Stephen Paulus
Interviewed by Peter Myers at Westminster Presbyterian Church, May 12, 2008

Q First of all tell, me a little bit about your earliest experiences with music – not necessarily choral – but just classical music in general. Was it in your household, or your school, or your church? How did you first get hooked into music?

A Both of my parents were musical – not professionals, but they both loved music and did some playing. My mother played piano when she was a child. My dad played piano but also organ – he was a church organist avocationally – and played for several different churches; Presbyterian churches, primarily or whatever was available. And I grew up with a couple of pianos in the house – a grand piano and an upright – and also an old reed organ that my father played to practice when the church wasn't available or whatever. My first recollection is actually playing that old bellows-run reed organ that he used to tinker with and repair. I think I was around 8. Then when I was around 10, my parents started me on piano lessons. So I was kind of a late bloomer. But I had piano lessons I suppose for about 12 years, up through my undergrad schooling, so when I was about 22. Actually formally, I didn't take piano into graduate school. Anyway we went to a lot of concerts. I remember going to hear Van Cliburn and Arthur Rubenstein. At one point I thought I was going to be a concert pianist, but I saw the light in college and changed my mind. Went for something much less stressful – being a composer.

Q At what point did you get serious about composition as your livelihood?

A Actually I became serious about being a composer as a professional at age 23. I was still in graduate school. When I finished by BA, which had been undertaken two years at Macalester College and then I transferred to the U for two years and got a BA with an emphasis on piano performance. I was going to go right on to grad school, but it didn't work out. I ended up working for a year as a reading and tutorial aid at an East side St. Paul school – East Consolidated Elementary I think it was called. After being in the workplace for 20 minutes, I decided I should have stayed in graduate school and after a year of doing the reading aide thing and also teaching piano lessons privately, I went back to graduate school at the University of Minnesota and got a Masters degree in two years. And that's where I really started…I studied some composition at Macalester when I was an undergrad and then in grad school I got started with Paul Fetler, who was my principal teacher. A couple years into it, or a year or so, by the time I was 23, I thought, I think this is what I'm going to do. One of the things that happened also was I had had a church job between the ages of 18 and 20. And it was with a Presbyterian church known as Dayton Avenue Presbyterian Church in sort of inner city St. Paul. It was a mix of black youths and white people from the suburbs who were helping and volunteering and people from that community. So I had a very unusual choir of people – some who could read music, some who couldn't, some who could sing, people who could maybe sing the tune but not do the words because of war injuries, or they could say the words but not carry the tune. So there were several challenges and I had to write pieces that were very practical and would work for the choir and that they could learn, sometimes in one rehearsal even. One rehearsal on Wednesday night or sometimes a rehearsal right before the church service. And those pieces ended up being my first publications with a company called Art Master's Studios, Inc., in downtown Minneapolis, which led to many other things. So age 23 was about, lets see, '72 or '73, was…first published choral work was one of the things that I had used with Dayton

Avenue Church and I sent it in to a guy just thinking, oh what the heck – Bob Wessler as a matter of fact – and it got published right away. And I thought, that was easy.

Q Who were some of the most important mentors to you along the way, especially in the younger formative years?

A Some of my mentors were actually people in books. It turns out I just remembered some time ago that one of the things I liked to do a lot was read composer biographies – and that was even when I was a young kid, 15, 16. Their lives always seemed sort of pathetic and sad and everything. That's not something I aspired to, but they were kind of fascinating. They led interesting lives and some of the pieces – by the time I was in high school I was playing lots of Chopin, or Rachmaninoff, so I knew these people musically in some respects but I didn't know their personal lives. So I sort of filled that out by reading a lot. In college I would say one of my big influences was Paul Fetler. The reason being, he really taught me how to be a composer in terms of how to be a critical artist. He has this phrase that maybe other students will mention – like Carol Barnett – but he used to say things like, are you pleased with what you've brought or are you not so pleased? Which left it wide open. He basically taught through the Socratic method. He never…unlike Dominick, who would say, why'd you end a piece that way, on an A octave? What's that about? And you'd think, oh he doesn't like that. It's just a different method. But Paul would say, ok how do you think this works? And you'd say, it works fine. I remember I wrote one piece for clarinet and bass clarinet and I'm a pianist so I don't play winds. So this piece went on for like three or four pages and he said, well if there was one thing you could do different, what would it be? And I said, well I might make the melody more interesting… He said, is there anything else you would do? I'd do this. He kept asking the same question – is there anything you would change? And meanwhile in these graduate school classes, we'd sit in front of a piano and play a dummied up version of the two clarinets or the two whatever, and the other graduate students would sit in a semi-circle behind you. And I noticed some of them were starting to smirk and giggle a little bit. So I finally took a hard look at the piece and I said, maybe I should put some rests in and breathing. And, ahh, now we have something. But he wouldn't say, look you've written a three-page piece for a wind instrument. They have to breathe, they're not pianists. Pianists breathe too, but they can breathe and play. So that was his method of teaching. Basically what it did was we knew from the teacher, so it taught you to be the person who could sit there and ask the questions. Is this the best you can do? Is there something that could improve this piece?

Q A lot of choral music has been written in Minnesota. A good chunk of it by you and some of your generation….

A I apologize….

Q What do you think has made this such a rich time and place for choral composition? Your first published work was a choral work and you have other genres that you compose in also, of course. But I'd say a good amount of your work has been commissioned by one chorus or another or one occasion or another. What do you think is it about MN that has helped so many composers establish careers here, a lot of it through choral music?

A I think the Minnesota choral scene – it's probably a complicated issue that takes more than a simple answer – but I think there are several things that contribute to it. I think Minnesotans like to sing. I don't know if their tradition was, hey it's cold outside, we gotta do an indoor activity. But it certainly would make sense to me if that's how it came about. I think Minnesotans like to sing, there's this tradition going back to the F. Melius Christiansen and the whole
St. Olaf thing. It's a group activity, its something that amateurs can do and do a lot of, so its not like you have to have studied 11 and a half years and be able to sing a three octave range and have perfect pitch. It's just not that kind of a deal. And there are so many choruses here – there actually are other places in the country where there are lots of choruses – for instance the DC area has a ton of choruses. The Atlanta area, of course, since Robert Shaw was down there as well for many years – Atlanta has just numerous choruses. So we're not the only ones but somehow or other, Minnesota has become known for having a rich choral tradition. And I think for some reason or other everybody likes to sing, they like getting together in groups. It's cold outside for a lot of the year and its provided opportunities for people like myself and may other composers because many of the leaders of the choruses seem predisposed to saying, well let's do a new piece. It somehow has become part of the tradition. I think part of that – the reason that choruses are so keen on commissioning work – without trying to take extra credit – has to do with the American Composer's Forum, which when Libby and I started that it was known as the Minnesota Composer's Forum. One of the original projects we undertook was to create an anthology of choral music and someone pointed this out to me yesterday. They said, I've got a book that must be quite old but it's a collection of pieces by MN composers that we put together. This had to have been in the late '70's or perhaps even the early '80's. But as soon as the guy started talking about it I said, is it blue with black print? He said, yeah that's the one. I said, I haven't seen that for 20 years.

Without trying to take any undue credit for the perpetuating of choral music here, I think one of the groups that helped sort of move this along is the American Composer's Forum, which was known as the Minnesota Composer's Forum in the early days when Libby and I were involved and co-founded the thing. But we put together an anthology of choral music with I don't know how many composers – it might have been 15 or 20 – each one having written a piece. Our idea was to make this available for choruses around the country, but especially here in Minnesota because we could distribute it easily. I think choral people are just predisposed to be looking for new material. On every concert – unless you're doing Brahms Requiem or something, have a big piece, but most of the concerts they do have ten, twelve, fifteen pieces on them and they'll do three, four, five, half a dozen concerts a year. They need repertoire. And I think you can only do the same old, same old so many times, unless you're an opera company. And at that point, even opera companies are leaning a little towards doing more contemporary things. Choral people are just, they're hungry for that. And there supposedly are 238,000 choruses in this country. That's a lot of appetite for new music.

Q You're in a very collaborative art form. You often collaborate with the librettist and ultimately end up sharing the work with a performing ensemble and conductor. Talk about the whole notion of collaboration and describe one of the most rewarding collaborations that you have been a part of.

A Being in choral music does involve collaboration because there's a text involved. You have to select a text. I have in the commissioning agreements that I write up I

always have inserted in there a clause that says, the selection of the text will be approved by the conductor of the chorus or a board member or a group named by that organization. I don't want 11 people weighing in – you know five voting for and six against. But I mean, the conductor at least should be on board. And usually…not everybody knows that or assumes it. And usually they're somewhat surprised or relieved or whatever the word is. If they don't have any ideas I'll select three or four things. Or if I find something that I think is just "it", I'll pick it and email it to the conductor. And they'll get back and say, yeah this looks good. I do that because the conductor is the one who has to really sell the piece to the choir. They're the one who has to say, choir I have this new piece I'm really excited about. If they already don't like the poem and don't know why it was chosen, but the composer just wants to do this, it's an uphill battle. So I like to have them be fairly enthusiastic. And I've worked with a lot of different libretta's or people who write words – Michael Dennis Browne I've worked with for 20 years and has been an extremely relationship. Especially the last project we worked on, which was this big oratorio, To Be Certain of the Dawn. Joan Vale Thorn, a librettist in New York City, who I've worked with on a couple of operas and a couple of pieces for narrator and orchestra. Frank Corsaro, who is a stage director for City Opera for years and has done things all over the country and the world, I've collaborated with on one opera and he's a totally different character, but a lot of fun. Gene Scherer, who's been very active writing libretti for people like Tobias Picker. He and I collaborated on a piece for the University of St. John's Boy Choir and baritone and orchestra. And Colin Graham, who's no longer with us; unfortunately passed away last April. He was an invaluable…he also was a mentor. He really taught me things about opera and how to make it stage worthy and the timing and pacing of things. But I collaborated on two libretti. When it comes to conductors, there are so many local people that have been champions and wonderful people. My relationship with Dale Warland goes way back to when I was I think an undergraduate in school, when he surprised the heck out of me by coming up to me at a concert at the…it was a Jeff Van guitar concert at the Metropolitan, not the MMA, the Minneapolis Institute of Art – sorry wrong city – he said, hey how about you write a piece for me? It was for this concert choir at Macalester. I wrote this piece called, Personals, for chorus, flutes and guitar I think it was, which was a setting of four personals ads from a Greenwich Village newspaper. Not the X-rated ones – at that time things were a little different. And then I proceeded to work with Dale for years on several recordings and really sort of cut my teeth on the Warland sound and learned how to balance voices and how to set text from those experiences. And likewise it was a little bit later that I got to know Philip Brunelle and he's championed many things and done things all over the world and places that he goes and I've been grateful for that experience, too. And Kathy Romey, who's prepared choruses for MN Orchestra when I've done pieces there. Terri Larson at the Basilica of St. Mary. I find part of the fascination of music and being in the musical arts is this collaborative thing. If you're working with someone who sets text, before you ever write a note there's that whole discussion, will this work, and it's not just finding a good poem, should it be a three part poem, should it be a long one-part poem. So there's that whole thing. If someone's writing a text for you, then of necessity it's a little provisional. I've done this, like Michael Dennis Browne would say, look I've got a draft of this. What do you think? And on a piece as big as the oratorio To Be Certain of the Dawn, that thing…there was one point where we cut up the whole text. It was in little strips all over the floor and we started piecing it together and making a whole new shape because I wasn't quite comfortable with the shape that first emerged and so he said, alright let's re-work it. And we did.

Q About that specific piece, which as I understand originated with Michael O'Connell. Talk about the genesis of that oratorio.

A The genesis of the oratorio, To Be Certain of the Dawn, began with Fr. Michael O'Connell, the rector for Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis. He's the man with the vision, the dream, the whole idea. His idea was that the Christian community should somehow own the Holocaust in a new way and he wanted a musical piece created. He also has been a colleague and great friend of the people at Temple Israel in Minneapolis, going back to Rabbi Joseph Edelheit, currently Rabbi Marcia Zimmerman. So he came up with this idea to commission this large piece as a gift to the people at Temple Israel specifically, and also as a gift to the Jewish community worldwide, generally. He first spoke to Michael Dennis Browne, librettist and poet teaching at the University of Minnesota, who I've worked with for many years and said, would you be interested in this? And Michael was interested and he then said, who would you like to work with? And fortunately Michael pulled my name out of a hat – I'm thankful for that, gave us a chance to work on the largest, one of the latest projects we've done, other than some of the operas. So we all got together. The piece was about four to four and a half years in the hatching. It went through several possibilities and do we do this and how large should the orchestra be things like that. Eventually we came up with…they wanted a 45 to 50 minute piece, and as I was writing it I could kind of see, ballpark it and say, it's going to be a little longer. It turned out to be one hour. I think it was my choice, depending on the forces available. We changed numbers of things like soloists, but I thought it'd be nice to have a soprano, a mezzo, a tenor and a baritone soloist and then it seemed right to have a cantor in there. I came up with the idea of an opening and a closing piece with a shofar, a temple instrument that's very symbolic and using some Hebrew in the piece, there's a little bit of German for very specific reason, and a lot of English. It was a fascinating project to work on and it continues to be because its getting more performances, which to some extent surprises me because it's a long piece, it's a huge undertaking. It's one hour, four soloists, a cantor, a shofar player, a pretty full orchestra, an adult chorus and a children's chorus.

Q When you're trying to get your arms around a piece like that in the composition process and you have multiple sources of text, multiple languages, you've got four soli and a chorus – how do you go about deciding which parts should be for a soloist versus the chorus? Or which parts should be in perhaps this language or that language? How did you sort it all out?

A That's sort of a complicated question but I can say this: the determination of who sings what in a piece of this size is a complicated one. When Michael Dennis Browne got me a copy of the libretto as he had fashioned it, it had things like chorus and words like soloists and everything which, to some extent, he needed to do just to have the piece adequately ready to go. After living with it for a while I said, it's ok with you I assume if I change some of these things. That's part of the give and take of collaboration. He said, well sure let's talk about it. So for various reasons I changed things. As a matter of fact, on of the very first things that occurs in the piece is the singing of the Shamah, the Jewish blessing, as part of the service. And I think he had the chorus doing that and I thought, I got this idea, a cantor would normally do that. Why don't we have a cantor do it? There are several things that go into it. First of all, I wanted to hold back the chorus until a little bit later time. Why bring on all the tank and the heavy artillery? Open with a solo voice. It's going to be easier to understand all the words and it'll be in Hebrew and a cantor would be able to do that effortlessly because

they do it all the time. And I also thought it was symbolic that a piece commissioned by the largest Catholic Church in Minneapolis should start in Hebrew. The performance, the premier, was going to be at the Basilica and I thought this is…the Shamah, in Hebrew obviously, by a cantor accompanied by orchestra, is probably not something that several hundred Catholics are used to hearing every Sunday. So it was kind of symbolic. So things like that, that's the way I build a piece. It makes more sense. Eventually, the chorus does come in and sings these words, create in us, and it's plural – us – it seemed logical to have that be chorus. Create in us a great wind to cleanse us and make us start over again with a new slate, an empty slate. Make a new person out of us. So it's sort of their apology part of the piece. Other things in this particular piece I was consistent with Michael's idea in that the children would sing the blessing throughout the piece. That was consistent. In the Jewish day there are several blessings. They do this, I think primarily to remind themselves of their faith. If you're blessing this and blessing…that's a way of reminding, oh that's right. And to have the children do this seemed sort of clean, pure and unadulterated, just an honest straight from the heart blessing. Not that the adults couldn't do it, but some of the aspects of the piece were reserved for them that were a little bit more volatile and sometimes simpler. The reason for using the different languages – obviously the Hebrew for the Shamah was a no-brainer. Later on the cantor sings the veahavta l'reyacha kamocha and this is the Hebrew for you should love your neighbor as yourselves. The reason that came about is there's a book by Henry Ortell, which the name is escaping me at the moment, but there's a picture in his book – he's a local person who lives in St. Paul and I think he's close to 80 and he's a survivor. And in the book he has a picture of this temple whose name I never can remember and because my librettist is not here he can't insert that at this point, but it's a temple in Berlin that was destroyed by the Germans and the only thing left standing – it was completely destroyed – the only thing left standing was a stone upon which were the words in Hebrew and in German – you should love your neighbor as yourself. So the Hebrew veahavta l'reyacha kamocha and the German was Du selbst deinem nachbar lieben vie der selbst, I think. I found it ironic that in their own language, in the German's own language, was this thing saying not just you should love your neighbor as yourself – obviously they weren't doing that by destroying the temple. I thought how poignant to have it sung first in Hebrew, then later on the choir, which in this case are a choir of Christians, sing it in German. And a piece that's all about the Holocaust and is sung primarily in Hebrew and English, to have something in German is almost like a slap across the face, almost like a shock. But they sing this Du selbst deinem nachbar lieben vie der selbst in German… and you just sit there and think about it. Later on, towards the end of the piece, they sing that phrase not in German but in Hebrew. So there's this…it's like the cantor is singing it first so we all hear it in Hebrew. The chorus of Christians singing it in German, which is sort of a double thing – its kind of a chastising remark. In your own language we're telling you, you shouldn't have done this. But then they've sort of moved across the great chasm and the great divide at the end to sing hand in glove with the cantor, in Hebrew. It's a way…it's not hitting anyone over the head, but its just a way of saying, we've moved, hopefully, by the end of the piece.

Q What kind of reactions have you gotten from that piece, either from the original premier at the Basilica or this year's performance?

A We've had a great reaction ever since the premier of, To Be Certain of the Dawn, from any performance that has taken place. In particular I remember the Basilica of St. Mary, Melissa Streit, put together a little notebook for Michael Dennis Browne and

myself, of responses. And most of them were, what we got, responses ourselves – emails and things saying, this is an awesome experience. Fr. Michael O'Connell, rector at the Basilica, had put together this thing with Melissa Streit and emailed these things as well. It was just amazing. People saying – both Jews and Christians – saying this is an incredible experience. That sounds vain to say that, but just repeating that they said it was a moving experience, that it put the whole Holocaust issue in a new light for them and that they felt changed by it. As a matter of fact, Rabbi Joseph Edelheit, who was the original rabbi at Temple Israel when Fr. Michael O'Connell first came up with this idea, I believe – became determined that St. Cloud State University should undertake this piece. And when I first heard that I thought, well that's fantastic. It's another performance. But I thought, how can I do this, because of all the choirs involved? He actually was the motivating factor that put together St. Cloud State University, the University of St. John's and the College of St. Benedict. And in April – April 25 and 26 of this year, 2008 – those three schools combined with faculty members to do two performances, and 310 performers and in fact created from the beginning this program where they not only did performances here but they're taking it to Europe and performing it at a concentration camp in late May and one other city – they're doing it in Duseldorf on May 24th. May 29th they will perform at Natzweiler Struthof which is a concentration camp outside of Strassburg. That should be an amazing experience. They'll be singing right in front of graves of Jews who died in the Holocaust. So for the school, for some of the kids, St. Cloud State has had problems with some anti-Semitic things going on…this should eradicate and totally change some heads and ideas about what the whole Holocaust and genocide issues are. I'm sure it's going to be a transforming experience for many of the kids who are singing.

Q Music has that power and it seems like in recent decades choral music more and more has been written to bridge some kind of religious or social or cultural gap, not necessarily taking a nice Mass in Latin, like it used to be, and setting it to music, or a requiem. Talk about the power of vocal music to heal and bring people together.

A That's an amazing point you bring up, Peter, because I think the power of vocal music comes from several standpoints. One is that it deals with a text. So as beautiful as an oboe concerto can be or an oboe line in the middle of a symphony and it may conjure up all kinds of tugging of your heartstrings, memories of a past love or someone who died or whatever – if you're singing a text and you're actually saying words that we can understand and the diction is all good and all that – you've already got a leg up on grabbing people and making a difference in how they're going to react to the music. It's words plus pitches and rhythms and meters and things like that. So I think that's one of the things that makes choral music so riveting and sometimes life altering. The other thing is that, I think…I spoke of this a little earlier….you've got a community of people who are standing and using an instrument that's part of themselves. They're not pushing keys or levers or whatever and making something sound or stroking a string or whatever. The instrument is actually coming out of them and it involves not just the mouth, it involves facial expressions. I recently heard a performance of a whole concert of my choral works at Calvin College, under the direction of Pearl Shangkuan, who's an amazingly wonderful conductor. And I was struck – they did 14 pieces – and I was struck not just by the fact that they did all 14 of these pieces and it was a Calvin College Alumni choir. These are not people who are doing this professionally, necessarily, at least most of them. I was struck by the looks on their faces – absolutely engaging. They really wanted to put across the music, they were riveted on the conductor, but you could just tell from many of their faces that they were absolutely enjoying singing and it was

such a part of them. And I think this creates an opportunity to somehow connect with us. You're not just looking at someone playing an instrument, but you're actually looking at someone's face as they're projecting these words, which hopefully mean something to them. This other piece that we referred to as an aside before Pilgrim's Hymn, has been…it's a part of an opera I wrote called the Three Hermits. But it surprised the heck out of me in that its been used in so many situations. People have used it for weddings, they've used it for funerals, when the 9/11 event happened I had people email and say, we weren't scheduled to program this, or perform it, but we had to do something and so the conductor said why don't you take out Pilgrim's Hymn and let's sing it? Somehow it brought people together, it made them bond and feel connected or rooted or something more than just sitting there and saying, hmm what was that all about? So there's no…one of the reasons I do love choral music is not just because of the words but because of the expression, the communal sense. It really grabs people if its done right. And I think that's one of the things that can potentially make an artist feel good, that you've touched lives somehow.

Q How do you think we can instill passion for singing in the younger generations that are coming along? You have kids, don't you?

A I have two boys – one is 20, almost 24 and plays trumpet – he got a jazz trumpet degree from the Manhattan School of Music. He's currently living in Brooklyn and making tracks with his computer – these techno dance tracks for large warehouse parties and other things that are being issued, hopefully. He's got a label that he's working with in Germany, I guess. The younger son just finished his freshman year at Georgetown University. He's in business. He's a smart guy. The music people in the family are still wondering – what are we doing next? I've recently written…for some reason I had a bunch of commissions for young choruses – the Colorado Children's Chorale in Denver, I just came back yesterday from Atlanta where I had a piece premiered Saturday night with the Atlanta Boy Choir and a freelance orchestra at symphony hall down there, and a couple of other things that are escaping my mind right now. But I thought, why am I getting all these youth choir things? I'm supposed to do a thing for the Syracuse Children's Choir – Barbara Tag is their conductor. David Wright is the conductor of the Atlanta Boy Choir. They did a fabulous job of this piece I wrote, setting a Rudyard Kipling poem, "If," which is about boys becoming men. And I think one of the ways to instill children with singing is to have some of these talented, multi-talented conductors around who want to make great music. And music for kids doesn't have to be pandering or written down or watered down. You know, you'll love this kid. This is really cutesy. Many of the conductors out there are very concerned about getting substantial text, words that mean something. I did a piece for Emily Ellsworth and the Glen Ellen Children's Choir, which is now called Anima – they've changed their name. It was a co-commission with James Litton and the American Boy Choir in Princeton, New Jersey – he's no longer…he's the conductor laureate…but I submitted one text to Emily and she said, you know it's too cutesy. My kids are sophisticated and I want them to learn great music which means we've got to have a sophisticated, great text. Many of these conductors, at least throughout the US that I'm aware of, are very keen on having wonderful text and they run amazing programs some of which have 3-, 4- and 500 kids in them. The Atlanta Boy Choir starts with the little shavers that are like 4 and 5 years old. There are about 4 levels and each level they graduate to a different outfit and a different number of kids and they've been all over the world. They're going to Russia this summer with a piece that I wrote for them. The adults that have the passion for singing and like working with young voices are going to save the day and put the

passion into these young people. I've seen several…all these people I've mentioned…they are passionate. So they're conveying this. And they're doing other things, they're teaching…you know kids are kids so they're going to sit there and scratch and squirm and wiggle and everything. I mean, they've got rules and you have to toe the line and put your toes on the dot when you get on the stage and all these things. So they're learning…by learning music, they're learning kind of discipline for life. They're learning how to stick with something and be good at it. They're learning how not to give up. They're learning what a wonderful thing the human voice is and they're learning how to share and be involved with comradeship and to listen to their neighbor and to follow instructions. The singing itself is a great thing and it carries with it all these other disciplines that I think are useful for learning. So I guess the answer would be, I think the adults who are talented and inspired, like Deborah D'Santis at the Colorado Children's Choir and some of these other people I've named are the ones who are making sure that this choral tradition gets rooted in the younger people of our country too.

Q Anything else you want to add?

A I don't think so. Great questions. I think I'd like to say one more thing, which is a tribute to the people who do this. I feel very indebted to the people who lead all these choirs – the Dale Warlands, the Philip Brunelles, the Kathy Romeys, and Terri Larsons and all over the country – Robert Shaw when he was alive, obviously. Grant Gershon from the LA Masterworks Choral. These people who reach out and commission works or who go to their boards and say I'd like to have us commission a new work – they're always taking a chance, because even if you're a good composer or you think you're a pretty good writer, you never purposely write a dog or a piece that doesn't work, but most of us that have any integrity at all are always trying to do something a little more adventuresome than the last piece. We're sort of pushing the envelope and pushing the frontier a little bit to try something – it may be a harmonic change that we've never done before. You do this because otherwise you get tired of writing the same formulaic thing. I just can't do that and most composers I think would agree with that. So in doing that sometimes with a group that has more in the chops department you might do something a little more on the outer edge. So there are always these people who are our champions, are always sticking their necks out. And many of them…some of them even know I should do this and I think I want to do this, but you get questions from boards like…this is not uncommon – what if we don't like it? They want to know if they get their money back. And the answer is "no." If it's a total dog you don't get your money back because that's the way art is – you're always taking a gamble when you go for something new. But I think its fantastic that the artists who lead all these choirs, the conductors, are willing to take those chances. And to them, I am honestly indebted and can't thank them enough. An orchestral piece, choral piece, whatever…its always a little bit of a risk and sometimes it can be a heavy duty risk and people will say, I didn't like that new piece so much. And sometimes it's hard to sell a new piece. So I think they're to be lauded for their bravery, their adventureness or adventurousness, and their ability to really hunker down, dig in and teach a brand new piece of music. It doesn't always arrive exactly on time either. They don't always have as much time to learn a new piece as they have to learn the Brahms or some other piece that they already know. So I'm indebted to them and I think most of my colleagues would agree with that.

Q Run the first part again…..

A One thing I want to say is that I'm truly indebted to so many conductors who've been willing to take a chance, go out on a limb and commission a piece of music, to go to their boards of directors and say, I want to do this. Without them we in the composing business wouldn't exist and people from Dale Warland to Philip Brunelle, Kathy Romey, Teri Larson and numerous people all over the country. If it weren't for they're being willing to take a chance and getting a new piece and hoping that its going to be a success, none of us would have careers. There's no guarantee with a new piece of art. Hopefully if you know your craft, at a certain point in your career you should be able to write a good piece no matter what happens. But nobody wants just a good piece. They want a masterpiece. They want a hit. They want the best thing you've ever written. And that's always what all of us strive for, but there are no guarantees. And because we're constantly…any artist with integrity is constantly trying to push the envelope, to try something a little more adventuresome, especially with some of the groups that are so good and can do virtually anything. It's always a bit of a risk. But I'm truly indebted to all these people who say that's what makes our art of recreating and interpreting music – that's what makes it exciting because we get a chance to birth a piece of music that no one else has ever heard before. There's a real excitement in that.