

ONE MEMBER'S REFLECTIONS

(Spelling of names and some reflections may be altered by passing through the "star filter of memory.")

THE FIRST DAY: A Saturday in October, 1945. Age 11. 1P.M. I had been a dominant boy soprano at St. Anthony's, but this was overwhelming. Two hundred singers. I sat on the end of a row next to a red-headed kid named Stewart. First song: "Tales from Vienna Woods."

THE MAN: What more can be said? A perfect teacher. I've been teaching high school English for over a half century. I've seen only one or two teachers his equal. The perfect balance of knowledge, preparation, and discipline. (Discipline? Absolute. How else does one handle so many young kids? Snap that binder ring=gone! Yet never offensive, always kind.) Did we learn? Every note. Every shading. The books were purely props on stage. All we had to do was watch him. His premature death taught us much about the shock of tragedy and coping with the blindsided hits life lays on us.

SOLOISTS: *Joyce Albrecht.* The one who made it into the big leagues: The Met. Had many major roles, especially in Copeland's opera, *The Tender Land*. She was pretty, quiet, and totally beguiling. *Patty Kreitzer.* Silver voiced. Really cute. (Remember, pre-adolescent libido was developing. We were guys.) *Eileen Slattery.* The best voice, I thought. Strong. *Dave Cordonnier.* My good friend then and perhaps the best boy soprano soloist. Once, after Dave had sung an "Ave Maria" section, one audience member told The Boss (RW) that he swore he could hear "the Blessed Virgin singing." Then and later a totally brilliant and accomplished guy. *Me.* Hardly extraordinary. Had a short eight-bar moment in a nondescript song, "Zing, Zing, Zoom, Zoom..." Prepped for the big one ("Toora, Toora, Loora, That's an Irish Melody") but my voice changed. The curse of adolescence. *A Soloist of a Different Type.* My close grade-school friend, Dan Pilarczyk, was a member for awhile. I remember taking the bus downtown with him for a Saturday rehearsal. I'm reading the advertisements for dry-cleaning and beer. He's reading (sixth grade) a biography of Lenin. He went on to become the Archbishop.

THE UNIFORMS: A master-stroke. No chorus ever looked better. I dug the Eton British look. Even better than the King's College Cambridge choristers. I still have the cufflinks. And the powder-blue gowns were totally cool. (But why do I feel the girls hated them?)

THE ACCOMPANISTS: I may butcher their names, but I remember them as totally competent. With them everything flowed nicely. *Isabel Herbst.* Solid, unobtrusive, unhurried. *Mary Werner McCash.* More of an extrovert, more flamboyant.

THE VENUES: Memorial Hall and Christmas. Singing with Paul Katz and the symphony in the big place made us feel really important. Who could forget the collective sigh when the blue tree lights were turned on? And getting the starting note from the oboe player to start the a cappella version of "Silent Night." And the soprano descant above the melody of the same carol, a descant I believe The Boss wrote. And the half-hour annual Christmas Eve radio broadcast of the Chorus usually following Lionel Barrymore doing *A Christmas Carol*. The Boss once said that a former member heard our broadcast on a destroyer doing sub-chasing off the coast of Brazil during WWII. It was, of course, overwhelming. And then there was the Art Institute in spring. A magical time. Two concerts in a day. Why do I remember the mummy's hand in the glass case next to where the boys lined up?



And the recording days. Wow! We were recording! And the records often arrived as Christmas presents, a pleasant surprise. And sometimes in cherry red. They were the last gasp of the 78rpm era. I have one poignant recording memory. We had just finished recording Victor Herbert's "Toyland." As I walked across the levy along the river into downtown to catch the bus, I felt the song's acute sense of loss-- that childhood was over. In a way that's what the Chorus was all about—a kind of childhood dream-state that was destined to end. We had to get on with the serious stuff of life.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS: It all ended, of course. Times change. Industry changes. In the 1940's and 1950's Dayton was an industrial town with the highest per capita wages in the state. In many ways it was a General Motors town. (But who can forget NCR and the Old River complex?) The industrial fast-pitch softball and basketball leagues were as competitive as any in the country. And Inland, under J.D. O'Brien, made a major artistic statement with the Chorus. (My aunt Marcella Sprauer, was his right-hand person, and from her I really learned to appreciate the company.) The zenith of Inland's involvement came with the St. Nicholas Cantata. Hugh Ross directing, David Lloyd singing, great sets, old members called back into action—very nice, indeed. But views of music were separating along generational lines. Until Elvis and Rock moved into teenage consciousness, everybody was pretty much on the same page of popular music. I mean everybody from 15 to 50 knew (and cared) what was #1 on the hit parade. Then tastes split, and that's OK, but essentially the Chorus was doomed. Oh, there were other reasons—corporate money either dried up or went in other directions—but the shift in popular music interest made the Chorus' demise inevitable. And so a toast, as we shuffle off singing, "Evenings when I go to sleep..." To Richard Westbrook, who founded it and perfected it. To Joe Geiger, who kept it going against the inevitable. And to the Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors and J.D. O'Brien who made the vision possible.

(One past member's view, errors and all.)

John F. (Jock) Hussong

22 April 2013



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Member: 1945-1950/53

