

## **Kathy Saltzman Romey**

Interviewed by Peter Myers at Hennepin Ave. United Methodist Church, April 24, 2008

Q First of all, I would love to hear a little bit about your childhood growing up, not only with music but with a conductor in your household – your father. What can you recall about your earliest musical experiences that may have helped sow the seeds of your lifetime involvement in music?

A When I was a child I certainly remember first and foremost that there was a great deal of singing in the church. I come out of the Brethren in Christ Church, which is kind of an affiliate community of the Mennonite Community, so a whole tradition of a capella singing was prevalent. In addition to my own parents being involved in music, especially my father who was a church choir conductor and taught at a small college, I remember my grandparents singing. They had a little duet called, The Gospel Singers, and they would go around and take their autoharp and sing in nursing homes. So just the idea of sitting in a church community that would sing in four-part harmony hymns that came up through the course of a service – often a capella – had a profound effect on me. And that was my early childhood. But then as I matured, my father took a position in another state. So I initially grew up in California, but then we moved to Oregon. He became a professor at the University of Oregon and he took a job in the Episcopal Church, which is as far away from the Brethren in Christ Church as you could possibly get. So every Sunday we were singing Mass – complete Mass – as children in a children's choir. There were smells and bells, there was Communion and I became very familiar with kind of the Anglican Church tradition. So I think that this duality of my choral experience through childhood and young adulthood was very formative in my shaping as a choral conductor. And then certainly my father's own work as a choral conductor. I remember going as a child to see one choral concert after another – the St. Matthew passion and the Messiah and all of the large symphonic works as well as his collegiate choral concerts. I remember seeing him backstage and his psychological preparation. I remember talking to him during intermissions and afterwards at performances. And I also remember singing under him as a young person at the high school age and then again in college. That had a very profound affect on me, to see him as an artist and as a scholar and as a conductor. I would say it certainly has influenced my work. He is not only a parent, but he's been probably one of the primary mentors and advisors in my life. I would say one last influence was when my father took a group of students from the U of Oregon to Ludvigsborg, Germany, where they spent a year studying choral music all around Europe. But primarily in that kind of Stuttgart area, which is where he connected with Helmuth Rilling, where he heard Helmuth Rilling's first B Minor Mass, was invited to his home, where these two young conductors shared a passion for choral music and decided wouldn't it be interesting to continue this relationship through a small festival. Then my father invited Helmuth Rilling to come to the US for a week, do some organ concerts, maybe give a couple of lectures and do a choral concert. So also during these early years of singing in children's choirs and in the Episcopal church and under my father, I also remember the beginnings of the Organ Bach Festival, where they would go to practice rooms and say to students, want to play a cantata? Want to sing a cantata? It was so grassroots at that point. It was on a shoestring budget, in an academic setting, where you really had the vision and the dreams of two individuals kind of leading the way to what has become an outstanding international music festival. So those early memories of the Bach Festival in Oregon and then of course later when I went to spend time with Helmuth Rilling as a governess in their home – twice – and saw all of the great

stars of Europe coming in and out of that home, where I sat at the breakfast table with Helmuth Rilling as he studied for his first performance of Mendelssohn's Elijah. His Elijah was Fischer-Dieskau. His soprano soloist was Arlene Auger. It was just remarkable for me. I don't think I truly comprehended this – I was 17 years old. I was there assisting with the preparations for the arrival of the first child and then again back two years later for the arrival of their second child, where I was helping Martina Rilling cook dinners and serve artists and where I had the opportunity to go to one remarkable concert after another, where I was quizzed at the breakfast table on cantatas, where we would listen at night to recording sessions from the previous week and drink red wine and talk about music. All of these experiences, I think, shaped who I am as an individual and certainly who I am as a musician and as a conductor. That was more information than you needed to know. But it's all so integrated because I think that my experience has been very much a family experience.

Q Is your mother a musician?

A My mother is not a musician, but I think that she's a guiding force in my life because she represents the audiences that I perform for on a daily or let's say weekly basis. She is that type of intuitive musician that goes into the concert hall or into the church and says, what moves me about this music? What do I connect to? And her feedback and insight has been so candid that I rely heavily on that voice, as well as my father's voice who can immediately dissect and analyze what has occurred during the course of any rehearsal or concert. So it's again that kind of duality of having the amateur music concert-goer in my home and then the trained professional musician. Both have been very important in terms of providing counsel and wisdom.

Q At what stage did you decide that you wanted to pursue music as a profession?

A In third grade I told a little boy named Ben White that I was going to be a conductor. And he said, you can't be a conductor. You're a girl. And I said, no I'm going to be a conductor. And Ben and I graduated from the U of Oregon together and he said, what are you going to do? And I said, I'm going to go study conducting in Germany. And he said, you told me in third grade that you were going to do that. And I was determined. I won't say that I wasn't without fears or doubts as many young people pursuing any type of career path. But it was at a time...I'd say in kind of the history of women in the workforce where there were not many role models. There were certainly some, but very few. And truly many of my female role models in the conducting world were women that I never even met, I had never met. They were out there doing the work and I looked to them as individuals who were following the journey, pursuing the career that I wanted to pursue and opening the doors that I would eventually walk through. Elaine Brown, who was at Temple University and developed the program Singing City, in the heart of Philadelphia, doing major works where she brought in Helmuth Rilling to do St. Matthew Passion with a remarkable symphony chorus made up of people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. And I looked to that as a model for my own work. Certainly for what I do with the chorale in terms of bringing people together and the incredible impact that community and music can have upon one another. Sarah Caldwell, who conducted at the Metropolitan Opera for the first time – the first woman to conduct the Metropolitan Opera – and I was studying in Germany at that point and I was asked by an orchestral musician who said, how much did she pay the Metropolitan Opera to conduct them? And I said, she didn't pay them anything. She was asked to conduct them because she has ability, musical vision. And then this was

followed by a discussion about gender and music. This was at a time when the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic did not allow women in the orchestras. Many women were not allowed to play in European orchestras at that time. And in certain organizations women were starting to emerge. There were issues. There were tensions that people were trying to overcome. Even my final thesis when I graduated from the Conservatory in Germany with my artistic degree – I chose the topic, three generations of women composers – was unheard of. There were so few people that were pursuing this line of research at that time. And I was young and I was just going to libraries and saying, may I see the manuscripts that you have in your historical collections of women composers? And I was told by a woman librarian, it's been medically proven that women cannot compose. Why are you pursuing this topic? Again it was those types of experiences that just have stayed with me. Those early experiences and then during different periods of my training and then kind of moving from Europe back to the US and entering the field of teaching and conducting at a time when women were becoming more and more active in the field but still not as prominent as in today's musical culture.

Q I'm sure you have many memorable experiences, but can you think of an experience from any time in your life – with a piece of choral music where you just really realized the power of this particular medium to really touch people's souls?

A When I was studying in Germany at the Conservatory in Frankfurt, we had an opportunity every year to go off campus and begin each semester with a large work. This would include an orchestra, student chorus, student conductors, student soloists, and we would usually go for a retreat of about a week and intensely study a major work and then perform that. As my final exam piece, the work that we studied that year was the Brahms Requiem. And this had a profound impact on me as a young person. Not only because of the music but because at that particular point in my life and in studying at the Conservatory, there were three people from my conducting class that were killed. And so I think that that piece, more than any other piece, became a way for me to process that experience through music and to look at the ideas, the theology, the philosophies, the intent, the relationship of text to music through the composer's eye, and also to see that that had relevance for me as an individual and as a musician. Certainly I think that all of the members of the conducting class saw that as a very significant experience in our own personal and musical growth.

Q I'm sure that anybody who was paying attention after 9/11 couldn't help but notice all the different performances that were presented as a response to those tragic events. And the other day somebody was talking about the amount of singing that went on during the 60's, in particular, with civil rights and anti-war messages...a lot of that was conveyed through song. What is it about singing that works?

A I think singing has a very powerful ability to transcend and transform. It is a way that we come together as a collective where the voices become one, where you are able to use text connected with music to express feelings and/or ideas, beliefs that may be difficult to discuss or articulate through just spoken word. I mean there's something remarkable about a lyric melody from Brahms as attached to a text by Schiller that seems to connect deep into the souls of the individuals who are performing and that then connecting with the audience or audience member who is listening and receiving that. I think that there is something very important in terms of the relationship and the marriage of text to music. Which is why I really value the time that I spent with Helmuth Rilling because this is intrinsic to his work – that connection between text and music and how

we find those deeper layers of meaning and understand them and share them as performers and as listeners.

Q That leads to a related question. When you are beginning to prepare a piece for any one of your choruses to rehearse and perform, how do you go about preparing the piece, studying the piece and trying to get inside what the composer was really trying to say both musically and through the text?

A In beginning my own process of score study for a particular project I think I am...one of the things that first draws me into the work itself is the architecture, is just the organization, the structural parts of any work. So I usually go through and do a fairly thorough analysis of the structure. How is it organized, what is the harmonic movement, the melodic movement, the melodic motives? How is the text relating to all of this? I like to sing through parts. I play through parts on the piano. Sometimes I will listen to recordings. And I will certainly do research and looking at the composers themselves and where they were in their lifetime and how this related to their own work and development as a person, as a musician. But architecture for me is probably a guiding force in terms of the way I organize my work, especially within the symphonic chorus rehearsal, but also at the university. It just fascinates me to see how composers will take the organization of any type of text and then use compositional form to realize that into a larger work. Certainly for me, when I'm trying to dissect a work for a chorus, I want to present it in a way that's logical so that they have this experience of almost building a house. We can sing through it all the way through – maybe that's looking at the blueprint of the house? And then we go back and say, ok what is the major melody? So if it's a fugue I'll have everybody sing the fugue subject, so that we understand it and how is it organized. And then from there let's all sing the fugue as it occurs in each of our different voice parts and we slowly build the exposition. Then we look at how it will be developed and how we return. Then how does that all relate to the idea of text and the relationship of text – why a fugue? Why not some sort of free structure? I think what I try to convey to my singers is that I really do believe nothing is haphazard with composers, that there's very thoughtful craftsmanship that goes behind creating a work of art. And I want my singers to delve into that a little bit deeper and to look at some of those aspects of building and creating something so that they can have the same wonder and joy that I have when I say, oh my gosh. We've modulated to this key and...in Bach we've modulated from one key to another and there are three sharps there and we're talking about a Trinitarian text and it so obviously relates to a moment in theology that is connecting Christ and the passion of Christ. Any of these things, I think, are very important to look at because it's not something that's necessarily self-evident when you sit down and listen to a work on the first hearing.

Q I'd say most people would not catch the three sharps, for example, as an intentional device. Let's shift gears to the MN Chorale, one of your several hats. MN and the Twin Cities have innumerable choruses of all sizes and shapes and colors. Talk about the Chorale and what you think distinguishes the Chorale from a lot of the other choirs?

A I would say that any musical organization reflects very much the interests and the passions of its conductor or the artistic director. So certainly the chorale reflects the interests of the founding director, Robert Berglund – his interest in larger choral symphonic works. And that is still the primary mission of this chorus, is to serve as the major symphonic resource first of all to the MN Orchestra, and sometimes to the St. Paul

Chamber Orchestra, to bring that symphonic choral repertoire to larger audiences. My passions have then been integrated with that primary mission and those lie in the area of education and community. So if we look first of all at education – because I dearly love symphonic choral music – I have tried to find opportunities in which we can connect this music to a younger community that may not have experienced it in the same way that I experienced it as a child going to my father’s concerts or even as a young person in Europe singing these major works at the age of 17, 18, early 20’s. Or even early generations in the Twin Cities – there are high school choirs, let’s say 30 years ago – people who can remember singing a major choral work every year. A rotation in an inner city Minneapolis high school where you would do Elijah one year and Messiah another year and the Creation the next year. This existed in the Twin Cities 30 years ago, but does not exist today. So I – because I love this repertoire – I want to keep it alive and I want to share it with younger people. So I’ve developed a series of educational programs around the chorale’s work where we have people come in and experience that music within rehearsal settings, where we may take parts of it into a high school or educational setting, where we allow young conductors to come in and work in front of the chorale with this music. So that’s the educational part of my work with the chorale. Then the community part of my work goes back to my interest and fascination with the work of Elaine Brown in the inner city of Philadelphia and her formation of Singing City, where you bring many peoples together and that you share music as a community. So with the chorale and with former executive director Camille Kolles we developed a program called Bridges, which each year looks to create a musical experience that is completely different from what you would experience with the MN Orchestra. So this is a program that leaves the traditional concert hall setting, that looks at the greater community – who are we, what is happening, what type of artist exists, interesting spaces, what types of music and how can we learn from our community? This might be coined as the primary outreach venture of the MN Chorale, but I would counter with the fact that its probably the most important in-reach experience of the chorale in that my hope and desire is that the singers of the chorale each year stretch and grow as musicians in their, through their experiences with the Bridges program. So the idea of relationships that form over time, where we can get to know each other as individuals, as well as performing artists or as well as musicians, and that we come together not just for a side-by-side experience but for some sort of deeper educational experience and cultural experience as well. And that these relationships ideally will continue over time, that we may come back and revisit some aspect of a program again in several years and/or expand on that through other projects with the chorale. I think that this is of great interest to me and I really feel that its – as much as some of my singers might react against this – I really feel its important to me as a conductor to challenge them as musicians in a global society, to look beyond what is most comfortable to them, to the larger community and the larger world and embrace that and somehow, on some small level, experience that.

Q I know you did one of your Bridges programs on the theme of “home”, with Habitat for Humanity. Could you talk for a minute about that as an example and then, talk about this year’s Bridges partners.

A If I might start with our first Bridges program and then just document a couple of the Bridges programs along the way. Our very first Bridges program was called, A Russian Night. I was interested in doing the Rachmaninov Vespers, partly because I had discovered that there was this growing Russian immigrant community in the Twin Cities and I thought how interesting it would be to do this work and to make some

connections with the local community in relationship to this work. So I went to St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Church in Minneapolis and I knocked on the door and I said, I would like to meet one of your priests or your cantor and I would like to study Russian Church Slavonic. And they said, who are you? And I said, well I'm just a local choral conductor looking to do a Russian program and wanting to learn more about the whole traditions and liturgy that a specific work grew out of. So I did make connections with their local cantor, Nick ?, and one of their priests and for one summer I went in and I would meet with them and they would talk to me about the liturgy and they would speak the text for me. And that was just a remarkable experience. Then those two men came in and helped coach the chorale. And meanwhile, Camille Kolles and I started looking around the Twin Cities and discovering that there was this almost underground Russian immigrant community that was very active. There was Russian radio, there was Russian newspaper, there were Russian restaurants, there were Russian artists, a Twin Cities piano duo had just moved to town and they were going to be studying with one of my colleagues at the university. So the whole program just kind of naturally evolved into this larger cultural experience. We did a program in dual languages and we had at least 50 or 60% of the audience there attending that were Russian. And that began our thinking about how it is that we live in a community as vibrant as the Twin Cities and yet we remain so separate from one another. There are musical experiences going on every single day, in churches and community spaces and schools and yet I'm completely unaware of them. So I think that this was very interesting to me as an educator and as a musician. Who are we as a community, who are we as a singing community, how can I learn more about this and how can I participate in this experience? So from there we developed partnerships with young people and church choirs and African American artists. Probably one of my most out-there Bridges programs was called Musical Chi, where I connected with a Tai Chi master teacher, and he had a passion for Bach. I actually met him through the Oregon Bach Festival. And he then...we talked as I do with so many of these Bridges programs – it just evolves. Ideas are coming out of coffee. So Al said, wouldn't it be wonderful if we'd do a program with Tai Chi and movement and Bach? And I said, well. And because he had a close connection with the Dayton family in the Twin Cities and the Chinese collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and because he had a close connection with a, kind of a healing center, we developed this whole program around movement and Tai Chi and Chinese art and Bach and Chinese music. And together we did this program, which was kind of a miniature Bridges. It appeared in the Marsh, this center for the exploration of eastern art and culture. It appeared in the Mpls Institute of Arts and in small intimate spaces. We took it into an educational setting. We involved a Chinese ? player, Gow Hung. It involved a piece that we had commissioned a number of years before with Janet ? for western violin, Chinese pipa?, chorus, solo soprano. It was just a fascinating project. My chorus did tai chi before their rehearsals to warm up. I mean this was fantastic. They said I was so grounded in that concert. I was so calm. So again, this is my fascination for education and the process of making music is that I always want to learn and grow as a student of the art. My most recent Bridges program – this was last year – was called, Sing Me a Home. I received a sabbatical from the University of Minnesota to pursue the research for this project. This project developed out of an earlier relationship with a social service organization, Habitat for Humanity, which is an international organization that seeks to provide affordable housing for people all over the world. We had done a fundraising concert benefit in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity three years earlier. So I wanted to revisit this relationship and I thought, wouldn't it be interesting if we looked at some of the texts around Habitat for Humanity in their songbook and that we would select some of these texts and have them set by local composers or MN composers, so that we

would bring relevance to some of the ideas around affordable housing. So I started looking through the Habitat songbook which has 150, 160 titles and many of the songs dated back to my youth – Blowin in the Wind, counter-culture songs during the Vietnam War era – and I thought my children will not relate to this. Will the diverse cultures of the Twin Cities relate to this? Does this even reflect who we are as a community that reflects so many different cultural heritages? So I thought it would be interesting to go out and collect stories of actual Habitat homeowners, representing a variety of cultural traditions and to bring these two young writers and have them synthesize those interviews into some sort of prose or poetic text, and then take those texts and put them in the hands of Minnesota composers and then give those texts and musical compositions back to the great community and have them performed in a larger work, again surrounding the idea of affordable housing and what it means to a community, to a family, to a neighborhood to have people living in their own homes and becoming part of the larger fabric of our society. So we did just this. I got my sabbatical from the U of M; I went into the homes of six different families, identified by Habitat for Humanity. In some cases I took six...I took high school writers with me. We listened to their stories. We took back those transcriptions of the interviews and read through them. These students distilled down these stories into the essence of what they saw within those texts and shaped them into sometimes a free prose text, sometimes a more formal poem. And we put those back into the hands of MN composers who wrote works for these students' high school choirs. Then those choirs came together with the MN Chorale and we brought together the families and the writers and the composers and we did a larger program called, Sing Me a Home. The kind of larger community work that brought all of us together was, in fact, a piece by Janet ?, who wrote a piece entitled, Sing Me a Home, and in fact it's almost like my analogy of building a house. She took all of the ideas that had been assembled and compiled and written in a larger poem by a professor from St. Thomas University – Hyde Erdrich, who served as the mentor/teacher to our young writers – and she built, literally built, for her own students a work that reflected kind of different compositional styles, features and essentially almost built a musical home under our eyes, through this text and through the music. That was a work that all of us sang together at the end of our program and that all of us used as a point of departure, I think, in sharing our different and separate experiences around this project. And looking at the larger community of who we are, what we do and how we are both similar and different and what this means in terms of a vibrant and rich and diverse society.

Q What were some of the impacts of that kind of collaboration – both among the Chorale singers and among some of the people from the Habitat side?

A Quite honestly, the Bridges program often are not completely understood by anybody until we actually get to the final dress rehearsal and the concerts, as much as I try to convey the vision of these projects to the singers. Whenever you're doing larger collaborations it's often impossible to bring all of the partners together until those final rehearsals, much in the way it is...which is similar to performance week with the MN Orchestra. You just do not have that, all of those resources available to you on an ongoing basis. But with the Bridges projects, they are always pushing the boundaries of the traditional. So it's hard sometimes for the singers to get their hands around exactly what that larger vision is and what the experience will look like and feel like and sound like, until we are standing side-by-side with high school choirs or moving with a tai chi artist or experiencing music from Venezuela. So in truth, I think that the most moving moments were when we finally got to the point of the concert and saw all of the partners

collected together and understood that we were many, many different voices who had invested in this program and in this project and that each voice brought something unique and exciting to the project. And I think for the students and for my own singers to sing side-by-side with one another in a really beautiful space like St. Olaf Catholic Church and to see these families gathered – I think particularly of the Hmong family that was sitting in the front row with four of six children, who I will venture to say have never been to a formal choral concert. To see their bright eyes, when are they going to be singing our song? When will they sing about the house? And to see the pictures of the families being illuminated above each of the individual compositions – I think that that was probably one of the most inspiring moments.

Q Can I ask you to give a brief description of this year's Bridges, but speak of it not as if it's going to happen but as if it did happen?

A This year's Bridges program is called African Voices and in some ways it evolved out of our collaboration last year with St. Olaf Catholic Church. When I was in that space and talking to their organist and minister of music, Lynn Trapp, I discovered that there was a very active African choir that was part of that church and musical community. And I've known that there are many African choirs that have been developing through the immigrant community within the Twin Cities and are active through the church communities. And I've always been intrigued with this idea of learning more about who they are and what they bring to the musical experience and also to the church music experience of their own communities. So I asked Lynn whether it might be possible to meet their director, Othello Collins and to speak with him about the possibility of bringing our choirs together – Lynn's church choir, MN Chorale and Othello's international African choir – in a fairly grassroots project, to explore African music, and to explore it from the standpoint of Othello teaching it to my singers as he would work with his own choir. That is, departing from the notated score and sharing it by rote. So that has been an exciting experience for us and certainly a challenging experience for the singers in terms of understanding what it means to put aside what is most familiar to them – the notated page – and to open their ears to the nuances and in some respects very complex melodies, rhythms of African music, and to try to hear this and remember this and respond to this. So this program has been a remarkable journey for all of us and one I think that ultimately has been quite a different experience in terms of past Bridges programs because it has taken the chorus away from what is most comfortable to them and placed them in a situation where they feel vulnerable and perhaps unprepared for what will come in the final musical performance.

Q Let's talk about the chorale's unique role as the official chorus of the MN Orchestra and the fact that you spend a lot of your time preparing the chorus to hand off to the performance conductor. Talk about how that works. Does Osmo essentially say, ok here are the markings? Go bring back a well-prepared chorus. Or is there more of a dialogue? How do you two work together?

A I love serving as the chorus master of a larger symphonic choral organization and absolutely enjoy the relationship that I have with artistic director, Osmo Vanska of the MN Orchestra and the many different guest conductors that come into town each year to do works that involve chorus. I'm often asked, what is my role in terms of the preparation of the choir? What am I looking to do? How do I interact with the conductors? So let me just start off with a general overview in terms of my own goals with a symphonic chorus. First of all, I want to create the most flexible vocal instrument I

possibly can. I often do not get much information from conductors before they arrive to town. So I bring my own knowledge of the score, my own knowledge of their work to the musical.....

In terms of my work with different artistic directors through the MN Orchestra, I am always looking to bring some very basic elements to that experience. One is that I want to create the most flexible chorus possible. I need to understand what the work is all about, who the conductor will be on the podium and how to create an instrument that can reflect the style, the period, all of the musical elements that I would anticipate a guest conductor would bring to any musical project. What is challenging in my work is that I often receive very little information in advance. And this includes my work with artistic director Osmo Vanska. I learned very early on that if I call him too early, he has not had the chance to consider what it is that he's going to be bringing to a choral symphonic work because he is so engrossed in the projects that he is doing at any particular time. So what is wonderful about an ongoing relationship with any conductor is that you learn to anticipate what they will want from you. In my first work with Osmo Vanska, I did not have this information so I did call him quite early in the rehearsal process and I asked for tempi and any other musical interpretive markings he would want to give me. We talked about what type of approach we would bring to the language. And he had some answers but not as many as he would have liked at that particular moment in time. He did give me tempo markings for individual movements. Later all of those were revised in the first choral piano rehearsal and he said, did I give you slower tempi? And I said, yes you did. And he said, oh well that was so long ago. I've re-thought those ideas since that time. So I would say that any first experience with a conductor – where I'm preparing for them – I am making mental notes about what they are most interested in. So in terms of Osmo Vanska, which is my primary relationship, I know that he is highly interested in dynamic nuance. I have never in my career had to prepare choruses to sing as softly as they sing for Osmo Vanska. And what I've learned to do is to develop a sense of that spectrum of soft to loud and to anticipate how far he may want to go and to build in ways in which we can do this in both a coloristic manner and also in a vocally viable manner. So that's one thing that I have learned to appreciate and understand about Osmo Vanska. I also know that he, as a clarinetist, comes with a really wonderful understanding of the symphonic score, that he is not as much of a singer. So he relies heavily on my background as a vocalist and a chorus master to make many musical decisions that pertain to, let's say housekeeping details of releases and voicings and any of the things that just will put things into a very clean and organized choral presentation. We also have learned that he is more of a classicist in terms of tempi, so if there are printed tempi within a score, I know to take those very seriously. I also know that he will probably not take many liberties in terms of slowing down or speeding up, in the same way that some other conductors would be more of a romanticist. I've also learned that he is passionate and diligent about going after certain details. So I do want to prepare my chorus to be ready to work hard for him and to respond to what it is that he is trying to elicit from them and to go as far as they can with those ideas so that we can both experience his vision but also somehow realize those ideas for the audience. I think to Osmo Vanska's credit, he works with the chorus and the orchestra in much the same way. If we have not quite understood a particular concept he often will have us do it five times in a row. If he gets it to a point where we understand it, it's almost like working with an athlete – do it again, now do it one more time, now yet again one more time. So that we really almost have physically brought this, integrated this into the body and into the voice. So those are some of the insights that I have gained in working with Osmo Vanska. Beyond this, he is a remarkable

musician and he is a thoughtful artist. So I always know that he will challenge me as an individual and as a conductor to grow as well. And that's what I love about choral symphonic preparation. It's like being in graduate school all year long. You get to sit at the feet of the masters or mistresses and watch them bring music to life in many different ways. Certainly for my own graduate students, I try to bring them into this same experience because I know as a young person that this was what helped me when I was doing my training in Europe. And that was to experience music performed at the very highest level and to develop your relationship from there. But that oral experience is definitely in my ear and helping me guide my own singers in their development and preparation for whichever conductor they will be working with.

Q On that subject, if you could give a brief description of what you're working on right now, three Brahms pieces for Helmuth Rilling.

A This year we are preparing a very special program with my former teacher and mentor, Helmuth Rilling. This is a program, which, for the chorus, focuses on Brahms and actually three works from Brahms. There are two larger choral symphonic works. One is called Schicksalslied, The Song of Destiny, and the other is Nanie, which is kind of a lament. And in addition to that, there are four songs for women's chorus, two horns and harp, which are on a variety of texts. And I dearly love doing Brahms with Helmuth Rilling because I feel that he has a special relationship with this composer and that he delves deeply into the craftsmanship and the motivation behind what moved Brahms to seek out certain texts, to set them and to draw those connections and build those relationships between poetry and music. So I have many singers who wanted to do this special Brahms project. And because these are shorter choral symphonic – almost like symphonic poems – they are cameos of some of the larger Brahms works that the greater public is familiar with. And one personal story about this: interestingly enough, these two works – Nanie and Schicksalslied – are rarely programmed and performed in the Twin Cities. But this year, the Twin Cities Gay and Lesbian Chorus programmed Nanie in preparation with a project with another colleague of mine, Vance George, who was the symphonic chorus master of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. Now he did this work with piano and that chorus in conjunction with a high school, inner city chorus where my daughter attends school. My daughter's not a singer, she's a cellist. And this high school music program decided what a wonderful opportunity to learn this piece and so here you have a high school orchestra and high school choir who mounted this piece as part of their own choir season. My daughter, a ninth grade cellist, playing Brahms Nanie at the same time that I'm preparing it for one of the leading conductors in the world. And here was the thrill: I'm getting ready for the preparation for this project and – this was just a month ago – and I had on a recording of Nanie. It was playing in our kitchen. And my daughter walks in from outside. She hears one bar of that Brahms piece and she says, is that Brahms Nanie? And I said, it is! And then she starts doing air cello. Playing the pizzicato parts, which are so beautiful in this piece. And her face lit up. And I cannot tell you the thrill, that that music had been so deeply internalized within my 14-year-old daughter and that she recognized it instantly and that we could share that connection over this piece of music that I absolutely love. So you see, this I think comes back to the idea of sharing music as a community, within the larger collective, between generations, between different cultural backgrounds. And I bring this back to the influence of Helmuth Rilling who has long sought to break down barriers through music. So the first German conductor that conducted in Israel following World War II – he conducted the Israel Philharmonic. One of the first conductors to go into Eastern Europe and conduct in the Soviet regime, major works by Bach. One of the first

European conductors to travel to South America. One of the first conductors to bring young people together from all over the world to explore major repertoire, but as a point, as a departure for global dialogue. It's not that some of these ventures haven't been happening in other places, but I think that this is first and foremost in the mind of Helmuth Rilling, is how can music be used as a language to connect people and to explore our commonalities and differences. And ultimately, to overcome many of these issues that may separate us and bring us into conflict with one another. So I look at this Brahms program as being one of the more traditional programs. It is a traditional choral symphonic program with Helmuth Rilling. But yet, I know that throughout the process of working with him during that week, there will be these moments where he will – with the chorus and the orchestra – bring these deeper connections to that music and allow us to explore some of the issues that were troubling or challenging for society during that time and that are equally challenging for society during our times. This is just the type of musician that he is.

P Speaking of global connections, could you talk about the sixth World Symposium of Choral Music, that was presented in Minneapolis in 2002.

A The sixth World Choral Symposium was presented in 2002 in Minneapolis and was a collaboration between the International Federation for Choral Music and the city of Minneapolis and then also a peripheral relationship with the MN American Choral Director's Association. Interestingly enough my roots and connections with the International Federation for Choral Music are also familial, in that my father was one of the founding members of the International Federation for Choral Music and served probably for ten years as the president. So I was on the planning committee for the sixth World Choral Symposium. My father was kind of an outside adviser on that committee as well. And during the course of that World Choral Symposium I had a very interesting and unique project that was running in conjunction and in tandem with the many different choral offerings that were being presented. I actually had two roles. The first role was that I had prepared the world premier of Penderewski's Credo, which had been jointly commissioned by the Oregon Bach Festival and the International Bach Academy, and which had been presented in its first performance in Eugene, OR, and then later in Europe. I presented both...prepared both premiers for Helmuth Rilling. This was presented as one of the performances at the sixth World Choral Symposium. A second role that I played during that symposium was that I had received a McKnight Grant from the U of M to interview ten different conductors and ten different composers, because the World Choral Symposium, the planning committee, had commissioned ten composers from North and South America to write a piece for ten of the visiting choirs to be presented in the context of the symposium. And I felt this was too good of an opportunity to miss. So I received a grant to interview both their conductors – the conductors of these ..... I received a grant to interview the commissioned composers and the conductors of the choirs that presented these commissions. This was fascinating in that I had an opportunity to sit across from emerging and established composers and talk to them about their process and their craft and at the same time to talk from the other end of the spectrum, with the commissioned choirs' artistic directors. And in some cases, the composers had very little connection with their choirs..... This was interesting in that in some cases the composers and the commissioned choirs had very little interaction with one another. In other cases there was much more dialogue. But in the end, bringing together these new pieces in the forum of the International Federation and the World Choral Symposium was a fascinating journey in terms of global dialogue. And just choosing texts that could connect international choirs and

composers from either North or South American and looking at the time constraints that they had to prepare these works and to what they would need to present these works – this was just amazing. So I think fondly on that period as an opportunity again for me to listen to colleagues from around the world discuss what they love to do. Sometimes these interviews occurred through translators. And also just to share what the role of contemporary music and living composers should be within the choral medium.

Q What are some of the factors that you think were responsible for the IFCM choosing MN? What was it about MN and our reputation for choral music that made this such an obvious choice?

A There are many factors that go into choosing a site for a major symposium or for the Olympics. So you're looking – on the most basic level – at the facilities, at the available resources within any given city, housing, all of these basic issues. But beyond that I think MN was a very clear choice because it lies in the heart, in the middle of the US and because of the very profound and deeply rooted choral culture. And this is certainly evidenced in the many church choirs that we have, the school music programs, the remarkable collegiate choral music programs, the number of professional choral music organizations, and the community interest in song as a formative part of our culture.

Q I also wanted to have you talk briefly about the origins of the Mpls Youth Chorus. How did that come to be? As an educator, how did that just sort of flow out of your own desires to make sure the kids have opportunities to sing music at that level?

A The Minneapolis Youth Chorus really grew out of the vision and dreams and passions of a single music educator. And that is the current artistic director, Pat Arasim. And having working in the inner city of Minneapolis for many years it was one of her deep desires to create a forum for young people within the inner city to come together and experience what it means to perform wonderful repertoire and to experience choral music as a way of bringing together and building community. And citizenship. So together with executive director Camille Kolles, Pat and Camille went to the Minneapolis School district and through a series and succession of three different school superintendents, they presented this proposal, which was accepted and would ultimately move forward. But it was delayed significantly just by the terms... was delayed significantly by rotation within the administration of the superintendent position. Ultimately, I think that Pat and I both, as music educators, shared this desire to see young people grow within the choral setting and to take that experience into the rest of their lives, to share it with family members, to share it with their friends and to understand that in singing together, we create something together that we could not create as individuals. And this is certainly evident when you watch these young people sing in their rehearsals or in their performances. And they're in the very early stages. It's not about pristine art at this point. It's about young people discovering who they are as singers, who they are as a group, who they are in relationship to music and saying, I want to share this with my community. So I think this is what's so deeply moving is to see a music educator like Pat Arasim take her many years of experience in the public schools and to forge this alliance with the larger community and to patiently work with her colleagues in the inner city to build a program that will not supplant any given music program, but augment those experiences, enrich that, those programs and in some ways encourage the development of more vibrant music programs in any of the public schools.

Q If you could envision a perfect music program for kids growing up, what elements might that include?

A There are many different youth music programs that are far older than ours around the US, that are excellent models for the Minneapolis Youth Chorus. Certainly in New York or California, we find these vibrant programs that represent the larger cultural heritages of all of the members. So they are exploring music not just of one people or nationality, but many different types of music. They see in their rehearsals and their performances music that reflect themselves and also reflect their neighbors or their colleagues, as we would say – the other singers within the choir. I would love to see this become a larger organization. This would require, certainly, staffing which would be tiered by age level, where you would have a succession of choirs. We have models within our own community, certainly, of very active and exciting youth music programs. But we need this type of program offered in the inner city available to anybody who would like to participate and has the desire to sing. It would be nice to connect this experience from those very early years to the collegiate experience or the community choir experience or the church choir experience, so that young people have the opportunity to develop those skills regularly and to kind of move from one level to the next, just as you would in school. And to grow and mature with one another and then to bring that experience to some larger educational or community experience. Ultimately our dream is to have members, alumni, from the Minneapolis Youth Choir singing side-by-side with the MN Chorale. And I'm talking about as young adults. And at the Oregon Bach Festival, this is what's happened. We have a youth choral academy program that runs simultaneous to the Oregon Bach Festival program and we now have had graduates from that program join the professional chorus of the Oregon Bach Festival. And it is so exciting because we know that they have been looking from those first rehearsals at the Youth Choral Academy to the performances that they saw onstage with the Festival chorus and thinking, someday I may get to do this. And now, we have those members with us. That would be my dream is to see this continuum of choral singing from the early years of grade school all the way through to the end of our lives.

Q When you're auditioning and rehearsing singers, what do you look for? How do you achieve a kind of tonal quality, the sound that you're looking to achieve in a group like the MN Chorale?

A The MN Chorale is a very unique choral organization in that it's a pool of 250 singers. Among those are about 60 professional singers and the rest are very qualified amateur singers. Their vocal abilities, their musicianship, their backgrounds reflect many different musical experiences. SO when I'm auditioning singers I am thinking often about the season ahead. We know every year we will sing Messiah, so what voices can come in and really have the flexibility, the agility to sing in that baroque style? What voices will enhance a Verde's Requiem? What voices might be ideally suited for a contemporary premier? What voices are suited to sing with Doc Severenson in, Jingle Bell Doc? I'm always thinking about the season and in some ways building my rosters from there. SO no given ensemble with the MN Chorale is the same from project to project. Every project has a different personnel list. Of course there are duplications over the course of the year and you'll see many of the same Messiah singers because we have so little time to prepare Messiah and its an incredibly athletic work and a demanding work that I always will bring back a roster of singers that I know understand and have a background with the Messiah. On the other hand, I also feel it's my role as

the artistic director to constantly train new singers in repertoire. So I always try to bring in some new singers to any given project and sometimes if it's a roster of 150, that's not difficult at all. But with the Messiah roster, at least two to four new singers who may not have sung it, but have the ability to sing it so that they, in turn, will take their place and be training the next generation or the next year's Messiah singers. The way I like to organize choral sound starts from repertoire. That is, a Verde chorus is going to sound completely different from a Bach Magnificat chorus, which will sound different from a Mozart Requiem chorus – just starting from the size of the chorus. But also its more...its also about the quality, the color of the choral instrument that I'm looking to shape something that will, I feel, be uniquely suited to that given project. When I organize my chorus – this drives them crazy – I have, I start with a given roster, which I have created in my head, and I know the abilities of my singers. So I'm not just creating sound in my head. I'm trying to strategically place singers based on my understanding of their abilities. That is, language, musicianship, agility – any of these aspects are things that I'm considering as I'm building a roster. Then over the course of the first few rehearsals, I am listening to that choral instrument and I will make changes. Sometimes I will make the changes in my head. I'll go home and think, ok this is not quite what I'm looking for. And I'll just do it on the computer and come back and reorganize people. Other times I'll take the time within any given rehearsal to listen to the individual sections, as I have done with this Brahms project, and strategically place voices. And oftentimes I'm looking for color. That is, I have many colorful voices that you might not have in the a capella Lutheran choral ensemble and I need to utilize them in such a way that they enhance and enrich the color and not detract from the overall color. So I recently had a conversation with somebody where I was explaining to her that I have brick and mortar voices. I'm definitely a mortar voice, myself. I'm not that big colorful brick. I don't bring that substantive vocal tambour to any given choral work. But what I do bring is kind of the ability to glue those voices together. So I would say the larger voices and the smaller voices – they are equally important in bringing to life any choral symphonic project and in creating what I think is a fascinating choral instrument. One thing I would like to add is that Robert Shaw greatly impressed me in his ability to voice the choral instrument. So through Robert Shaw and my preparation over three choral projects I learned that the choral instrument is like an artists palette in that there are many different colors that are available within the roster. And you might consider blending these different colors in the course of any given project. So that, for example, tenors might double sopranos or altos be singing with tenors. There are so many different ways that you can combine these voices to create different colors and nuance and to enhance and enrich the sound in such a way that it will become something that realizes the larger structure of a fugue or can carry the dramatic moment. So for example, sometimes in the larger works where I know I'm going have so many brass players – like Verde Requiem – every able bodied voice on deck is going to sing this musical moment. And this is men and women alike. It doesn't matter. And I've had to get past the egos of some of my singers. We don't need altos singing with us. We're real men. And I try to draw them again to the idea of the impressionistic painting. If you look back at the painting, you see the whole. But if you get close, you see all of the many different colors and points that are creating the whole. And that's, I think, a lot about what I do. Is to consider the many different voices that will bring together a whole choral symphonic instrument.