

Today I feel I've come full circle. My first job in Wilmington was teaching a logic class in the UNCW Philosophy Dept. I was asked to fill in because Professor Gerry Shinn was ill and could not teach that semester. Later I worked with Gerry on the Schweitzer prizes when I was on the staff of the City government, which sponsored one of the international awards. I can't tell you how pleased and humbled I am to be part of this commemoration of the life and work of Albert Schweitzer. I understand that I was selected because of my involvement with music, and I am happy to talk about that subject, so dear to my heart.

One Saturday afternoon in the late 1970's Wilmington opera enthusiasts, like those around the world, tuned in for the usual live radio broadcast of the Saturday afternoon matinee at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. But there was no opera broadcast in Wilmington. The commercial radio station that had offered this program for years had decided that it would no longer do so.

Dismayed listeners met with the station management to discuss the situation. The manager was sympathetic but unmoved by their pleas. The station did not carry any other classical music. This broadcast had become a dinosaur for the station. Meetings with other radio stations produced the same disappointing results.

A group called Friends of the Opera was organized to look at alternatives. UNCW had a license for noncommercial FM campus radio station. A request was made to add the opera on Saturday. At first the students were reluctant, but they finally agreed to try it. Great news for the opera fans. Except for the fact that the station's signal barely reached beyond College Road. Opera listeners had to get in their cars on Saturday afternoon and drive to the campus. Listening to a four-hour opera from the car was not exactly optimum. And in those days car radios did not have the great sonic capabilities that you enjoy today. And the students didn't really want to carry the program anyway. This was not going to be a good solution.

By then some people were becoming aware that other cities had noncommercial FM stations called public radio. An organization called National Public Radio was offering programs to such stations, news and music programs. Many public radio stations were carrying the Metropolitan Opera (which is independently produced.) There was such a station in Chapel Hill, WUNC, which could be heard over the Triangle area. Friends of the Opera was renamed Friends of Public Radio. They contacted WUNC to discuss the technical requirements to get that signal to Wilmington. The more they learned, the more the group began to think about building Wilmington's own public radio station. It would be more expensive than being a repeater for WUNC, but it would put the station in local hands, to choose programs that best met the needs of southeastern North Carolina.

There were further conversations with UNCW about the university holding the license for a public radio station. The student station was no longer operating. The university had other priorities, so they gave up the license to 91.3, and the incorporated Friends of Public Radio applied to the FCC for a license for that frequency. A fundraising campaign was organized, a Federal grant was secured for a portion of the equipment costs. On April 24, 1984, WHQR went on the air as an 1100-watt public radio station, broadcasting 18 hours a day from a converted bar in a little strip shopping center on Greenfield Street. The initial programming included morning

and afternoon news from National Public Radio, classical music during the day and early evening, late night jazz, and, yes, the Metropolitan Opera on Saturday afternoons during the season.

Over twenty years later WHQR continues to offer opera, classical music, jazz, and news to southeastern North Carolina. The signal is now 100,000-watts strong, 24 hours a day, broadcasting from studios on Front Street. Almost 30,000 people listen to WHQR each week. The Board of Directors of Friends of Public Radio is composed of individuals from the region who set the mission for this station, and hire a General Manager to run the day-to-day operations. Hundreds of people volunteer to help the station, and individual membership is the largest source of financial support for the station. Each year approximately 88% of the budget is raised from local sources, including individuals, business underwriters, fundraising events, and grants. WHQR qualifies for a Federal grant that pays for about 12% of the budget.

There are hundreds of public radio stations around the country now, offering a variety of types of programs. I don't have precise figures, but the number of stations offering classical music is declining. The stations that are having the greatest growth in listenership are those that emphasize news. WUNC, the station we originally considered for Wilmington, is now entirely devoted to news and information, except for weekend nights when they play folk music.

Why does WHQR continue to play classical music? Couldn't we attract more listeners if we offered something different? The answer to the second question is yes. But the answer to the first question takes us back to our mission, to the roots planted here some twenty-five years ago. And it lies in our belief that music, especially classical music, is an important part of our culture, of enduring value, and part of our service to this region, a service not available from other radio stations.

I'd like to share some thoughts about music, based on my personal experience and my conviction as someone who has worked to help ensure the availability of music in our community, through WHQR and other cultural organizations such as the Wilmington Symphony, the Chamber Music Society, UNCW Choral ensembles, and the Wilmington Concert Association. In so doing, I hope to convince you to continue to enjoy music, whether it is a long-time interest for you or something that you are just beginning to discover. I'm using the term "music" rather than "classical music," because that is the music that I know and love best. I think jazz and some other types of music probably have a similar role in culture and in many people's lives. I do know that Albert Schweitzer was an accomplished classical musician, as an organist who specialized in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. It was Bach who said, "Music is a gift of God to the children of God, to give them a joy worthy of their destiny."

I was fortunate to grow up in a home where music was valued. My father had a beautiful voice, like his parents before him. But he never had formal music lessons, so he was determined that each of his four children would have the opportunity he had not enjoyed. Each of us began piano studies when we were in second grade, and three of the four of us also studied other instruments. My sisters and I sang in church and school choirs. Some of my earliest memories are of singing in church before I could read, having learned the songs by heart. I hate to think how many piano recitals my parents had to endure. But they also enjoyed performances of the Richmond

Symphony and other concerts, and they took each of us children as we became old enough to enjoy them.

I don't want you to think that other kinds of music were forbidden. Each of us as teenagers listened to rock and roll, or whatever was popular at the time. In high school I was part of two different folk groups, and I thought I could be the next Joan Baez. My parents encouraged us to enjoy all types of music. I remember listening to their records of big bands and singers such as Perry Como and Dean Martin.

I also don't want to perpetuate the myth that you have to know a lot about classical music in order to appreciate it. It's interesting and helpful to learn about music as you begin to enjoy it, but it is not a prerequisite. Now to study an instrument or singing is certainly work, requiring practice and concentration in order to make progress. And that leads to the further satisfaction of making music yourself. But simply to enjoy music, it is only necessary for you to hear it.

So maybe, like me, you were fortunate to grow up in a home where music was valued and enjoyed. Or maybe your experience was more like that of my husband, Thad. There was no music in his home. When he was about 10, his parents said, "You don't want to study piano, do you? Wouldn't you rather play baseball?" You can guess what he chose. He sang in a chorus in high school, but it wasn't until he got to college, at Duke, that he realized the joy of singing great music. He sang in the Men's Glee club for four years and then in the Chapel Choir when he was in Graduate School at Princeton. It was also during college that he had the opportunity to hear outstanding musicians in concerts on campus, and he began to collect recordings.

Music was one of the first things Thad and I discovered as a common interest, and it has remained so for all of our life together. Not long after we began dating, Thad bought speakers for his stereo system. Previously he had only had earphones. I knew this was a serious relationship then! We have enjoyed collecting recordings, first vinyl and now CD's, and we have both worked with organizations that bring good music to Wilmington. We have also enjoyed singing with various groups, including church choirs.

Music has figured largely in our religious involvements. Music for me, and for many people, has a spiritual dimension. Novelist Kurt Vonnegut says that the proof of the existence of God is the existence of music. Most religions incorporate music into worship and other religious practices. For me personally, love of music and worship are certainly bound together. I would say that at various point in my life, it was the experience of making music that kept me connected to the church and formal worship. Just last week I heard a concert of settings of the Psalms from Christian, Jewish, and Islamic sources of the 16th and 17th centuries. It was fascinating to hear the settings of familiar texts in various traditions, and to experience the power of music to bridge gaps that otherwise seem so insurmountable.

Music seems especially appropriate to times of great emotion. Not long after September 11, 2001, there was an article in *The New Yorker* magazine reflecting on various performances of classical music as part of the City's remembrance and grieving. The author, whose name I do not have, observed that great music has the power to do the "emotional heavy lifting." This is music that has distilled the grief and joy of people across the ages. Through it we have a deep

connection to those who have gone before us, and to those who will come after us. Music gives us a sense of solidarity with humanity, bestowing a deep dignity on our memories and emotions, without sentimentality or trivialization. Classical music is playing each day in my husband's hospital room. This is the gift of all great art, to keep us in touch with the best of our humanity. It stands in contrast to the commercialized, depersonalized, violent, and manipulative aspects of life in the twenty-first century.

So I hope you will avail yourself of opportunities to enjoy music—and other arts—while you are here at UNCW. Whether you take a class in music appreciation, or join one of the performing ensembles, or go to concerts in Kenan or Thalian Hall, or listen to WHQR at 91.3 FM or online at whqr.org, you will encounter life-enriching, perhaps life-changing, music.

I'd like to tell you about two such occasions for me, both centered in UNCW music-making.

Dr. Joe Hickman takes the UNCW choirs on a singing trip to Germany every other year. I have made one such trip, and my husband has gone twice. (These are essentially student ensembles, but Professor Hickman allows a few of us old fogeys to go if there is room.) The repertoire is wide-ranging, including both sacred and secular music, with a heavy dose of *a cappella* works (that is, singing without instrumental accompaniment.) This makes the ensemble very flexible in the locations where we can sing. The Germans are very appreciative of music, both of European origin and also American music, especially African-American spirituals.

The time I went we sang in all sorts of locations, including churches, restaurant, civic celebrations, and even in a Toyota dealership. But the most memorable for me was in a nursing home on a Sunday afternoon. It happened to be Mothers' Day, both in the US and in Germany. We gave a formal program in the parlor of the institution. Patients, their families and attendants gathered, many brought in wheelchairs. They loved the 16th century setting of John 3:16 sung in German. Our final piece was John Rutter's *The Lord Bless You and Keep You*. I looked around the audience, disabled people some of whom were clearly alone, and then at the young singers, so far from home, thinking of their own loved ones. There were many tears, as we shared a connection through music.

The other occasion was here in Wilmington. The UNCW choirs and the Wilmington Symphony (which was then called the UNCW/Community Orchestra) were preparing Bach's *St. John Passion*. Dr. Hickman had stepped in to prepare the ensembles because the founding conductor of the orchestra, Professor William Adcock, was too ill to do so. On the day of the performance, Bill Adcock died. As the performers gathered prior to the concert, Chaplain Bob Haywood spoke to the groups and had a prayer with us. From the stage, Joe announced that the performance would be given in memory of Bill Adcock and in gratitude for his work with music-making at UNCW. The work is long, telling the story of the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus using the text of the gospel of John. The chorus is both the crowd in many scenes, and also represents all humanity, commenting on the narrative. In the final chorus, after the death of Jesus, the chorus prays for peace for Jesus and for all the dead, and then has a vision of heaven. As we sang this glorious music, I knew that we were transporting Bill beyond pain to peace.

These are the kinds of experiences I treasure for you. Perhaps you have had such already, and there will be more in the future. In just a few weeks, the UNCW choirs will perform *A German Requiem* by Johannes Brahms. The concert will honor the memory of Chris Beaver, a graduate of UNCW and a wonderful baritone and church musician, who died last year. Contributions in his memory will benefit a music scholarship at UNCW. Chris was a gifted musician and a person of wonderful spirit. All of us who knew him, and especially who made music with him, will miss him.

I also want to emphasize that the provision of music in our lives does not come without effort--effort we make individually, and more importantly, efforts we make collectively to assure the availability of the arts. That is the point of the story about the founding of WHQR public radio. A few people had a vision and the will to work. They enlisted others in their cause, and they did not give up until they had created something worthwhile.

A similar effort is underway right now to build a concert hall for this community. The group is called ARCH (Alliance for a Regional Concert Hall.) We are working with UNCW to help make this happen. As you know, you will soon have wonderful new arts facilities which are under construction now. This will give you arts classrooms, studios, rehearsal, and small performance spaces. I congratulate the university on this wonderful addition to the campus, and I am especially happy for my friends on the music faculty who will finally have appropriate facilities for much of their work. But the project won't be complete until we have a large hall, where symphonic and large-scale choral music can be presented, along with opera, musicals, dance, and other presentations that need large ensemble and audience capacities. It's another project that requires vision and hard work. Such a hall will greatly benefit you as students and the community as a whole. It will help ensure that music can be part of our lives in an exciting and meaningful way.

“Music is a gift of God to the children of God, to give them a joy worthy of their destiny.”

Susan Gamble Dankel
Schweitzer Honors Presentation
UNCW
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