

LEGACY

Illuminating the Past, Informing the Present, Inspiring the Future



WAYNE KIVELL

Wayne Kivell, a graduate of Luther College, has received an MS degree in music education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an MFA in musicology from the University of Minnesota, specializing in Renaissance and Early Music. He has done additional study at numerous workshops under Robert Shaw, Roger Wagner, William Venard, Douglas McEwen, Norman Luboff, Paul Salamunovich and B. R. Hensen.

In 1994, Mr. Kivell completed 33 years of music education, the last 25 years at Northfield High School. From 1975 to 1983 he was assistant conductor of the Dale Warland Singers. In 1988 he founded the I Cantanti chamber choir in Northfield and has since added the Le Donne Cantanti women's choir. Choirs under his direction have twice performed as guest choirs at the Luther College Dorian Music Festival, four times at Minnesota Music Educators, and six times at a state or divisional convention of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA).

Wayne is a life member of the American Choral Directors Association. He has long been active in

ACDA, having served as district chair, membership chair, newsletter editor, state president, North Central division president, division convention chair, national chair of the high school repertoire and standards committee, and national convention coordinator. He recently retired as executive secretary for ACDA of Minnesota.

In 2000, Mr. Kivell was awarded the F. Melius Christiansen Award for lifetime conducting experience and distinguished service to choral music in Minnesota by the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota.

Editor's Note: The following is a condensed transcript of an interview with Wayne Kivell held in Moorhead, MN, on August 6, 2009.

SotN: Wayne, how did you first come to the decision to be a choral director?

WK: It was kind of strange. In high school, I was an instrumentalist. I started trumpet in fifth grade and played all the way through. Some friends told me, "Oh, you should go out for choir, too." I had been a decent singer all that time, but trumpet was my main instrument. So I only had one year of singing in high school...that was my senior year. When I left to go to Luther, I had planned to be a band director. We packed to go down to Luther, [and when we arrived] I realized I had forgotten my trumpet! I tried out for the Chapel Choir, made that, and even though I was a vocal/instrumental major it was clear I was going to go vocal from that point on.

SotN: Describe your first teaching assignment.

WK: My first job was in southwest Minnesota, in Lakefield. I taught 7-12 vocal music and German I & II. Although I minored in German, I hadn't planned on teaching it, but did so for four years.

SotN: What was your first annual salary?



A couple of ACDA 'Young Pups' in 1988: Wayne Kivell and Steve Boehlke.

WK: I think it was something like \$4200, but I got an extra \$250 for teaching German.

SotN: What were some of the ideas you implemented to encourage students to sing?

WK: I needed to get kids involved in Lakefield. This was before the days of class lists. The first day of school, I had no idea who was going to walk into the choir room. It's hard to select music when you don't know who's going to be there. I did a little recruiting to double the number of boys [that first fall] to a total of six. During the course of that year, for the next year, I auditioned every boy in the school. I went to every study hall, pulled all the boys out into the choir room, had them sing a few bars of *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, and gave them a score of 1-5. I just went right down the line. After hearing all of them, I said, "You, you, and you can go back to study hall." For the remainder, I said, "You've got a great voice. I want you in choir next year." I had a much more balanced choir the next year.

SotN: Who were some of your musical mentors growing up?

WK: The main person was Reginald Torrison, who influenced not only what I did, but where I did it. He was my high school choir and band director my senior year, his first year out of Luther. He was a real inspiration to me. He, as well as friends, got me into choir that senior year. He was the kind of person you wanted to emulate. Ironically, he taught for only 10-11 years and then went into the ministry. Weston Noble, of course, was the obvious inspiration at Luther. Anyone who had the opportunity to study with him, well, that's who your main mentor is, but also Bart Butler at Luther. He was amazing, probably one of the most intelligent people I ever knew. Then in 1967, I went to the Meadowbrook School of Music and took a six week workshop with Robert Shaw. For a young choir director, still in his late twenties, that was a godsend.

SotN: What were some highlights over your career?

WK: First of all, performing with the Nordic Choir at Luther. We had some memorable performances while on tour. There was one in Albuquerque that none of us who were in choir will ever forget. We sang an entire concert without one smattering of applause. At the end of the concert, the audience quietly stood up. We didn't know they couldn't applaud in that church. We didn't know what was going on. We just got chills. Certainly, rehearsing and performing with Robert Shaw was a highlight. In six weeks, we did Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the Haydn Lord Nelson Mass, Oedipus Rex by Stravinsky, and we ended with Bach's St. John's Passion. Shaw let you into finer listening skills. We're on four measures for twenty minutes. At first, you sit back and wonder, "What's he harping on? It sounds great to me." Then,

after working with him for a couple of weeks, you started to hear what he was hearing. You realized where he was taking you from and where he was leading you to.

SotN: What choirs have been influential in developing the sound you enjoy hearing?

WK: College choirs of all types. Later, I came to enjoy the English choir sound. I'm interested in all types of choir sounds. I may not like it, I may not do it, but it's fascinating to hear different kinds of tone. To take every piece of music and sing it to a standard "choral sound" just isn't being true [to the music].

SotN: How do you go about selecting literature?

WK: You choose music for the ensemble you have. You don't pick your music and then wait to see who comes in the door. To do anything else is foolish.

SotN: In what ways has programming changed over the years?

WK: The most recent change in programming, especially as you go to ACDA conventions, the proliferation of 20th, and now 21st century music. That's good, but not good is the absence of anything from prior to the 20th century. We've forgotten our roots. You will hear some programs where conductors are so focused on impressing their choir director audience with the pieces they have found...it doesn't make for balance. That's the thing that's missing: balance in programming.

SotN: If you had to pick five chestnuts...

WK: I'd have to think about it, but I'll tell you the one piece that always works with a high school choir: *Sicut Locutus Est*, from Bach's *Magnificat*. It's got a chance for everyone to shine. It has rhythm, it has climax points, it's just plain fun. I don't care what a young person's musical interest is, they can get excited about that piece. That's one that particularly worked for me.

SotN: How did you first become involved in ACDA?

WK: I got involved while I was at my second job. Some colleagues down in Iowa said I should join ACDA. Like most people, I resisted for about a year, but finally paid my six dollar dues and signed up. After a few years, I decided it was a good thing and paid my life dues – \$100. Best investment I ever made. When I came back to Minnesota, I found out we did not have a state organization, just a state president. The national president came to MMEA and sat down with a group of choral directors and appointed me to become the MN state president beginning in the summer of 1972. The current state president, Philip Steen, couldn't go to the division convention in Indianapolis and asked me if I could go in his place. That was my first of over 30 consecutive ACDA conventions at the national and divisional level.



Wayne leaving the podium.

SotN: Why should people be join ACDA?

WK: It is our main professional organization. How many people in the medical profession aren't members of the AMA? I don't think they'd consider it. How many lawyers aren't part of the American Bar Association? We should be that dedicated. Every choir director should be a member of ACDA. Get involved. Come. You don't have to hold office. Just come and learn. Share. I've talked to fine conductors and said, "You should be involved in ACDA." "Well, I don't know if I need it." I respond with, "Well, maybe ACDA needs you. Share."

SotN: How has the organization changed over the years?

WK: The organization has changed because we have an organization. At that Indianapolis convention in 1972, I went to a state president's meeting and they were starting to outline sites for the next few division conventions. At that time, we had a region of ten states. Well, 1974 was going to be in Des Moines, 1976 was going to be in Columbus. They looked around and asked, "Who wants it in 1978?" Nobody raised their hand. I don't know what I was thinking, but I raised my hand and said, "We'll take it in Minnesota." Six years down the pipe. I figured we could get something together, and we did. We had 66 members when I started in 1972 and my goal was to double the membership in two years. We did. We had exactly 132 in 1974. During those two years, we

put together a state board and we were having regular meetings. Everybody said, "When you host a divisional convention, your membership will increase." This is certainly true. That convention drew 1004 people. It was the first divisional convention in the country to ever break 1000.

SotN: How has the ACDA-MN calendar of events evolved?

WK: The state convention came first. We had the first state convention in January of 1974 at Normandale Community College. Our headliner was Charles Schwartz of the U of M. We had choirs come in and perform, and a couple of interest sessions. That was about it. At that time, we decided to have the convention in the fall. We didn't want to have it in the winter to compete with MMEA or in the spring to conflict with contest or anything like that. We made the decision to put it in the fall. Late enough so choirs would have a chance to get something together and early enough so what people picked up at the convention they could apply to the rest of their year. I can't remember why, but we picked the Saturday before Thanksgiving, and it's never changed since then. We had a few church music conferences, we had a contemporary music forum one year in the seventies. Dialogue is a whole other story. A group of ACDA-MN people got together in Sioux Falls in 1984 and talked about a summer conference. Axel [Theimer] said, "Well, I'll host it." Convention and Dialogue have obviously become our two biggest things. Then came the honor choirs, men's/women's festival, Star of the North festivals, etc.

SotN: What's the next big thing for ACDA-MN?

WK: I'm hoping that the mentorship program will be the next big focus for ACDA-MN. It's something we've talked about for years. It's something that's been set up individually. ACDA needs to focus to set up a program where younger directors can connect with a mentor.

SotN: Why was creating the Executive Director position such a critical move to advance the organization?

WK: ACDA of MN has grown so much over the years, you can't ask a person to hold down a full-time conducting position and do [Executive Director work] for ACDA, which is almost another full-time position. Yes, you could divide it into little segments, but it's more efficiently run by one person than fracturing it out.

SotN: So what is the role of volunteerism in an organization like ACDA?

WK: It's 100% important. Even with a paid position [like the Exec Director], we need volunteers. There are big jobs, there are little jobs, but nothing that is going to cause anybody to take much time away from their paid position.

SotN: What advice do you have for young choral directors?

WK: First of all, let me just say that people coming out of college are so better prepared than we were 40-50 years ago. When I think back on how green I was, it's scary. I see people coming out of colleges and universities and stepping into good programs (or growing good programs) right away. Try not to be an entity [onto yourself]. Look for assistance from retired people in the area. We have an excellent retired conductors in Minnesota. Don't be afraid to ask someone to come in and assist you with rehearsal, develop a filing system for your music, or anything no matter how mundane.

SotN: What do you think your impact has been on choral music in Minnesota?

WK: I don't know if I've had any impact on ACDA other than getting it started. You develop it, grow it a little bit and then kick it out the door. I have been privileged to be connected with some fine choral organizations: I Cantanti, the Dale Warland Singers, and Northfield High School. I hope that's what people will remember.

SotN: What kept you active in ACDA through the years?

WK: When you believe in an organization, it's an honor to serve.

SotN: Thanks, Wayne.

WK: My pleasure. Thank you.



Wayne can finally rest after nearly four decades of ACDA leadership!

5 WORDS or less...

Describe your vision for
the future of ACDA

Inspirational, Technological, Multicultural,
Data-Driven

~ *Tim Sharp, ACDA National Executive Director*

Editor's Note: This new feature will appear in each issue of Star of the North and will ask nationally recognized figures in our field to discuss an important topic in five words or fewer.



Tim Sharp joined Summer Dialogue participants to discuss the future of ACDA. Pictured with Tim Sharpe is ACDA-MN President Brian Stubbs.