A 25, 30 I think it is.

Q That can be a very stressful time. Talk about the different kinds of pressures that you get when you're making a recording as opposed to giving even a very important performance.

A Recording is very stressful. One wouldn't expect it until you get into it. It has to be planned very carefully. First of all, you of course will have a concept of what you want the recording to be, and it has to be agreed upon, because in a case of professional recordings, it's very expensive. Not in any special order, but I think it's terribly important to have a team, the technical team that clicks together. I'm talking about conductor – you the conductor, me the conductor – an engineer, sound engineer and a producer. The three of you have to really click, especially the producer and the conductor, because you're relying on that person's ears to make some decisions under a stressful situation. It's very important to work carefully with the producer on planning each night. On a given recording that the Dale Warland Singers did there usually were four sessions, four, four-hour sessions and quite often they would start late at night because of street noise. So, again, everything has to be planned very carefully. Program it so that it's not too stressful physically, vocally, and emotionally. You want to pace the evening so you may...and you only can take, plan on keeping I think it's like between 7 and 15 minutes out of a given four hours. That's about what you can expect to keep so you've got to cover the material enough times so you know you're going to have that much that's worth keeping. A producer usually always wants you to do two complete takes, nonstop. And then you go back and you do sections and you do that section until you get it right, until you know it's right and then you go on to the next section and so on. So there is that tedium that can result in repetition and it can be just one little noise – somebody's knee can crack or someone hits the wrong note or something – it can be a multitude of things, or a car outside. So patience is very important and persistence along the way because you as the conductor have got to be the cheerleader to keep going, keep going, keep going. And to be the cheerleader and to be a set of ears listening all the time and performing, performing, performing all the time is very exhausting. I mean it's one thing to do a concert with an audience there. It's quite another thing to conduct for four hours, to perform for four hours straight with trying to get your very best. So you have to expect that it's going to be work. You go home at night and you're just totally wiped because it is so – if you do it right – it is very exhausting. I should go back and just say one more thing. I'm saying all this while at the same time saying that recording is an exciting exercise. There's nothing else like it to bring a choir to a peak. You simply don't listen for all the things you, in getting ready for a performance, that you do in a recording. Suddenly your ears become so...and your eyes become so focused on details that otherwise just sort of went by. It's amazing how you gain a new

insight into the music that you might have performed several times. So recording does a lot to bring you to your very best as far as developing your skills are concerned.

Q I'd like to circle back a little bit to the earlier discussion we touched on when you were starting to form the Warland Singers and you were determined that people would be paid, albeit a minor amount. But that was the beginning of the era in Minnesota and nationally for actually recognizing choral singing as a professional art. Put that in a national context of what influence you may have had here with other groups, the formation of Chorus America and all those activities that were happening in the mid to late '70's, early '80's, to bring a new level of recognition to the professionalization of choral singing in this country.

A I wasn't the only one around this country that had the idea that singers should be recognized with pay, with dollars. It happened in other parts of the country – Philadelphia was one of the first. The Philadelphia Singers, Michael Korn, and he because he felt so strongly that we need to bind together as...around the country...organized or helped several of us organize what was called APVE – Association of Professional Vocal Ensembles – a support group, a support effort at least, coming together to really encourage every aspect of developing professional choral music in the US. Up until then, only the military had paid choirs and Metropolitan Opera. But subsequently we had groups springing up all over. Then there were touring groups – Norma Luboff, Roger Wagner, Robert Shaw – would put together groups and go on the road, but it was short term project – project to project, tour to tour, recording to recording. But to have ongoing, established professional choirs was a new thing in this country with very few exceptions. So this was an effort and it stimulated others to do the same thing in their communities. So all over the country there have sprung up professional choirs – either fully professional or core membership that is paid –so you have professionals that are in the ranks of an otherwise volunteer group. But the APVE then, the Association of Professional Vocal Ensembles, became because of a need to support other independent choirs, became Chorus America, which means we have children's choirs, community choirs, any choir that's independent of support for instance a college choir or church. So in some ways that organization has changed to great...quite a bit...great extent. In other ways its still there to support professional, but it's a little bit watered down now for focused support of professionalism. I don't know if that covered it or not.

Q What advice would you offer an aspiring young conductor today?

A If I were going to make recommendations or mentor a would-be conductor today I would say, first and foremost become the best musician you can. Observe other outstanding conductors throughout the world – make that a priority to go and soak up, listen, meet, observe the best before its too late. Next I would say develop your ear, your listening skills, every aspect of it – not just pitch and things, but learning to hear balance and texture. Do whatever you can to

develop your ear and your reading skills. Next I would say learn all you can about the voice, the instrument that you're going to be working with. Not that you have to be a great singer yourself, but learn as much as you can about your own singing but especially how to recognize good singing, good techniques in others. Then repertoire – to be truly an outstanding conductor you must know repertoire and develop skills as a programmer. Not that you have to remember, because titles and composers can slip by, but make lists and do research whenever you can. Listen, listen, listen. Buy recordings, go to concerts, just soak up all you can about repertoire because, again as I might have mentioned earlier, what the choir becomes – any choir you take on – is through the repertoire. What you become as a conductor, as a musical leader, is through the repertoire. So those are the things I would really strongly urge would-be conductors to follow and to aspire to.

Q Is there anything you would like to cover or talk about that we haven't?

That was in, that's covered. Let me just extend this last thing with a story, maybe, if it be called a story. I mentioned go and observe conductors. Meeting conductors is an important thing too. I think I'm really not...a pretty shy person in some ways, but I learned to be bold very early on in meeting people and also in inviting composers. Two little incidents. One when I was probably still in high school, MN Orchestra came through our town and in those days they used to travel by train and do touring. And this was Fort Dodge, IA, and they were in a junior high gymnasium. Very few people were there. I can just vaguely imagine as I think back, probably 100, 150 people were there. Can you imagine? There's the MN Orchestra and the conductor I didn't know of course. That was the first time I'd ever heard a live orchestra. But he was smoking a cigarette at intermission time on the steps and I just thought, I'm going to meet this conductor and just....well it turns out, I found the program some years later – it was Dimitri Metropolis. I had the bold guts to go up and say hello to Dimitri Metropolis when I was just in junior high. Also when it came to commissioning I was very naïve – bold but naïve. I'd heard a work by Jean Berge when I was at St. Olaf and I thought for my Viking Male Chorus I'm going to invite Jean Berge to write a piece. I didn't know you ever paid a composer. I had never heard the word commission. I just thought you asked somebody to write, and a composer would write. Well I did this and sure enough he wrote me a piece – no charge, no money – and it turns out it was his first commission in this country. He had come to escape the Nazi threat; he had come the US by way of South America and was teaching at Middlebury College. And I just tracked him down, just wrote him a letter, didn't call or anything and I don't know a month, month and a half later, I had a manuscript for my male chorus at St. Olaf waiting on my desk. It was a good lesson on being bold. I wouldn't advise it for everyone, but it has worked because I have continued to always go backstage, meet the conductors and the composers, and it has expanded my horizons a great deal.