

From InlandChorus.com "Forum Page": <http://inlandchorus.com/community.php>

Paul Thomas - The Inland Children's Chorus was a big part of my childhood, growing up as the last of six kids in a GM family that was constantly surrounded by music. Two of my siblings already sang in the Chorus and even before I was of eligible age, my sister convinced director Joe Geiger that her little 7-year-old brother had a good singing voice. Mr. Geiger allowed me to audition and I earned a spot in the Concert Chorus.

Joe Geiger was one of those guys that commanded respect. He would let kids be kids, but when it was time for rehearsal or a performance, you better be ready to go. This was no time for goofing off! We had a job to do. For 15 years he managed to take a group of 8 to 16-year-olds, most that had no musical experience, and got them to sing in harmony. Even more incredible was that, most of the time, they were in tune!

Concerts were held at Dayton's Memorial Hall or Art Institute. The stage productions were nothing short of amazing: the Eton suits, bright lights and packed auditorium were all very exciting -- and intimidating -- to a young boy. Being very small in stature, I had the terrifying position of front row center, just inches from Mr. Geiger's podium for two whole years! He was so close I could count the beads of sweat on his forehead under the hot stage lights. I can still recall his smile and little wink to calm our jitters before starting a concert.

One shining Chorus moment from my era occurred in December of 1966. In the 1960s, several TV stations had their own local and regional variety or talk shows. Many people recall the Phil Donahue show, which started in WLWD's (now WDTN) studios. What most people don't remember is that prior to Donahue, there was the Johnny Gilbert show. Johnny, famous for being the 'voice' of the game show Jeopardy, had his own locally produced variety/talk show on WLWD. The show featured many top name guest stars, a live band, an audience and lots of music. Johnny's 1966 Christmas special featured the Inland Children's Chorus. I can still recall the family gathering around the TV on Christmas Eve to watch the taped event. At 10 years of age I was appearing on a TV show. This was the big time! [Link to the flier on the "articles" page for "The Music of Christmas" hosted by Johnny Gilbert.]

The chorus kept me musically occupied for six years but I wanted more. After taking up trumpet, the rehearsals of both chorus and band became a bit too much. Puberty wasn't all that kind to my singing voice anyway, so at age 13, I turned my attention to the trumpet.

Loving music as I do, I still play trumpet today as a weekend warrior in a big band. Last year we played for a party in the Shaw Gothic Cloister at the Dayton Art Institute. While wandering down a hallway looking for chairs for the band, I opened a door and found myself backstage. Suddenly I was peering out into a dark auditorium I hadn't seen for 40 years. For me, this is where it all started. Chills ran down my spine as I recalled performances from my childhood on that very stage.

The Inland Chorus concerts were larger than life to a child. Inland gave the children lucky enough to be involved a good musical foundation, instilled discipline, and taught them group cooperation. With the difficulty of maintaining profit margins, a more global economy -- who knows the reasons -- businesses aren't quite as involved in community today. I was lucky enough to grow up during a time when the GMs and NCRs gave back to their employees, families and the community. Even today, I am richer for their contributions. [Posted: Feb 25, 2010]