

LEGACY

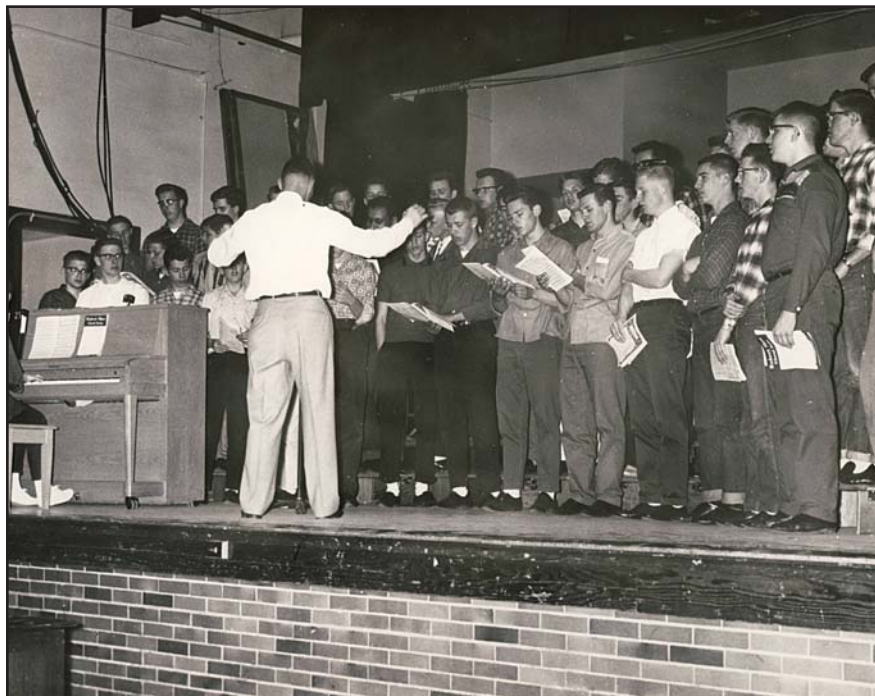
Illuminating the Past, Informing the Present, Inspiring the Future



CARL LIPKE

Editor's Note: Carl Lipke was recently selected as the 2010 recipient of the FMC Lifetime Achievement Award. A full biography of Carl's career can be found on the preceding page. The following is from an interview conducted with Carl in August 2010 by Vicki Peters, a former student and now colleague. Vicki serves as conductor of The Summer Singers and is a professional singer with The Singers, Minnesota Choral Artists. Vicki begins with the following testimony:

If you have ever met Carl Lipke you have experienced his steel blue eyes, firm handshake, and boundless energy. Those eyes, hands, and passion created beautiful music with such fine subtleties, while capturing the hearts of thousands of young high school students and many adults too. His intensity and passion for excellence in the choral art has been instilled in many people who have continued to sing in good choirs all across the country.



The Boys at North High School in 1964

I had the privilege of singing under Carl in high school and learned firsthand how he took average singers and turned them into superior choirs. He always called his choir students "the cream of the crop!" This confidence, high expectations, and discipline was instilled in us and helped create the mutual trust and respect needed to become a great choir. Carl gave us outstanding choral literature, including college level music, and we sang it very well because we knew we could. He taught us hard work, commitment, and dedication for the team, resulting in memories that will last an entire lifetime. We took a seventeen-day choir trip to Europe my senior year, one of the first choirs to travel to Europe from Minnesota. That trip and his passion for choral music were instrumental in my decision to become a choir director.

Vicki Peters: When did you first decide to become a choral director, and why?

Carl Lipke: I guess it was when I was singing in my high school choir and church choir that I decided that I wanted to direct a choir some day. Along with that, it was when I took my first teaching job at Cleveland High School in Cleveland, MN. I had such a great time and success with the choir groups there, that I wanted to continue teaching

VP: Where was your first year of teaching and what were some of your responsibilities during your first year as a choral director?

CL: My first teaching position was at Cleveland High School in Cleveland, MN. Some of the responsibilities were: Band, Choir, one class of Geography, English, History and assistant coach in football, basketball, track and baseball. At basketball games I would go back and forth from coaching on the floor to directing in the stands.

VP: How long did you teach at North High School? And did you coach there also?

CL: I taught choir for 39 years and was department chairperson at North High School. I did one year of coaching gymnastics as I had been on the gymnastic team in college. I was also the musical and technical director for musicals. North St. Paul is a great community of wonderful, caring people. I thoroughly enjoyed my years at North and just loved those kids. I loved going to work every day. For me it was never a job, just so much fun!

VP: Back in the day, who were the choir directors that inspired you during those early years?

CL: When I was growing up, my parents would take me to hear the St. Olaf Choir sing their Christmas Concert and I remember being in awe just listening to them. I would look forward to this concert every year. When I got to college, I knew that I wanted to sing in the college choir and it was Elias J. Halling, my college choir director, who inspired me. He was a master teacher and director. I was very fortunate to have sung under him for 4 years. Those were very exciting years. After college, it was listening to choirs directed by Paul J. Christiansen, Robert Berglund, Robert Holiday. Along with these college directors, it was the high school directors of Oscar Dahle, Gar Lockrem, A. B. (Bud) Engen, Denis Brown, and Bill Lydell.

VP: You have a gift for programming great music for both the singer and the listener. Where do you find your selection of music?

CL: I would and still do attend many concerts during the year and listen to hear what music I could use that would be appropriate for my choirs or singers. I would attend clinics and workshops and always be looking for literature. When I would go to music contests, I would listen to as many choirs, solos and ensembles as I could from other schools. In today's world, one can go on the internet and review literature. I also attended the Christiansen Choral Schools held at Concordia where we sang through new music.

VP: Your choirs always had 30-40 guys singing, and they were athletes and scholars. How did you recruit them and deal with all the sport conflicts?

CL: When I first came to North St. Paul, I had probably two or three boys that were athletes in choir and I immediately would encourage them to go and recruit some more boys. I would go to the locker room and with the help of these boys, encourage some more to come to choir. Next, I would go out and compete alongside some of these athletes. Having been involved in sports throughout high school and college days, I pretty much stayed with them. When they saw that the choir director could stay with them, I guess they soon thought that

choir wasn't a bad thing to belong to. I also had some very intelligent students and some very attractive girls in my choir, which surely helped. It was THE class to belong to. After a while, students saw the success that the choir was having, and soon it became the class that the students wanted to be in, especially the concert choir. I had some great leaders and the best students in school.

As for dealing with the sport conflicts, it was not as bad in my day as it is right now. With the girls and boys sports today, it would be much more difficult. However, there were still some conflicts that did occur for my choir students. I was fortunate to have coaches that would work together with me most of the time, and I would do the same with them. When it came to conflicts, however; if a decision had to be made by the students, my students chose choir or choir activities. Choir was THE CLASS to belong to.

VP: I remember the strict "Lipke's Rules" that made sure the guys hair weren't too long and girls skirts weren't too short (tough in the 70's) and shoes were exactly the same. Where did you acquire this strong sense of discipline?

CL: There was a long history of strong discipline in my family for me. My parents were very strict. My father, being a barber, saw to it that my hair was cut short every week or two weeks, whether I needed it or not. It was just accepted that you would always dress appropriately for school and church. You did not wear clothes that one would wear for recreation. I had strict hours to be in, and all of my school responsibilities had to be completed before I was allowed to go and recreate. This included practicing the piano and clarinet as well. My family was not very affluent. We had only one car and I did not get my first car until my first year of teaching. Along with that, I had just been discharged from the Navy and had been under strong military discipline. I think that these elements played a very natural part of my strict discipline.

VP: Many of the choral students today take private voice lessons which help them and their choirs. How did you take untrained high school singers and produce outstanding choirs year after year, receiving over 60 superior choir trophies?

CL: I guess I felt and approached every rehearsal as a voice lesson for my students. We would work on tone, and tone production, listening skills, blend, balance and sight reading skills during our choir rehearsal. I was very much influenced by Doug McEwen from Arizona State. He was one of our first All State choir directors. I liked his philosophies on vowel placement and blend. I also encouraged students to be involved in state contest singing solos or ensembles. Every grading period, each student was required to be in an ensemble and perform



Carl with the 3M Music Makers in 1980

for the choir for a portion of their grade. I often felt that after school hours were really where the teaching began. I always had students coming in after school and working on vocal techniques and/or literature. I would also try and expose them to as many concerts and performances as possible. Some years I brought in college directors such as Dr. Sateren and Dr. Berglund to work with my choirs.

VP: What are some of the festivals and conventions your choirs have participated in?

CL: The choir participated in MMEA conventions and were invited to sing at MMEA choral clinics. I also hosted many exchange concerts with other schools, much like the conference festivals they have today. Also, a group of high school directors would observe a choir every month. Then we'd go out to dinner and candidly critique the choir with their director. We learned a lot from these discussions and had fun too. Also, the Dorian Festival at Luther College was first offered to All State singers which North High had many members each year. Then Weston (Noble) changed it to be a quartet from each school. That was a marvelous opportunity for those kids.

VP: Tell me about the wonderful choir trips you took in those 40 years of teaching.

CL: We took a choir trip almost every year. We would tour Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, California, Washington D.C. and generally throughout United States. We also toured Europe on three separate occasions in 1972, 1974, and 1985. During those

times, we gave concerts in the Netherlands, East and West Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France. The cost of the first trip was \$538.52. It about doubled thirteen years later for the 1985 trip.

VP: How do you feel the European choir tours affected your students?

CL: I feel that there was and is a lasting and positive attitude toward their experience traveling in Europe. I know that in some cases that was and is the only time that any of the students have gone or will go to Europe. I hear all of the time, "The European Trip was the greatest." "Do you remember when?" etc. I have members in my Alumni Choir today that often times reflect on those trips and wish we could do it again. I should mention that in 1972 and 1974, the Iron Curtain was up and there were some very scary times. They saw and heard things that the students could hardly believe or could have imagined existed. They saw how people lived there and they appreciated their homes and country much more when they returned. I will never forget when we crossed over on the bus from gloomy East Germany into West Germany and the sun suddenly came out. The choir broke out singing "Oh, Freedom", one of our concert songs. I still tear up at the thought of it. It was such a valuable, educational experience for them.

VP: You are currently the Chairperson for the FMC Endowment Committee. How has this committee impacted choral directors and how will it affect musicians in the future?

CL: I'm a hopeful and firm believer that the money that is being raised through the FMC Endowment Fund Committee will have a lasting impact on Choral Music in Minnesota. The committee, through their fund raising efforts, make it possible for teachers to attend conventions (state and national,) dialogues and symposiums. It will help to keep Choral Music alive in Minnesota. We have such a wonderful tradition here in Minnesota and we certainly want to maintain and nurture that. Being Chairperson for the FMC Endowment Fund Committee, I'm just so hopeful that I in some way can, give back to Choral Music what it has given to me. What a wonderful life I've had.

VP: As Music Consultant for the Minnesota State High School League, what are your responsibilities and how long have you held this position?

CL: In 1971, Murrae Freng, then the Executive Director of the Minnesota State High School League, hired me to be their Music Consultant. In that role, which I still hold today, I assign contest judges, chair the Music Advisory Committee, conduct adjudicator certification clinics, update the League Music Manual, and host con-

test manager workshops. I mentor choir directors, manage region music contests, and adjudicate contests. I also represent the League at the MMEA Convention, and help in many other as-needed capacities. In May of 2009, I was inducted into the Minnesota State High School League "Hall of Fame."

VP: How has the State Solo/Ensemble and Large Group contests changed over the years?

CL: I believe there is much more involvement in the solo/ensemble contests. I do know that in 1994, the student involvement in MSHSL music contests impacted 93,000 students each year. In 2010, the student involvement was around 99,000 students.

VP: You have been highly influential in developing life-long singers as well as directors. Name some directors that student taught under you.

CL: Well, I had over 35 student teachers that I mentored including Tim Sawyer, David Cherwin, Ed Anthony, Jeff Wressel, Dave Ryan, Jean Larson, Kirsten Broman, and Al Hawker to name a few.

VP: What other jobs have you held over the years?

CL: For seven years I directed the Cathedral Choir (teen-age) at Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, and I directed the Roseville Lutheran Church Adult Choir for four years, taking them on a concert tour to Norway. I am currently in my eighth year with the Salem Lutheran Church Adult Choir in West St. Paul. For 25 years I was also the director of the 3M Music Makers. This was a corporately sponsored choir, auditioned from full-time employees of 3M, created as a public relations group for the company. They traveled to perform at 3M functions in Minnesota and 3M's many locations across the United States. I am also a pilot. Summers and weekends I was a Flight Instructor and Charter Pilot at the University of Minnesota Flight Facilities, flying state officials, U of M presidents and staff, department heads, as well as transporting donor organs for the U of M hospitals. I later became a Flight Instructor and Pilot Examiner At Wings Inc. at the St. Paul Airport. Since 1992 I have been a Designated Pilot Examiner for the FAA and have given flight tests to over 900 prospective pilots. In November of 2009 I was awarded "The Wright Brothers Master Pilot Safety Award" for over 50 consecutive years of safe flying without any accidents, incidents, or violations.

Another job that I thoroughly enjoyed was being the charter pilot for Reuben K. Youngdahl, the Senior Pastor of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church. He loved to spend his summers at their church camp called Cathedral of the Pines on Caribou Lake near Tofte, MN. But members of the church wanted him to be available in Minneapolis for services, weddings, and funerals. The compromise was

to charter a plane and a pilot for the summer to get him back and forth quickly and safely. During June and July, I would juggle my flight students at the U of M Flight Facility and then my wife Jean and I would live at the camp in August to accommodate Youngdahl's schedule.

VP: You are still directing your Alumni Choir today and it has inspired other retired directors to do the same. Why did you decide to start an alumni choir?

CL: As you know, the Alumni Choir was started when I retired from North High School. Unbeknownst to me, you (Vicki Peters) and Linda Smith (Edina music teacher and former North High Student) put together an alumni choir as a surprise for my retirement party. 80 alumni showed up to sing for that party! They had such a good time singing together, they wanted to continue and asked me to direct them. We have been singing ever since. I still have a member in my Alumni Choir who was in my very first choir in North St. Paul. They have been a wonderful group to work with and as long as they keep coming to rehearsals, concerts and enjoy singing, we'll keep on having an Alumni Choir.

VP: What do you do in your spare time, if there is any?

CL: I am an avid fisherman and hunter and have several trophy fish and large animals decorating my house and cabin. I have been married to Jean for 46 years and we live in North Oaks. We have two children, four grandchildren, and five grand-dogs that keep us very busy.

VP: What impact has music organizations such as ACDA, MENC, MMEA had on your career?

CL: These organizations have helped me grow not only musically but also expanded my professional and social network. One can attend any or all of the conventions, conferences, concerts and many other functions put on or sponsored by any one of these organizations and come away with a refreshed attitude and feeling. They are all there to help directors to be able to give back to their students the best help that they can give. You go



Conducting the Alumni Choir in 1999

to these conventions to hear the finest speakers, finest directors and finest groups perform great literature. Along with all of that, directors have been able to compare strategies for their choirs. Everyone there is willing to help one another for the common good of their music students. What more could one ask for?

VP: What words of wisdom would you give the emerging choral director of today?

CL: You choir directors today have the greatest job in the world. You have the finest students and the best atmospheres for working with these wonderful students. Where else can you have a position like that? When the day comes that you retire from teaching music, is the time that you will know what a great life that you have had. I would like to say, give your students the best opportunities that you can, enjoy their youthfulness, and expose them to all different types of music, as well as the best literature that you can. "Savor the moments."

The greatest thing about all of these jobs and experiences is the wonderful people I have met and the friends that I have made over all of these years!



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