

## WSU Music Recognition Award – Phase II

### Essay

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Vocationally, I'm a computer nerd; I've worked with computers virtually my whole adult life, focusing on software engineering and programming. At the same time, I have a strong draw to music and to language. In all reality, they constitute my first love.

Music particularly has been a primary involvement of mine since elementary school: singing in choir, playing violin and cello in orchestra, and oboe, bassoon, and flute in band. This continued in college; performing in various college choirs, wind sinfonietta, and various student productions in music and drama. In fact, I was a music major for a while, taking the standard core classes: music theory, ear training, music history, piano proficiency, and the like. But, I decided that outside of an educational context, a music degree would have little impact on my future, since I didn't see being a music educator as part of my future. (And, of course, in retrospect, this has proved to be ironic decision.) Though switching to major in mathematics, I stayed active in music, primarily singing in choir and serving as a cantor at church and performing in light opera and musical-comedies in community theater. After finishing the bachelor's degree in math, I entered graduate school, finishing a master's degree in computer science. The same kinds of musical involvements continued through graduate school and then after graduation.

There have been several seemingly minor events which have brought about significant, life-defining changes for me. One of them happened while doing some harpsicord shopping. I was visiting David Calhoun, one of the primary harpsicord builders in Seattle, and changed upon a concert program for Schola Sine Nomine, a Gregorian chant group based in Seattle. I contacted one of the co-directors for the group, auditioned, and started singing with them. While this was a wonderful broadening to my musical background, it also led to one of the most significant episodes in my musical history. Through Schola Sine Nomine, I became acquainted with Howard Hoyt, the principal organist and interim director of music at St. James, the Roman Catholic cathedral in Seattle. St. James had need of a cantor and contacted me. This began a 36-year-long involvement at St. James. I was fortunate to be there under the whole tenure of Dr. James Savage as the cathedral director of music.

Under Jim's direction, the St. James music program became one of the most prominent programs in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States of America. I was there and actively involved in major cathedral liturgies ranging from ordinations and Chrism Mass to the rededication of the cathedral after the major renovation in 1994, as well as major musical events, just as staged presentations of the medieval *Play of Daniel* and Hildegard of Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum*, concert versions of significant cantatas such as Benjamin Britten's *Saint Nicholas*, as well as music for the parish liturgies, which included a large sampling of the standard religious choral repertoire, solemn vespers on Easter and Pentecost, Tenebrae with settings by François

Couperin, Christmas Midnight with mass settings by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, and Requiem settings by Gabriel Fauré, Maurice Duruflé, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart presented within the context of the Requiem mass. There was also a long-standing tradition of a *son et lumiere* production in the early spring which was called Great Music for Great Cathedrals.

Another major event occurred in the spring of 2014. I had what I thought was a spring cold, but it hung on and on. Eventually, when I was no longer functional (I couldn't walk up a flight of stairs), I called 9-1-1 and asked them to bring me to the local hospital. Within the hour of arriving at the emergency room, I was in the intensive care unit, and then, less than twenty-four hours later, I was intubated because my lung function was so compromised. Apparently, I was not a quiet patient, trying to remove the intubation and IV lines, so they heavily sedated me. I was in this drug-induced coma for four weeks. There were several times during this period that the prognosis was "rather grim," as I heard later. Shortly after I awoke from the coma, I was cautioned that I might not be able to speak any longer. This was a difficult thing to hear since I have been an educator for years, and lecturing was a good deal of what I did for work. And, of course, then singing would be completely out of the question. But I was able to speak again, albeit haltingly at first. Bit by bit, I learned to compensate for the scarring in my lungs. I even tried to return to singing, but found it was quite "unstable" due to the impaired breath support.

So, I recovered, after a fashion. After three months of being in the hospital, I was back in the world. I have been on disability with the Social Security Administration ever since, due to reduced lung function. I was able to return to work that fall, teaching again at North Seattle College. I had long thought about pursuing a PhD, but it never seemed to be the right time. This experience underscored for me that the time is never "right" to embark on something major like this if one is waiting to be "ready" for it (whatever that may mean), or perhaps, more aptly, it is always the "right time" since one will never be fully ready ...

So, I started researching PhD programs in Computer Science, with an eye toward studying undergraduate education in computer science. This led me to the program here at Washington State University. At the same time, I did some investigation of the School of Music as well, having long thought of myself as a singer, after a fashion.

A third fortuitous event occurred in Fall 2016, shortly after my arrival here in Pullman, during the Week of Welcome. While walking through the lobby of Kimbrough, I noticed that they were holding auditions for choral ensembles that afternoon. So, on a lark, I asked if they were taking walk-ins. I was told that there was an opening coming up, if I wanted to take it. I filled out the paperwork and walked in. Having nothing prepared, I sang the Paschal sequence, *Victimae paschali laudes* a cappella since the chant repertoire is quite familiar to me due to the years of music ministry at St. James Cathedral.

That chance audition has been life changing / reaffirming for me. Under the aegis of the school of music, particularly the voice faculty, I once again think of myself as a musician, a

performer. The atmosphere in the school is extremely open and supportive. I have been given the chance to enter into this community, to develop as a singer, to reclaim this part of my identity.