



# AMERICAN CHORAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

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## C H O R A L C O M M E N T S

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Your chapter will be co-sponsoring one of William Dawson's sessions at the first Unified Arts Conference in Atlanta, January 31- February 3, '80. Joining the Georgia Music Educators Association in sponsoring the conference are the Georgia Arts Education Association, Georgia Theatre Conference, Georgia Music Teachers Association, and the Dance Division of the Georgia Alliance for Arts Education. We hold a social hour for our members - please check announcements for time and place.

Special thanks to Mark Lisicky who designed the logo for our newsletter. Mark is from Catasauqua, Pa. and a political science and history major at Oglethorpe University. His future plans include Law School and adding to his auto memorabilia collection which includes a 1957 Chevrolet and 1967 Firebird. Mark will be "seen" again in our next issue.



"SPECIAL"

Our first "special" is an interview with Dave and Sandy Arenz. Many thanks for their time...it was an hour interview which has been edited and "culled with love". (Note...laughter sections) Read, think and enjoy.

An Interview With:

David and Sandy Arenz

David Arenz is the Principal of the second violin section of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Born in Chicago, he studied there for seven years with George Perlman before completing a Bachelor of Music degree and Performer's Certificate at Eastman School of Music. While at Eastman, David was a member of the first violin section of the Rochester Philharmonic and of the Syracuse Symphony. After graduation, he came to Atlanta as a member of the first violin section. He held that position for five years before advancing to his present position as Principal of the second violin section, which he has held for six years.

Sandra Arenz has been with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for ten years as an oboist-English Hornist. She earned her B.M.E. and M.M. from Indiana University. Her teachers include Jerry Sirucek, Ray Still and Grover Schiltz.

Q: Who were the conductors you worked with while at Eastman and Syracuse?

DAVE: The most notable was Walter Hendl, who was Fritz Reiner's assistant for a number of years.

Q: Did you play many choral works while you were at Eastman?

DAVE: I don't believe I did a single choral work while I was at Eastman.



Q: Perhaps one of the Howard Hanson works?

DAVE: No.

Q: In your work with choral directors, what do you see as some of the major problems, deficiencies, or weaknesses?

DAVE: Since I have come to Atlanta, I have had a variety of experiences, many with church choral directors. To be honest, one of the glaring weaknesses of the tremendous insecurity of baton technique, especially definite beats, definite preparations, definite basic patterns, and generally not being sure of what he or she is doing. Sometimes the choral director is too concerned with the choir, and maybe rightly so, because she or he has hired professional symphony musicians who supposedly can play the parts and should know enough on their own without having a person standing up there telling them what to do, but at the same time, the most important thing is that the basic beat patterns are clear and conducted properly. If we can see the main beat, the rest of the musical things will probably fall into place because we won't be so worried about distinguishing where the beat is. Therefore, we can concentrate on other aspects of the work like dynamics and phrasing.

Q: Sandy?

SANDY: The beat; the baton technique; just the beat pattern. My biggest criticism is that the beat pattern is not very clear and that "one" is not always down. I would like to see a little less expressive beat pattern in favor of a very clear and plain beat pattern, and let the musicians be expressive. Sometimes the left hand gets in the way and I am not sure you need it that much, unless it is a very high point in the music; a very large climax, and sometimes it is very effective. Using the left hand less will help make it a more special motion. Just a nice clear beat. A lot of times choral conductors, or any conductor (it is not only choral), when the music gets loud, they get bigger, and the piece slows down, and that's not very good. And, sometimes, when they want it softer, they use a very large beat...I've seen everything.

Q: Would you say that the preparation of the down-beat is one of the weakest areas of the choral director?

DAVE: Yes. Some will set one tempo with the preparation, and another tempo in the first measure. Another problem I have seen is the choral conductor who has not decided how many preparation beats he or she is going to give...is it 1.2.3, just 3, or two measures? This is probably one of the major problems.

Q: What about the size of the beat with a large orchestra, when distance might be a factor?

SANDY: I still don't think it has to be large as long as it is out in front and you are not hiding it somewhere down low. It must be high enough.



What suggestions would you make to the choral director for achieving more efficiency in the limited rehearsal time? - i.e. should parts be marked; how much should they be marked?

NDY: Know the score...know the cues.

DAVE: I think it would be a good thing for the choral director to meet with one of the instrumentalists-probably the person who has contracted the other musicians. This could be helpful in regard to the preparation beat and tempo.

Q: What about bowing marks? Is it essential that the choral director mark bowings, or is it more efficient for the players to decide this in the first rehearsal?

DAVE: Speaking from my church experiences, generally there is one two-hour rehearsal before the performance. Chances are that most everybody will be bowing passages approximately the same way, and for sure by the performance. The most important thing is that the work is completed by the end of the rehearsal, and make sure that everyone knows each of the movements will be in 3, 4, etc. I really  
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believe that bowings are non-essential, because in a two-hour rehearsal, the total concept is the most important thing.

Q: What about marking the parts in general?

SANDY: Marking the parts for woodwinds isn't necessary. I think sometimes they are over-marked...let the musicians play the music, and get out of the way (laughter)- unless there is something the conductor really objects to; and usually the musicians will really do what you want anyway.

Q: In rehearsing choral works, do you like to start at the beginning and go straight through, or maybe work on a difficult passage first?

DAVE: I think it is safer to go straight through, and then go back and find any problem spots. Sometimes what a choral director might feel is going to be a problem actually turns out not to be a problem, but another spot might be. Again, I think it is important to go from the beginning if you only have a two-hour rehearsal. Now, if you have four rehearsals on a piece, then maybe you can begin to dig into it and maybe work on certain spots. Chances are, if you have four rehearsals, you are doing more than one work. Again, I think it is important in a two-hour rehearsal to go straight through the work and then the instrumentalists might have questions about tempo changes, and other questions that the choral director might not anticipate, and then that will help the conductor as well as the instrumentalists to understand what is expected of him when he goes to the performance.



Q: What about over-rehearsing? Has that happened in any or your situations?

DAVE: Yes. That happens more when you have four rehearsals - or five on three pieces. And I am not speaking only of choral now, but orchestral works as well. Where you have musicians who are excellent enough players, they may not need five rehearsals, but the conductor has slotted five rehearsals and he will use all five, and chances are, you may ruin the performance by over-rehearsing. Maybe the work will be ready in three rehearsals; a lot of times the conductor may want those other rehearsals for himself. Sometimes the conductor may be not quite sure of how he wants a particular spot to go, and he may want to play with it a little bit. There may be times when it is necessary; but in a lot of cases, it's not.

Q: Are you also saying that over-rehearsing may take the human element out of the performance?

DAVE: Absolutely! Absolutely!

Q: So the notes just become notes, and not an expression of the artist...

DAVE: The work becomes boring, and as soon as that happens, it's just a waste; you may as well not even be playing it because if the musicians are bored, then the audience is bored because they can see and hear that the musicians are bored...and no matter how exciting the work could be, it won't have any impact on the audience.

Q: Sandy, what about over-rehearsing?

SANDY: For a church job, you don't have time to over-rehearse. You barely have enough time to get through the work, especially if it is a major piece. If you have four or five rehearsals, yes, you can over-rehearse it - and then it comes out a little boring because you lose your spontaneity. The human quality can be lowered to where you are just playing the notes, and then you are just watching the clock, and hoping it ends early.

Q: Do you feel that most orchestras really don't play on the down-beat of the conductor, rather than the upbeat?

SANDY: Well, in fact, a lot of orchestras don't play on the down beat, because the conductor doesn't have a bottom to his downbeat. Musicians know where it is, because they are used to a certain conductor.

Q: John Nelson said at the National A.C.D.A. Convention, that you must be absolutely clear, and stop where the bottom of the beat will be, or the orchestra will play after...

ANDY: Right. It again depends on the conductor. Some never give a definite beat...it's like a click, if you don't get it, then everyone



guesses, and if you are used to the conductor, then everyone guesses together.

Q: Is the concertmaster, then responsible for starting the sound?

SANDY: Well, maybe for the strings (laughter); but we can't see him where we are.

Q: What about cues?

DAVE: I think once in a while it is very helpful to have cues, but not all the time, and in fact, not a whole lot. But every once in a while you will be sitting there for 35 measures and if in a rehearsal you blow the entrance, you don't have to worry about it so much, but at the performance you don't want to make a mistake. So it would be helpful for the conductor to give a cue a measure ahead, even just with the eyes, to let you know that we're just about there.

SANDY: Just simply looking at the person is enough. I like eye contact for cues...just looking helps me to know that I am in the right place at the right time. Unless, you are panicked and lost, or if you are doing Charles Ives, then you ask the flute player where you are (laughter)!

Q: What about lead time? How long in advance do you like to have the parts? - or does it pertain to the work being done?

DAVE: I think it pertains to the work being done. In most cases, the works have already been played and are very familiar to the instrumentalists, so, in that case, no lead time is necessary. But if it is a work that is kind of obscure, then it is nice to have the music in advance - just to take a look at it - so that at the first rehearsal you are not totally in the dark.

Q: Do you feel it is helpful for the choral director to come to you and talk through the program and the score(s) before the first rehearsal?

DAVE: Yes. I think that is a tremendous idea - very helpful for both. The instrumentalist can give advice on spots in the work that could really help the efficiency of the rehearsal...they can work things out together.

Q: I agree; because you were tremendously helpful to me in our programs. Do you find many conductors who will ask advice of the instrumentalists i.e. are you going to take 2's or 4's on one bow?

DAVE: Well, no. Well, let's see - in the Atlanta Symphony, the parts are bowed in advance. But in a two-hour rehearsal, the conductor may want to hear 2 or 4 on advance, to see what he likes better - and then you are saving everyone's time, and are allowing more time on the total work. 2 or 4 on a bow is a picky thing, but very



important; and if it is worked out in advance, it saves time.

Q: Do orchestral musicians listen for and enjoy the totality of a work, or do they become so involved in their own part that maybe the whole is lost in a performance?

SANDY: That's the ideal; to be part of the whole picture; but I don't know if many people do.

DAVE: A good orchestral musician naturally has to concentrate on his or her own part. But I think the only way to play as an ensemble is to listen for the whole work; and if a person is only listening to his part, then you are going to have ensemble problems - so the orchestral musician has to listen to everything, not only to the chorus for ensemble purposes, but for pitch.

Q: Especially for pitch?

DAVE: Yes.

Q: Especially in some churches where the lights are on, and other factors may lead to pitch variations?

DAVE: Yes.

Q: Is it important for the conductor to tell the player that he or she has the principal theme inverted in this section?

SANDY: If it is some piece they don't know, then probably it would - at least to know it's the major theme. I don't know if they would care whether it's inverted or not - just knowing that they have the theme and to bring it out.

Q: Is it important that an orchestral musician does not see the total score, like a choral musician does?

SANDY: I think it is important, but a lot of people don't really know the total picture. They listen to their own little part, and that's it - and they are losing out. If they understood the total piece better, their contribution would be better, and more musical, although in a choral work, in my own mind if I know the words, it makes a difference, and I believe instrumentalists would play differently if they were aware of the text.

Q: Do you enjoy the large choral-orchestral works?

DAVE: Yes, I do.

SANDY: Yes, if they are done well. If they're poorly rehearsed, and the conductor doesn't know the score, then it is a drag - all you do is sit there, and earn your money, and you can hardly wait for it to be over.



Do you have some favorites?

DAVE: Boy, we've done a bunch (laughter). Let's see...I like the Haydn Creation, St. Matthew Passion, B Minor Mass - They are long works, and I would hate to do them every year, but to do them every other year is very enjoyable.

Q: What about Messiah? Does that become boring to a professional musician like yourself, who may play it a number of times in a relatively short span of time?

DAVE: About the second or third time, it can (laughter). It's a challenge and it's a great work, but the overall performance time with Mr. Shaw is about 2 1/2 to 2 3/4 hours, and most of the string parts are non-stop playing. It is tiring, but it keeps your attention because it is difficult. It is always difficult the first time through, but again we may have three or four rehearsals on it...so again by performance time, it may be the sixth time through. And then that night you might play in church, and the following week in another church - so it can become tiring - but then you are doing it in different places with different conductors and choirs, so there are always different problems that you are faced with, especially in rehearsal. But when I'm home, it crosses my mind...another Messiah (laughter).

Q: You are about to do three of the great Requiems this year with the Symphony - they are different musically - do they each turn you on; the Verdi, Berlioz, and Brahms?

DAVE: Oh, yeah! Absolutely!

Q: What about the smaller choral works like Bach 142 or Christ Lag In Todesbanden - do they have the same excitement that you enjoy in the larger works?

DAVE: Sure; and sometimes it has more excitement because it is over sooner (laughter). A three-hour choral work can get rough in terms of time. If they are done well - if they are done to the capabilities of the group, then I think it is exciting. If the orchestra does not play well, or the chorus doesn't sing well, or if the conductor doesn't conduct well, then it won't be exciting. But if everyone is doing his part - and listening - and trying - and concentrating - then it can be very exciting, no matter what the length.

Q: In your busy schedule do you have a chance to go to or listen to other choral works when you are not involved in the performance?

DAVE: Well, in my case, with so many nights that I am out with the Symphony schedule, its Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights, and sometimes Sunday afternoon, and if we do a choral work, we're out for rehearsal in the evenings (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday) because that's when the Chorus rehearses. I would have to say that I generally don't because I value the time at home with my family and enjoy watching sports on T.V.



Q: As part of your degrees, did you have to listen to some of the great choral works?

DAVE: No, not so much. At Eastman, I didn't play any choral work... we did do an opera.

Q: As you play in many areas of Atlanta, do you enjoy playing the less known choral works i.e. Buxtehude work? Does it become exciting because you are learning new literature?

DAVE: It just depends on the quality of the work. I can't compare the quality of a Bach to a Buxtehude, but some of the Buxtehude works are very nice - maybe not so deep and involved as Bach, but very enjoyable to play on a different level.

Q: Would you like to see in a choral program one "pure" orchestral work just for balance?

DAVE: It doesn't make any difference.

Q: In the curriculum of music majors, what suggestions would you have to help the choral director better prepare himself to deal with orchestral musicians?

SANDY: Talking with a friend who is an instrumentalist helps. In the winds, understanding the ranges of the instruments; the ability to hear the difference. Just seeing notes on the page doesn't mean anything; but if you hear it by having an oboist come in and play - something down in the low register and then something up high... The other important thing is choral directors won't allow wind players to breathe. I always think of my instrument (oboe and English horn) as an extension of my voice, and when I am playing, I am thinking I am singing it, although there are no words. Strings never have to breathe.

DAVE: I think it is important that the education major not be made to learn the instruments. In six weeks in a methods class, you just can't learn an instrument. I think it is more important for a professional musician or the concert master to come into classes and demonstrate different techniques, and actually show you, and listen to what those sounds are, and to write down the terminology that he is using so you know that a spiccato stroke is different from a martelé, even though both of them are short. The schools maybe are trying to expose the education major to the instruments in six-week periods. But, goodness, how can anyone do justice to the techniques of the violin in that period of time...? It is hard enough to learn how to hold the bow, let alone trying to learn what to do with it and be comfortable with it. I think it would be much better on the college level to have seminars on the instruments and the techniques of the instruments rather than six weeks on how to play. Some of the basics, like how to hold the violin, tuning of the strings, bow placement, could be accomplished; but the other would be much more beneficial.



Q: What makes a good conductor?

DAVE: A clear, concise, precise beat. I think that is of utmost importance. I think a lot of conductors who are considered good conductors may, at one point, have had a concise beat, but they have gotten away from that - (it is like a violinist who has learned the basics and then starts to get sloppy) - so instead of seeing a nice clear beat "one", they may throw one over to the left, or to the right, or come in some other way, so then it is very difficult for the musicians. The most important thing is that the baton technique is very precise. It doesn't need to be flashy. That's where Walter Hendl's way of conducting was; very small beats - what Fritz Reiner did, and if it was a couple piano (pp) spot, you could barely see the baton move, but "one" was always down, etc... you always knew. And if there was an important cue, you would be playing something soft, and all of a sudden a couple forte spot would come out in the brass - the right hand would go up like this, and you would never miss. He was a terrific conductor!

Q: What about the left hand? Are you suggesting that because some of us have been taught that the left hand should be the expressive one, and indicate dynamics and cues, that it is getting in the way? Is the left hand making the right hand less clear?

DAVE: Sometimes the left hand does get in the way. In a lot of instances some conductors try to do too much with the left hand...just the bare necessities would do. If they want the orchestra to play softer, you can get a lot of that across with a small beat in the right hand; but then if it is still too loud, then get the left hand into play. But a lot of the time the conductor will switch the baton from his right hand to his left hand, and start to conduct with his left hand, to show that he is ambidextrous or something - or Bernstein taking the baton in both his hands, and that kind of stuff is just for show and a lot of audiences enjoy that. So there's got to be some theatrics to conducting, I suppose, for an exciting performance. Iwaki, who conducts us down here, is a prime example of theatrics; but the audience just thinks he's terrific, and I do too. But there is always a precise beat. You always see that no matter what he is going to do, or what he tries to convey to the audience, the orchestra always knows where he is, what he expects of us, and so forth. So the basic thing is the beat. Then, past that point, I think a good conductor knows the terminology; knows to say to the strings, "I think you should be playing spiccato on this spot", and then if the conductor sees a string player not playing the spiccato on the right part of the bow, he can say, "You are not watching where the concert master is playing, or the principal second, or principal violist or cellist, you are not watching what they are doing." So the conductor in a rehearsal, this is when you are talking about three or four rehearsals again, you need to be alert. You need to be aware of these things, know the problems, and know why the ensemble is not exactly the way you want it. Say,



"The ensemble was bad here because..." not, "The ensemble was bad here, let's do it again", because then the ensemble will be bad again.

Q: So the correct terminology to orchestral players would be more helpful than saying, "this phrase should be 'warmer'".

DAVE: Well, both. To say that this phrase needs to be warmer means something to me. I know what they mean. They want more depth, a richness to the sound, not quite so edgy - maybe in terms of bow placement; maybe have the bow a little closer to the finger board so the sound won't be so, like Shaw says, "grainy". But I think it's nice to know the technical terms for it, so you don't always have to look at the concert master and say, "What do I mean here?", which happens on occasion.

Q: Is there anything else you could add to help the choral conductor run the rehearsal more efficiently?

SANDY: I have very often gotten the feeling that choral directors feel uncomfortable with instrumentalists. I don't know why. Maybe they think they can't communicate with us; and maybe if they think of the instruments as voices, they wouldn't be so intimidated. But, maybe some instrumentalists intimidate them on purpose, which happens sometimes because an instrumentalist doesn't like the way the conductor is conducting, and that can get nasty.

Q: Is there any alternative if that happens in a short rehearsal time and performance?

SANDY: No. Don't hire them next time. Try and get people you can work with.

Q: Have you had the experience where a professional instrumentalist has literally taken over?

SANDY: Yes.

Q: I am not saying that is right or wrong... in some cases, musically, it might have been right.

DAVE: Well, you know, in a two-hour rehearsal situation, it is the conductor's thing. The conductor is up there conducting the choir and orchestra, and it is not up to the orchestral players to constantly be shooting off their mouths. Again, I think a lot of this can be accomplished in advance.

SANDY: Preparedness is one of the most important things.

DAVE: But the main thing is don't use that person again.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

DAVE: No. I think we've covered it.



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