



December 18, 2009

Dear Educators and Students,

Thank you so very much for your wonderful letters. We had a lot of fun reading them. Students from some schools posed excellent questions to me in their letters, and I thought I would share some of their questions and my answers with all of you. The following is a list of these questions by school and my answers:

DeMotte Christian School (DeMotte):

Why does the classical period have no classical guitars?

THERE ARE NO GUITARS IN ANY ORCHESTRA OF ANY PERIOD AS THE VOLUME LEVEL OF A GUITAR IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO BE HEARD ALONG WITH THE OTHER INSTRUMENTS.

What is your favorite instrument?

MY FAVORITE TWO INSTRUMENTS ARE -

1. THE PIANO - AS I USED TO BE A PIANO PLAYER MYSELF - AND I LOVE THE REPERTOIRE OF THE PIANO. IT IS A VAST AND VARIED AMOUNT OF MUSIC WITH ALL SORTS OF EXPRESSION AND POSSIBILITIES.
2. THE HUMAN VOICE - IT IS SO MUCH JUST A PART OF WHO WE ARE AS PEOPLE - TO SING - WHETHER IT BE TO TELL A LOVE STORY OR CELEBRATE SOMETHING JOYOUS.

IN THE ORCHESTRA, MY FAVORITE INSTRUMENT HAPPENS TO BE THE DOUBLE BASS.

Why do French horn players put their hand in their horn?

THEY DO THIS TO MODULATE THE SOUND. HOWEVER FAR THEY HAVE THEIR HAND IN THEIR BELL WILL DETERMINE BOTH THE COLOUR OF THE SOUND AND TO SOME DEGREE THE PITCH.

Frank H. Hammond Elementary School, Munster:

How do the musicians know what to do?

EACH OF THE MUSICIANS HAS HER/HIS OWN MUSIC. FOR EXAMPLE, THE VIOLAS HAVE JUST THE VIOLA PARTS IN FRONT OF THEM - THE 1ST TROMBONE PLAYER HAS ONLY A 1ST TROMBONE PART IN FRONT OF HIM, THE 2ND TROMBONE ONLY HAS A 2ND TROMBONE IN FROM OF HIM.

THE CONDUCTOR HAS ALLTHE PARTS AT ONCE IN HIS SCORE ON HIS STAND. HE IS THE ONLY ONE THAT SEES EVERYONES' PARTS.

HE THEREFORE CAN SEE ALSO THAT THE VIOLINS SHOULD HAVE STACCATO BUT THE CELLI SHOULD HAVE LEGATO AT EXACTLY THE SAME TIME, OR THAT THE OBOES HAVE "ff" AND THE TIMPANI HAS "pp" AT EXACTLY THE SAME TIME.

ALSO, THE CONDUCTOR IS REALLY THE ONLY ONE THAT CAN HEAR ALL OF THE INSTRUMENTS AT THE SAME TIME AND HELP THE MUSICIANS TO KNOW IF THEY ARE TRULY TOGETHER, BALANCED, AND HAVING THE SAME IDEAS TOGETHER.

FINALLY, THE CONDUCTOR DETERMINES THE TEMPO OR SPEED FOR THE ORCHESTRA AND IF THE CONDUCTOR HAS A VERY GOOD TECHNIQUE WITH HER/HIS BATON, HE CAN HAVE 80 MUSICIANS AND 120 SINGERS ALL SINGING SUPER-EXACTLY TOGETHER IN PRECISELY THE SAME TEMPO.

Did you ever play an instrument?

YES - I STARTED PLAYING THE PIANO AFTER MY FIRST DAY OF FIRST GRADE. WHEN I WAS IN 5TH GRADE I ALSO STARTED PLAYING TROMBONE IN BAND AND ORCHESTRA. LATER, I PLAYED DRUMS, BASS, GUITAR, AND KEYBOARDS- AND SANG - IN A ROCK BAND WHILE I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Irving Elementary School, Hammond:

How many instruments can you play?

NOW I CANNOT REALLY PLAY ANY AS I NEVER PRACTICE ANY INSTRUMENTS ANY MORE. HOWEVER, I HAVE TWO DEGREES IN PIANO PERFORMANCE AND I ALSO PLAYED THE TROMBONE IN HIGH SCHOOL A GREAT DEAL.

Can a guitar be in the orchestra?

A GUITAR CAN BE IN A JAZZ BAND FOR SURE. HOWEVER, IN AN ORCHESTRA, IT WOULD NEVER BE HEARD AND WE DO NOT HAVE INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA THAT NEED AN AMPLIFIER.

Jerry Ross Elementary School, Crown Point:

I want to make music, but don't know where to start. Any suggestions?

YES. EXCELLENT QUESTION. I WOULD START WITH THE PIANO. FIND A WONDERFUL PIANO TEACHER, WORK HARD, BE PATIENT, AND YOU WILL CERTAINLY LEARN ABOUT MUSIC AND YOU WILL CERTAINLY BECOME GOOD. NO ONE WILL KNOW HOW TALENTED YOU ARE - THAT IS NOT IN YOUR CONTROL, YOUR PARENTS' CONTROL, OR THE TEACHER'S CONTROL. HOWEVER, IF YOU SIMPLY PRACTICE AND HAVE A FINE TEACHER, YOU **WILL** GET GOOD.

THEN I WOULD ALSO JOIN A CHORUS - AT SCHOOL, OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, OR AT CHURCH - AND YOU WILL LEARN MUCH ABOUT MUSIC THERE.

FINALLY, AFTER YOU HAVE DONE THIS FOR A WHILE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO LEARN ANOTHER INSTRUMENT TOO - SOMETHING THAT MIGHT JUST BE "YOU". NOW - IT MIGHT BE THE PIANO, OR SINGING, BUT IT MIGHT BE THE OBOE! WHO KNOWS?

How long have you been a conductor?

I HAVE BEEN A CONDUCTOR FOR ABOUT 25 YEARS.

What inspired you to be a conductor?

AT FIRST, I JUST WANTED TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT CONDUCTING. I DID NOT WANT TO BECOME A CONDUCTOR. I SIMPLY GOT SOME BOOKS ON IT AND TOOK SOME LESSONS SO THAT I WOULD BE A BETTER MUSICIAN. THEN I REALIZED HOW DIFFICULT, CHALLENGING AND INTERESTING IT TRULY WAS.

Who do you like better, Beethoven or Tchaikovsky?

WOW. HARD QUESTION. HMMMMMMMM.....I GUESS IF I HAVE TO CHOOSE, I WOULD SAY BEETHOVEN.

St. Mary School, Griffith:

When did you start having a passion for classical music?

I LIKED MUSIC SINCE I WAS A VERY TINY CHILD. I REMEMBER SITTING ON THE FLOOR PLAYING WITH MY TRUCKS, LOOKING UP AT THE PIANO IN MY GRAMPA'S HOUSE AND MY OLDER BROTHER WAS PLAYING HYMNS. I WAS TRANSFIXED BY MUSIC SINCE I WAS JUST A FEW YEARS OLD. I WAS SURROUNDED BY CLASSICAL MUSIC SO I LIKED IT VERY MUCH, ESPECIALLY ROMANTIC CLASSICAL MUSIC. I LIKED ROCK 'N ROLL TONS WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER TOO.

How many people are in the orchestra?

POTENTIALLY THERE ARE ABOUT 75 PEOPLE IN THE ORCHESTRA. HOWEVER, WHEN WE PLAY A MAHLER SYMPHONY THERE COULD BE ALMOST 100 AS THOSE SYMPHONIES OF THE LATE ROMANTIC PERIOD DEMAND THAT NUMBER OF MUSICIANS. WHEN WE PLAY BACH WE MIGHT HAVE JUST 20 AS THAT IS THE CORRECT SOUND AND TEXTURE FOR THAT PERIOD OF MUSIC (THE BAROQUE).

Did you pick the photographs for the screen?

YES. HOWEVER, I ASK MRS. CERVEN AND MRS. MILLER IN OUR EDUCATION AND MARKETING DEPARTMENTS TO HELP ME WITH THIS. THEY KNOW THE KIND OF PHOTOGRAPH THAT I AM LOOKING FOR AND THEN THEY EITHER FIND THEM FOR ME OR THEY MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT WHAT THEY FEEL WOULD BE THE MOST INTERESTING AND ENGAGING IMAGES FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE.

Wallace Elementary School, Hammond:

Where are you from?

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN A SMALL COAL MINING VILLAGE IN THE CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS. IT IS CALLED THE CROWSNEST PASS, ALBERTA, CANADA. YOU CAN LOOK IT UP ON LINE OR YOU COULD GOOGLE-EARTH IT AND FIND EXACTLY WHERE IT IS. WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, THERE WERE ONLY ABOUT 3000 PEOPLE THERE AND IT WAS VERY FAR AWAY FROM ANY OTHER PLACE.

Do you ever go to any fun places like Six Flags?

NO. I DO NOT HAVE THE CHANCE TO GO TO THOSE KINDS OF FUN PLACES. I USED TO LIKE TO GO THERE BUT NOW WHEN I WORK I GET TO SEE MANY DIFFERENT PLACES. I HAVE LIVED IN ROME, ITALY, VIENNA, AUSTRIA, ST. LOUIS, NEW YORK, PHILADELPHIA, SALT LAKE CITY, AND PITTSBURGH. THEN IN THE SUMMERS, I HAVE BEEN TO BEAUTIFUL PLACES LIKE ASPEN COLORADO, ALL BECAUSE OF MUSIC.

Thank you for being a wonderful and intelligent audience. I hope to see you all at our concerts during the season and the summer. Please come up and say hello to me after the concerts!

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "KIRK" in a bold, slightly slanted, sans-serif font. A long, horizontal stroke extends from the bottom of the "K" across the width of the signature.

Kirk Muspratt
Music Director and Conductor