RAY ROBINSON: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHORAL MUSIC AS EDUCATOR, SCHOLAR, AND PRESIDENT OF WESTMINSTER CHOIR COLLEGE FROM 1969 TO 1987

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The University of Southern Mississippi

RAY ROBINSON: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHORAL MUSIC AS EDUCATOR, SCHOLAR, AND PRESIDENT OF WESTMINSTER CHOIR COLLEGE FROM 1969 TO 1987

by

Mary Elizabeth Everett

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved:

May 2007
ABSTRACT

RAY ROBINSON: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHORAL MUSIC AS EDUCATOR, SCHOLAR, AND PRESIDENT OF WESTMINSTER CHOIR COLLEGE FROM 1969 TO 1987

by Mary Elizabeth Everett

May 2007

Forty-eight years ago, Ray Robinson entered the field of higher education as a music professor, having no idea of the extraordinary path that lay ahead of him. After spending four years in his first teaching appointment, Robinson entered academic administration as Dean and eventually Associate Director of the Peabody Conservatory. His success at Peabody propelled him into the most influential post of his career: president of Westminster Choir College, a position he held for eighteen years. As the school's longest-standing president other than the founder, John Finley Williamson, Robinson was able to make decisions that would ultimately impact the entire field of choral music. (1) His first task was to hire a new director of choral activities. That person was Joseph Flummerfelt. During Flummerfelt's thirty-three years at Westminster, the college gained quite an international reputation through participation in the Spoleto Festival and collaborations with the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra. (2) Robinson was instrumental in adding Frauke Haasemann to the faculty, who influenced thousands of choral musicians in the United States and abroad through traditional programs of study as well as the Westminster summer session, also started by Robinson. (3) Due to philosophical differences among the faculty, Robinson wrote a textbook entitled The Choral Experience, which continues to be a valuable resource to
choral musicians today. Robinson's impact on choral music did not end with his retirement from Westminster; he returned to teaching so that students might continue to learn what he believes is the true "choral experience."
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the doctoral committee who guided me through this process: Dr. Gary Adam, Dr. Joseph Brumbeloe, Dr. Jay Dean, Dr. Christopher Goertzen, and especially to the chair, Dr. Gregory Fuller.

Special thanks go to Constantina Tsolainou, Dr. Allen Winold, Dr. Charles Schisler, Roberta Marchesi-Van Ness, Dr. Betsy Weber, Dr. Eric Nelson, Dr. Pearl Shangkuan, Dr. Steven Demorest, and Dr. Joseph Flummerfelt for giving interviews in support of my research; and to Charlene Allen who saved me countless hours by transcribing all of these interviews into typed manuscripts.

No word of thanks will be adequate to express proper gratitude to Dr. Ray Robinson for his enthusiasm for and support of this project. The many hours he spent in interviews with me and the wealth of resources he provided made this project not only possible but a joy to produce. I thank him not only for his involvement in this endeavor, but also for the many ways he has impacted my life since 1992. I hope that this project will serve to honor him for many years to come.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..............................................................................................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................iv

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ..................................................................................................vii

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................1

Purpose of Research
Review of Literature

II. BIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................9

Education and Formative Years
Christian Commitment
Teaching and Administrative Positions
Scholarly Pursuits
Conclusion

III. THE HIRING OF JOSEPH FLUMMERFELT AND FRAUKE HAASEMAN ..................25

Introduction
Joseph Flummerfelt
Frauke Haasemann
Conclusion

IV. THE WRITING OF THE CHORAL EXPERIENCE ...........................................41

Introduction
Motivation for Writing
Collaboration with Allen Winold
Summary of Content

V. TEACHING PHILOSOPHY ..........................................................................58

Introduction
Pillars of Robinson’s Philosophy
Commitments Required of Educators
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. Coral de Piedro ................................................................. 9
2. Santa Margarita Depot ..................................................... 10
3. First Baptist Church of San José Youth Choir ................... 13
LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. List of Churches Served ................................................................. 14
2. Presidents of Westminster Choir College ................................... 18
3. Number of Copies Sold of The Choral Experience ................... 47
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Research

In the field of choral music, schools of thought on choral/vocal technique in the United States often center around institutions of higher education: St. Olaf College and F. Melius Christiansen, Luther College and Weston Noble, and Northwestern University (the first choir in higher education to use the title “a cappella”) with director Peter C. Lutkin. One school stands alone, however, as being solely dedicated to the education of choral singers: Westminster Choir College founded by John Finley Williamson. Howard Swan wrote an important chapter in the Decker/Herford text entitled *Choral Conducting Symposium* in which he defined “six schools of thought that in theory and practice have greatly influenced choral singing in America.” According to Swan, “…with few exceptions every director in the country has received his initial help from and to some degree includes in his work the principles of one of these six systems of choral development.” School “A” represents the principles of John Finley Williamson and Westminster Choir College.

Williamson founded the Westminster in 1926 and was its first president until 1958. The school went into a period of decline in the period 1958 – 1969 as evidenced by the dropping of the Westminster Choir by Columbia Management. This could be due

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3Ray Robinson, interview by author, 14 June 2006, Boulder, CO.
in part to the fact that the College had two presidents during this time, neither of whom was a musician.  

In 1969, things began to change. Westminster appointed Dr. Ray E. Robinson as its fourth president, a post he held for nearly 20 years. Other than the school’s founder, Robinson was and always will be (because of the school’s merger with Rider University) the longest standing president of Westminster Choir College. Under his leadership, some very important people were hired, books were written, and teaching philosophies were established that returned Westminster to the quality school it was founded to be and ultimately shaped choral music education in this country.

One of Dr. Robinson’s first tasks as president was to hire a new Director of Choral Activities. That person was Joseph Flummerfelt, who just recently retired after thirty-three years in that position. His name is closely associated with the prominence of the Westminster Choir and for the many collaborations between the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the New York Philharmonic. This study will explore how Dr. Robinson came to hire Flummerfelt and how Dr. Robinson paved the way for Flummerfelt’s years of success.

Dr. Robinson was also instrumental in bringing Frauke Haasemann (1922 – 1991) to the United States from Germany and ultimately as a Westminster Choir College faculty member. She is known best for her voice building curriculum entitled Group Vocal Technique. The idea of structuring choral warm-ups based on the music to be rehearsed was inherent in the German choral tradition, but it was not a part of the tradition in this country. American choral musicians were fascinated by this new way of doing things, and they flocked to her workshops around the country. This new

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4Ibid.
philosophy coupled with Haasemann’s unique ability to teach and communicate made her an instant success. An interview with one of Haasemann’s strongest disciples, Constantina Tsolainou, gave the writer many insights into this educator, who died much too young.

Although necessary, bringing new blood into a school so steeped in tradition like Westminster Choir College did not escape conflict. When Robinson became president, he found that three factions existed among faculty and students: followers of John Finley Williamson, followers of Elaine Brown and Warren Martin, and those who followed the ideals of newcomer Joseph Flummerfelt. While the existence of conflict can sometimes add to the learning environment, Robinson felt the need to bring the three groups together. Each faction will be defined in greater detail in chapter four, but suffice it to say that none of them were wrong, but no one set of ideals was enough. Robinson wanted them to see that it was a combination of all three that would lead to the ideal “choral experience.” Thus, in 1976, he set out to write a textbook entitled, The Choral Experience, a term that he coined.5

This textbook is still very much in use today with the most recent reprinting being in 2002. Covering historical context, rehearsal techniques, basic musicianship, and performance practice in one book allows it to be used in a variety of classes on choral music. A brief glance at colleges and universities revealed the following course titles which use The Choral Experience:

5Ibid.
Choral Methods

Choral Conducting (both beginning and intermediate levels)

Choral Literature

Choral Rehearsal Techniques

According to WorldCat, *The Choral Experience* is held by over seven hundred libraries worldwide, further illustrating its widespread influence.

Robinson wrote the textbook with a readership in mind that consisted of the practicing choral conductor and the student training for a career in choral music. In interviews with the writer, he further specified that this book is geared toward the undergraduate student in at least his or her junior year. As if to say, this book gives a more comprehensive look at choral music than the average conducting textbook, but it is not meant to give the depth required at the graduate level. By covering performance practice and choral diction as well as rehearsal techniques, this textbook portrays the choral conductor as someone who must be concerned with much more than just gesture.

After spending eighteen years in a high-profile administrative position, Robinson returned to full-time teaching, making it appropriate to explore his teaching philosophies as a part of this research. In the interviews, he named many qualities which he believes must be a part of a successful educator, but they all focused around a commitment to the student. He opened his remarks by saying that "everyone has the potential for greatness...teachers must give students a vision of greatness." Every teacher must have sound ideals of leadership. Without them, problems will occur. He wrote a chapter in a

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6 *The Choral Experience*, Preface, xv.
book entitled "The Challenge of Choral Leadership in the Twenty-First Century," which supports many of his teaching philosophies that the writer will use to further define his quality as an educator.

Review of Literature

A variety of published and unpublished literature relating to this study falls into four categories: periodicals published by Westminster Choir College, such as student and alumni newsletters, dissertations on the history of Westminster as well as other key faculty members, interviews of Ray Robinson and others conducted by this writer, and Robinson's own writings which support this project.

Westminster published two series of newsletters which serve as documentation of events in the college's history. The May/June 1986 issue of the alumni newsletter announced Dr. Robinson's impending retirement as president which documents important milestones during his term. This same newsletter contains a transcript of a speech given by Frauke Haasemann to the Class of 1986, one of the few extant examples of her writings of a personal nature. The July 1987 issue of the alumni newsletter contains the presentation of Dr. Robinson's honorary doctorate from Westminster as well as his farewell address.

The student publication entitled "The Student Voice" dedicated its top story to significant events in the Robinson presidency on at least two occasions. The first being on April 23, 1971 with an article entitled, "Highly-Credentialed Flummerfelt Appointed Director of Choral Activities." The second article appeared on February 11, 1972 and was entitled, "President Announces Rationale for Change."

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Numerous dissertations have been written pertaining to various aspects and people of Westminster Choir College, but there are three that will be referenced in the writing of this document. First, Charles Harvey Schisler, academic dean of Westminster Choir College during Robinson’s presidency, wrote a dissertation completed in 1976 entitled “A History of Westminster Choir College, 1926 – 1973.” The final chapter covers the first four years of Robinson’s presidency and will document the need for immediate change including the hiring of Joseph Flummerfelt. The other two dissertations to be referenced are more biographical in nature, and therefore serve not only as a source of information but also set precedent for undertaking a project of this nature. The first of these, “John Finley Williamson (1887 – 1964): His Life and Contribution to Choral Music,” provides important information on the choral traditions established by Westminster’s founder. The second, “A biography of Warren Martin: Westminster Choir College’s professor of music,” gives insight into one representative of the factions that existed that led to the writing of *The Choral Experience*.

Interviews are an essential component to a project of a biographical nature. The writer spent nearly four days with Dr. Robinson with the sole purpose of gathering information for this project. These interviews resulted in numerous secondary interviews which serve to further confirm ideas put forth in this study. Charles Schisler clarified details about how Wilhelm Ehmann and Frauke Haasemann came to Westminster Choir College. Constantina Tsolainou, in addition to speaking about Frauke Haasemann, also


In 1972, Robinson reinstated the graduate program at Westminster Choir College. The revitalizing of the Master’s program resulted in a large number of nationally-recognized choral musicians of today: Betsy Weber (University of Houston), Pearl Shangkuan (Calvin College), Eric Nelson (Emory University), and Steven Demorest (University of Washington). They are all graduates of Westminster during Robinson’s era, and former students of Flummerfelt and Haasemann. Each offered additional insight into either Robinson’s leadership or the musical environment at Westminster under Flummerfelt.

Dr. Joseph Flummerfelt offered a perspective on the musical culture of Westminster that only he could give. He spoke of Robinson’s vision which turned the college around, the pioneering work of Frauke Haasemann, and that which makes Westminster unique. The interview with him confirmed many of the things learned in conversation with Dr. Robinson.

Through all of these interviews, there was great effort to secure differing opinions, but only subtle ones were found. It seems that even if dissention existed, Robinson’s ability to bring Westminster out of a very low time far outweighed negative opinions.

Dr. Robinson is also an accomplished writer, and many of his own writings will be referenced in this project to further show his ability to shape choral music in this
country from an administrative and scholarly standpoint. He had already begun his own memoirs of his years at Westminster, "Chronicles of the Westminster Years, 1969-87: A Memoir," at the writing of this project which will be helpful to the writer especially in the chapter on the hiring of Joseph Flummerfelt. In addition to the writings already referenced, Robinson wrote articles in the Choral Journal on John Finley Williamson and Wilhelm Ehmann, the mentor of Frauke Haasemann.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

Education and Formative Years

Ray Robinson was born on December 26, 1932 in San José, California. The son of a railroad telegrapher and station master, he began his education in a one-room schoolhouse called Coral de Piedro, in Edna, an area about 200 miles south of San José. In 1943, his family moved twenty miles north to Santa Margarita where he continued with the fifth and sixth grades in a four-room schoolhouse. It was in Santa Margarita that his music education began.

Figure 1: Coral de Piedro

Like so many aspiring young musicians, Robinson wanted to play the drums. He tells the story this way:

We had an itinerant music teacher in Santa Margarita, Mr. Jenkins, who came from another town about 10 miles north of Santa Margarita. He was a clarinetist, and so primarily an instrumental teacher. In 5th grade, I signed up for
elementary music studies. He asked me what I wanted to play, and I told him I wanted to play the drums. He said he already had 5 drummers! He said I couldn’t play drums, and that I would have to play something else. He preferred a stringed instrument. I talked to folks about it, and we ordered a violin from Sears-Roebuck. I’ll never forget the day the instrument arrived at the railroad station where my father worked.¹¹

Figure 2: Santa Margarita Depot

He played for two years through the music classes at the school. In 1944, the Robinson family moved back to San José, where he completed his elementary education at Campbell Elementary School. The school had a string orchestra of 30 players in which he played. In his high school, the strings instructor was a former first violinist in the San Francisco Symphony.¹²

Growing up in California afforded Robinson many opportunities to hear plenty of the wonderful music being written during the first half of the twentieth century. Stravinsky and Schoenberg were both living in Southern California, and Robinson cites

¹¹Ray Robinson, interview by author, 12 April 2006, West Palm Beach, FL.
¹²Ibid.
hearing Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* as one of the most memorable musical experiences of his youth. He would have heard it between 1946 and 1950, his high school years.\(^1\)

The high-quality music education Robinson received in his elementary and high school years led to him pursuing a music degree at San José State College (now San José State University). During his junior year of high school, he began studying viola privately. He made this the focus of his studies at San José State. By the time he was a sophomore in college, in 1952, he was playing in a semi-professional orchestra, the San José Symphony.\(^2\)

On March 18, 1953, Robinson's undergraduate studies were interrupted by him being drafted into the army during what would be the last year of the Korean War. He took his basic training at Fort Ord on the Monterey peninsula of California. What appeared to be a detour on his path to becoming a professional musician proved to be a key step in steering his career toward choral music. It was in Monterey that Robinson took his first church position, as Director of Music and choral director at First Baptist Church; a position he retained until 1955, when he was honorably discharged from the United States Army. He then returned to San José to complete his undergraduate studies which he did with honors on August 24, 1956.\(^3\)

Robinson immediately started his graduate work at Indiana University, pursuing a Master's degree in viola performance. While a student, he played principal viola in both the Indiana University Philharmonic and Opera Orchestra in addition to regular work in a

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Bachelor of Arts degree, San José State College, 1956.
student string quartet. After completing this degree in June, 1958, he remained at Indiana University to begin work on the Doctor of Music Education degree, completing coursework during several summers. He finished the degree in 1969.16

Christian Commitment

Many prominent figures in the history of music cite a religious experience as having a strong influence on their careers. One example is Francis Poulenc. In 1936, one of his colleagues, Pierre-Octave Ferroud, died tragically, and this led Poulenc to do some deep soul-searching. “The horrible snuffing-out of this musician so full of vitality had absolutely stupefied me. Ruminating on the frailty of our human condition, I was once again attracted to the spiritual life...You now know the true source of inspiration for my religious works.” J. S. Bach frequently signed his compositions with the letters “S.D.G.”, which stood for Soli Deo Gloria or “To God Alone the Glory.” There are countless examples like these.17

A Christian commitment was equally important in the life of Ray Robinson. When asked at what point he shifted his focus from instrumental music to choral music, he said, “It had everything to do with my Christian service in churches.”18 This highlights the significance of his years in the army, in particular his first church position in Monterey, California.

His Christian journey began long before those years in Monterey; it is still a lifelong pursuit. He enjoyed a great Christian upbringing. Robinson points to the spring

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16Ibid; Ray E. Robinson, “Career Overview,” Unpublished manuscript, West Palm Beach.


18Robinson, Interview.
of 1949, when he was 16, as the time he made his initial Christian commitment, while attending the First Baptist Church in San José. He has such fond memories of spending his high school and college years in this church, mainly because of the many musical experiences available to him. The church had an orchestra – which he cites as a rarity in those days – as well as an adult choir and a youth choir. The Director of Music at the church gave him some experience directing the youth choir and occasionally the adult choir while Robinson was a music major at San José State.

Figure 3: Newspaper advertisement of the youth choir at First Baptist Church, San José

Robinson went on to serve many churches in his career as a result of the strong musical upbringing he received at First Baptist, San José.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid.

San José Mercury-Herald

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As time passed, Robinson began to sense that his growing Christian commitment was to be more than just a compartment of his life. Indeed, his faith would shape his career. He felt called to Christian higher education, but it was not easy to get a job in a Christian college. Regardless of whether or not he was working for a Christian institution, he still viewed college teaching as a Christian vocation. He explained his view this way: "I wanted to invest my life in the lives of young people and shape their lives so that they could go out as ‘disciples’ in a way." Robinson has always wanted to influence his students to be the best, most responsible, people they can be, and he views this as a God-given calling.

\[20\text{Ibid.}\]
Teaching and Administrative Positions

Robinson’s college teaching career began in 1958 after he completed his Master’s degree in viola from Indiana University. Due to a faculty member’s sabbatical leave, the Dean of the School of Music, Wilfred C. Bain, appointed him as the Instructor of String Methods, enabling him to continue his doctoral work. It ‘enabled’ him due to financial needs that grew along with his family. He was married to Ruth Aleen Chamberlain on March 12, 1954. They had already experienced the birth of their first two children (Cindy in August, 1955, and Greg in July, 1957), and they were expecting a third child (a son, David) in October of 1958. In addition to his teaching position and church job at the West Morris Free United Methodist Church, Robinson was also the head of music ministry for Indianapolis Youth for Christ, for which he rehearsed a choir for a rally held every Saturday night.21

In 1959, Robinson finally received an appointment that fulfilled his calling to Christian higher education. He became Assistant Professor of Music and chair of the fine arts division at Cascade College in Portland, Oregon. Because this was a smaller school, the college required Robinson to teach a full load in addition to conducting a major ensemble. He taught conducting, private voice, and choral methods and directed the college chorus and brass choir. All of this was in addition to his administrative duties. While there, he became very involved in the musical life of Portland by playing viola in the Portland Symphony and the Symphony string quartet. He returned to Indiana University during the summers of 1959 – 1962 to complete his doctoral coursework.22

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21Ibid.
22Ibid.
After he had spent four years at Cascade College, the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore recognized Robinson’s administrative skills and offered him the position of Dean of the Conservatory. His predecessor in that position, Charles Kent, expanded the graduate program by adding the Doctor of Musical Arts degree. Robinson was able to continue developing the doctoral program as well as to use his instrumental expertise to build the Conservatory’s orchestral program through increased scholarships and heavy recruitment in the areas of strings and double reeds.23

In 1966, the Peabody Conservatory promoted Robinson to Associate Director. At this same time, there was an opening for director of the Peabody Chorus, a position which would give Robinson his first collegiate choral experience. As in many conservatories, the choral program was not a serious priority, at least in the minds of students. Robinson, therefore, sought to do things with the chorus that would benefit the solo performer while fulfilling the Conservatory’s requirement that all students sing in the chorus. Each year, the Conservatory had a composer-in-residence, and every performing group (including the chorus) would feature that composer’s works during the school year. Outside of those performances, one of the choral highlights of Robinson’s years at Peabody was when Gunther Schuller came to conduct the Baltimore Symphony and wanted to do Frederick Delius’ Sea Drift. The Peabody Chorus gave performances of the work both in Washington, DC and Baltimore.24

Robinson stayed at Peabody Conservatory until 1969, when an unexpected opportunity came his way. His journey to becoming president of Westminster Choir College actually began in 1965 when Peabody came up for its 10-year evaluation with the

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23 Robinson, Career Overview.

24 Ibid; Robinson, Interview; Frederick Delius (1862 – 1934).
National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and the Middle States Association of Colleges. The head of the accrediting team was a man by the name of J. Merrill Knapp, a professor of music and Dean of the Faculty at Princeton University. The team was carefully examining whether or not Peabody was too much of a professional school, lacking the proper emphasis on liberal arts needed in an undergraduate institution. Knapp liked the approach that Robinson took in handling this issue.25

Robinson was about to lead the Peabody Chamber Orchestra on a tour to Puerto Rico in November of 1968, when he received a phone call from J. Merrill Knapp. Knapp had just been to a board meeting at Westminster Choir College (Princeton, NJ) and learned that the current president, Lee Hastings Bristol, Jr., would be retiring on June 30, 1969. The board appointed Knapp as chair of the presidential search committee, and at the committee’s first meeting, three members mentioned Robinson’s name as a possible candidate for the Westminster presidency. Those three people were Ward Bedford, a state legislator from Vermont, Wilfred Bain of Indiana University, and of course J. Merrill Knapp. Knapp made it clear that having three members mention his name did not give him an inside track on the job, but they were trying to develop a pool of candidates and wanted to see if Robinson wanted to be included on that roster. This all came as quite a shock to Robinson as he had no ambition to become a college president.26

After returning from Puerto Rico, Robinson decided to allow them to consider him for the Westminster presidency. After four rigorous interviews, all in Princeton, the committee offered him the job. Robinson cites four reasons why he believes he was a


26 Ibid.
strong candidate for the position: his prior professional dealings with J. Merrill Knapp, his prior experience leading a school like the Peabody Conservatory, his youth (he was only 35 when they first contacted him), and that Robinson also knew some Westminster alumni who thought he might be a good candidate for president.\footnote{27Ibid.}

Robinson took over as president of Westminster Choir College on July 1, 1969, leaving no gap between the outgoing president and him. He stayed at Westminster until July 31, 1987, making him the longest standing president other than the school's founder, John Finley Williamson.

**Table 2: Presidents of Westminster Choir College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Finley Williamson</td>
<td>1926 - 1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William F. MacCalmont</td>
<td>1958 - 1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Hastings Bristol, Jr.</td>
<td>1962 - 1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William S. Fuller</td>
<td>1987 - 1990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The college began its association with Rider University in 1991, with the merger becoming official in 1992, thus nullifying the need for a president of Westminster Choir College. The chief academic office at Westminster is now the Dean of the college.

Robinson described his years at Westminster Choir College this way:

> The Princeton appointment was both exciting and fulfilling. The most rewarding aspects of these years were bringing together an outstanding faculty, raising the academic and musical standards of the College, and improving Westminster's image on a national and international level. Among the several new programs which were initiated and developed under my direct supervision between 1969 and 1987, those listed below were the most significant:

1. The Westminster Conservatory of Music, the Junior Division of the College, was established in 1970 as the Preparatory Division. This program now offers instruction to more than 1,000 non-degree students in the Central New Jersey area.
2. The Westminster Summer Session was developed from a high school vocal camp into a national program for post graduate study in church...
music, music education and performance. Experiencing steady growth over the years from its inception in 1970, this division of the College now attracts nearly 2,000 students to the campus each summer.

3. The Graduate program was reinstated in 1972, after it had been discontinued in 1964 while the College sought and achieved Middle States Association regional accreditation for its undergraduate program. Westminster now enrolls nearly 100 students in a Master of Music degree program in eight major fields of study.

4. A Seminar for Music Administrators was founded in 1972 for the purpose of providing leadership training for musicians who found themselves managing departments and schools of music and who were not prepared to do so. Over the years more than 500 music executives have attended this course. Since 1987 this Seminar has been offered at Indiana University School of Music, Bloomington, Indiana.

5. A capital fund drive was launched in 1984 which doubled both the annual giving program and the endowment over a three year period. Between 1969 and 1987 the annual giving program of the College increased from $100,000 to $600,000 and the endowment from $38,000 to $5,000,000.28

Despite the 25-year detour to Peabody Conservatory and Westminster Choir College, Robinson never lost sight of what he believed was a God-given calling to Christian higher education. After almost 20 years at Westminster, he felt called to return to Christian higher education. In 1985, while they were walking along canals in the south of France, it became clear to him and his wife, Ruth, that it was time to make this change. He gave Westminster two years notice.

In 1987, Ray and Ruth moved to England where he spent two years as a Fellow of Wolfson College and conductor of the Wolfson College choir in Cambridge. During the first year, he had no prospects for returning to Christian higher education, but the next year he received a letter from Michel Simoneaux, then Dean of the School of Music and Fine Arts at Palm Beach Atlantic College (West Palm Beach, Florida), telling Robinson

28 Robinson, Career Overview.
about the opening of choral director at the college. The last director had died suddenly during a performance of Handel’s *Messiah*.

Once again, past relationships led to him being recommended for this position. Two members of his doctoral committee at Indiana University now lived in Palm Beach: Wilfred Bain (also on the Westminster search committee) and Jack Watson, who went on to be the dean of the school of music at The University of Cincinnati. Simoneaux contacted both of them when Palm Beach Atlantic began searching for a new choral director in January, 1989. Bain said, “You know, the guy that just stepped down as President of Westminster Choir College, I know him and his wife very well. I don’t know where he is or what he is doing, but you might try and contact him.”

Robinson had no prior knowledge of Palm Beach Atlantic College, but he did have some contact with one of the college’s future presidents, Claude Rhea. In 1982, the Westminster Choir did a tour through the south, and Robinson held alumni meetings at many of the tour locations, among them Chapel Hill, Mobile, and Birmingham. The Birmingham concert was at Samford University, where Claude Rhea was then dean of the school of music. After the concert, Rhea invited Robinson to have lunch with him the next day at a club in Birmingham. At that lunch, Rhea told Robinson that it was his last week in Birmingham because he was becoming president at a small college in Florida. That was Palm Beach Atlantic College. Rhea was the president there from 1982 – 1990.

Robinson made his first visit to West Palm Beach in early 1989 while in the United States to attend the American Choral Directors Association national convention in

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29 Robinson, Interview.
30 Ibid.
Louisville, Kentucky. He went back to England to finish the school year, and made the decision to accept the position. He was appointed Distinguished Professor of Choral Studies in 1989 and immediately set about to reorganize and build the choral program. Up to this point, the concert choir had only met at the end of the weekly departmental recital in order to sing at area churches on occasion. During his tenure there, Robinson established the oratorio chorus, chamber singers, and Palm Beach Atlantic Singers and conducted the Concert Choir.

Robinson also took an active role in the classroom. In addition to standard conducting classes, Robinson developed a series of classes called ‘capstone’ courses. These were four courses offered in a four-year cycle centering on the following composers: Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Penderecki. Robinson, along with Tim Steele, then the musicologist at PBA, came up with the idea to teach these specialized courses as a way to prepare students for graduate school in music. What made these courses unique was that after spending a semester studying someone like Bach, Robinson then took the students on a two-week trip to visit all of the places they had studied. Chapter five will provide further elaboration of these courses.  

In 2002, Robinson stepped down as director of choral studies at Palm Beach Atlantic, but he remains active in the music department as Senior Professor of Music. His abilities as a fundraiser and recruiter make him invaluable to the school. The president of the college, Dr. David W. Clark, asked him to take on the role of recruiter for the school of music, which was experiencing some decline in enrollment numbers. Soon

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31 Robinson, Interview.
after he assumed this position, the number of new students entering the music department went from eighteen to forty-one with the possibility of going as high as sixty.\textsuperscript{32}

Scholarly Pursuits

In addition to his career as musician, educator, and administrator, Ray Robinson is also the author or co-author of ten books and has written more than fifty articles in international journals. He has also contributed chapters to at least ten other books, including two popular reference books in the choral music field: \textit{Five Centuries of Choral Music: essays on Choral Music in honor of Howard Swan} (ed. Gordon Paine) and \textit{Up Front! Training the Complete Choral Conductor} (ed. Guy B. Webb). His first scholarly article to appear in a refereed journal was published by the Essex Quarterly in January, 1970. It is entitled “The Peabody Institute of Baltimore: Ideas Implicit in its Founding.” He is probably best-known for his textbook, \textit{The Choral Experience}, which was co-authored by Allen Winold, and for \textit{Choral Music: A Norton Anthology}, a valuable resource in studying choral literature.\textsuperscript{33}

A large portion of Robinson’s scholarly writings focus on the works of Krzysztof Penderecki. His interest in Penderecki began back in 1970 when Robinson had a chance to meet the composer at the New York offices of the music publisher Belwin-Mills. This led to Robinson’s producing an evening of the works of Penderecki with the help of Phillip Nelson, then Dean of the Yale School of Music, at Carnegie Hall on March 2,

\textsuperscript{32}Ray Robinson, \textit{Interview}.

1977. Beginning in August, 1977, Robinson began making trips to Poland to research the life and works of Penderecki. By the end of 1983, Robinson had already published two books about Penderecki’s music: A Study of the Penderecki ‘St. Luke Passion’ (co-authored by Allen Winold) and Krzysztof Penderecki: A Guide to His Works. Ten years later, Robinson first read a paper on Penderecki at an international symposium: “Penderecki’s Reception in the United States of America,” and in 1995, Robinson was elected head of the editorial board of Studies in Penderecki, a scholarly journal on the life and works of Krzysztof Penderecki. It is no wonder that, in 1998, the Polish Music Reference Center described Robinson as the “leading American Penderecki expert.” His studies of Penderecki are ongoing with the publishing of his latest scholarly article entitled, “Penderecki’s Orchestra and the Intertextual Era: A Contribution to the Dialogue.”

Conclusion

As evidenced by this brief overview of his life, Ray Robinson is a man committed to knowledge and education as well as to people and strong values. His journeys to Poland not only facilitated his scholarly research but enhanced musical scholarship in Poland. Robinson established an endowment at the Krakow Academy of Music called the “Excellence in Teaching Award” to honor the outstanding teacher at the Academy each year. He established another endowment at the Institute of Musicology at the

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Jangiellonian University to recognize the outstanding Ph.D. dissertation of the year in music.  

One of Dr. Pearl Shangkuan’s first recollections of Robinson is that he played a major role in her going to graduate school because he made it possible for her to receive a fellowship that was intended only for United States citizens. (She was not one at the time.) She said that this opportunity changed her life.

In recalling how Robinson helped her secure her first college teaching position at Oregon State University, Constantina Tsolainou reflected on the person of Ray Robinson:

So here he was taking interest in how the graduates of Westminster win out and where they ended up and how they represented Westminster in these jobs across the country. So to me that’s pretty amazing that in the capacity that he had as president that he was in touch with, and I feel like it’s because he had an interest, not in just what was happening at the school, but what happens beyond the school when people graduated and you know, that was the way the school was represented to all these different places. So, his interest was not just in Princeton, but it was everywhere that there were Westminster people… it’s like a parent… who wants to raise their children in such a way that when they go out on their own, that they can be confident that they will do well, they can be proud of what they have done you know, and all those kinds of things that you want to be able to feel, when you no longer have any control over it.

Ray Robinson will continue to use his career as musician, educator, administrator, and scholar to exemplify excellence.

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35 Ray Robinson, "Chronology," Unpublished manuscript, West Palm Beach.

36 Pearl Shangkuan, interview by author, 1 March 2007, via telephone, McKenzie.

37 Constantina Tsolainou, interview by author, 23 June 2006, tape recording, via telephone, Hattiesburg.
CHAPTER III
THE HIRING OF JOSEPH FLUMMERFELT AND FRAUKE HAASEMANN

Introduction

The president of a college has many important jobs: develop and carry out the mission of the college, raise money for the school's endeavors, maintain strong, positive relations with faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and play an active role in assembling a team that will assist him with all these things. It is the latter of these responsibilities that played a key role very early in Ray Robinson's presidency at Westminster Choir College.

Just before Robinson took office as president, he received a phone call from retiring president, Lee Hastings Bristol. This conversation confirmed to Robinson that major faculty and staff appointments would take special care. Bristol also suggested that the current director of choral activities, George Lynn, was difficult to work with and would probably not be supportive of a new administration. It appeared that this issue could be difficult to confront, but fortunately, Dr. Lynn decided to resign in the spring of 1969 (before Robinson took office on July 1, 1969) in order to concentrate on his career as a composer. This did not solve the problem; it merely removed an obstacle so that Robinson could begin the tenuous process of choosing Lynn's successor. That person would be Joseph Flummerfelt.

Shortly after Flummerfelt's appointment, Robinson became acquainted with Professor Wilhelm Ehmann of the Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule (Westphalian School of Church Music) and ultimately Frauke Haasemann. Westminster invited Ehmann to teach workshops as a part of Westminster's summer session, but he refused to come without Frauke Haasemann to assist him. Her value to the mission of Westminster
quickly became evident. Robinson does not claim that Westminster discovered Wilhelm Ehmann or Frauke Haasemann, but what the college did do was provide a forum in the 1970s and beyond for those ideas that became very important in Westminster’s success in the nearly twenty-year period that Robinson was president.38

Although most people close to the college advised Robinson to hire Westminster graduates almost exclusively, his instinct was to bring in new blood (an idea supported by those outside of the Westminster “circle”). He later learned that at the time he became president, approximately 85% of the faculty and staff were Westminster graduates, which caused extreme bias in matters of academic policy and the appointment of new faculty members. This probably led to a decline in quality of performance coming from Westminster, as evidenced by the fact that Columbia Artists, Inc. dropped the choir from its list in 1968.39

Dr. Pearl Shangkuan, who received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Westminster during the 1980s, called these two hirings “critical” and states that “they defined a generation.” Some students from the Flummerfelt and Haasemann era who gave interviews in support of this research were unaware of Robinson’s direct involvement in bringing them to the school, but they all give a great deal of credit to Flummerfelt and Haasemann for the musical success they now enjoy.40


40Pearl Shangkuan, interview by author, 1 March 2007, via telephone, McKenzie.
Choosing a new Director of Choral Activities

Because of all the conflicting advice (both solicited and unsolicited) Robinson received about hiring a new director of choral activities, he decided to make it a two-year goal instead of just a one-year task. He appointed interim directors for the Symphonic Choir and Westminster Choir for the 1969-70 and 1970-71 school years so that he could concentrate on the task at hand.41

Robinson also sought counsel from some of the top names in choral music in America at that time in an attempt to restore Westminster as a nationally-recognized institution for choral music. The first and foremost name on that list was Robert Shaw. The second was Roger Wagner, who also conducted summer choral workshops at Westminster in 1970-72 and took the Westminster Choir on tour during the 1971-72 season. The next person Robinson consulted was Elaine Brown, who distinguished herself by founding the famous Singing City organization in Philadelphia. She also took the Westminster Choir on tour during the 1970-71 season. As a Westminster graduate with strong national connections, she understood what kind of person the college needed as director of choral activities. She was the one who first recommended Joseph Flummerfelt for the position.42

The fourth member of this unofficial search committee was Julius Herford, former Westminster faculty member and conducting professor at Indiana University. Herford

41Robinson, Chronicles, 65-66; Robert Carwithen directed the Symphonic Choir both years. Arthur Sjogren directed the Westminster Choir the first year, and Elaine Brown and Warren Martin directed it the second year.

recommended John Nelson. Nelson studied with Herford at Juilliard and won the Irving Berlin Award for conducting. The choice came down to two candidates: Joseph Flummerfelt and John Nelson. The choice would be difficult, but it was ultimately the advice of Julius Herford that helped to separate the two candidates. He advised Robinson to go with Flummerfelt because Herford knew that Westminster needed someone who had potential for longevity. Herford said, “John Nelson may well be the best conductor, but in my judgment he has a promising orchestral and operatic conducting career that will attract him away from Westminster within a short period of time.” Herford was correct: Nelson debuted with the New York City Opera in 1972, and Flummerfelt stayed at Westminster for thirty-three years.

*Flummerfelt, the Man*

For someone who has such a lengthy success in the music business, it is always interesting to know how he or she got started in music and sources of early influences.

Joseph Flummerfelt described his childhood this way during an interview in 2002:

> My mother, who is 90 years old and still teaches piano, was my first piano teacher and major influence. At a very young age, I began singing, playing by ear, and improvising pieces that she would write down. About age 10, I first heard a pipe organ in the First Presbyterian Church of Vincennes in Indiana—my own church had a Hammond organ—and I was so moved that I asked to take lessons, but was told I was too young. So I sort of taught myself to play the organ and at least had enough sense to pedal with both feet! Around that time, my family bought a hi-fidelity record player, and I spent hours conducting a recording of *Messiah* in front of our living room mirror.

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43 Ibid, 67.

44 Ibid, 68-69.

45 Pearl Shangkuan, “An Interview with Joseph Flummerfelt,” *Choral Journal*, (May 2004): 9; Flummerfelt’s mother, Mavorette Flummerfelt, was honored at the 2002 Music Teachers National Association National Conference in Cincinnati for 50 years of commitment to MTNA; His mother is now 94 and recently stopped teaching piano.
Flummerfelt is a graduate of DePauw University, the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music where he studied with Elaine Brown, and the University of Illinois where he studied with Harold Decker. Prior to his appointment at Westminster Choir College, Flummerfelt held positions at Purdue University, DePauw University, and Florida State University. While at Florida State, his choir sang twice with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony, including the highly acclaimed southeastern premiere of Penderecki’s *St. Luke Passion*. Given Robinson’s interest in Penderecki, one might wonder if this performance led to Robinson having a stronger interest in Flummerfelt, but it was simply these collaborations that led Shaw to recommend Flummerfelt to Robinson.⁴⁶

Coming to Westminster

It was while sitting in Robert Shaw’s living room in Atlanta that Flummerfelt first learned that Westminster Choir College was interested in him for the position of director of choral activities. Shaw told Flummerfelt that Robinson was interested in talking with him about the position, and Shaw asked Flummerfelt if he would like to be recommended for the position. Flummerfelt confirmed to Shaw his interest in the job at Westminster.⁴⁷

Flummerfelt once described his years at Westminster as “rich and rewarding,” but the beginning was difficult. Flummerfelt, a protégé of Elaine Brown and Robert Shaw, would be the first non-Westminster graduate to lead the Westminster Choir. Flummerfelt did not elaborate on his difficulties, but this fact alone could justify a challenging

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⁴⁶"Highly-Credentialed Flummerfelt Appointed Director of Choral Activities," *The Student Voice* Vol. 2, No.2 (Friday, April 23, 1971) : 1.

⁴⁷Joseph Flummerfelt, interview by author, 14 March 2007, tape recording, via telephone, McKenzie.
beginning to a new position at a college where tradition was so important. According to Robinson, “difficult” only begins to describe Flummerfelt’s early days at Westminster.\textsuperscript{48}

Flummerfelt very much wanted to pursue the job at Westminster, and Robinson spent a lot of time interviewing him by once visiting him in Tallahassee and then bringing him to Princeton to spend time on campus. Robinson explained to him the conflict that existed on campus (described in detail in chapter 4), and Flummerfelt’s response was, “Why don’t you let me help you pull that together?” It was clear to Flummerfelt that Robinson believed there was a need to move Westminster from the Williamson vocal approach to a more mainstream approach to choral sound – a sound in which every style period has its own sound, which is more flexible and more in tune. The beginning years therefore were very rough because Flummerfelt was the first non-Westminster graduate to hold the position. He felt that many alumni were suspicious of him and upset that Robinson did not hire a Westminster graduate in that position.\textsuperscript{49}

As earlier mentioned, Roger Wagner took the Westminster Choir on tour at the end of Flummerfelt’s first year, and it was a huge success. At the end of the 1971-72 year, Flummerfelt auditioned his choir for the next year with the idea in mind of singing at the ACDA convention in the spring of 1973. But, by the end of the 1972 fall semester, twenty-eight students out of forty had dropped out of the Westminster Choir. Robinson attributed this to the fact that he was not emphasizing voice building and all the things students were told they would learn if they went to Westminster.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Schisler, dissertation, 365; Shangkuan, 10.
\textsuperscript{49} Robinson, Interview; Flummerfelt, Interview.
\textsuperscript{50} Robinson, Interview.
Flummerfelt gave a slightly different perspective on this incident. He prepared the choir that Wagner took on tour in the spring of 1972, and they were well-prepared and excited. During the tour, the students became very fond of Wagner and were somewhat “won over” by him. Flummerfelt admits that he did not take this very well and therefore did not handle it correctly. After the spring tour with Wagner, Flummerfelt then took over the Westminster Choir to prepare them for their first trip to the Spoleto Festival in the summer of 1972, expecting the same energy that they had with Wagner. After this trip, a significant number of students (not necessarily twenty-eight out of forty) dropped out of the choir.\footnote{Flummerfelt, Interview.}

Flummerfelt was still determined to take the choir to ACDA in the spring of 1973, but Robinson stepped in and told him he had to wait. Though Flummerfelt did not like this decision, he accepted it and went on to have a very successful ACDA performance just a few years later. After this, Robinson left Flummerfelt alone; he did not crowd him because they both had very separate and important jobs to do.

Flummerfelt actually had four ACDA national convention appearances in his years at Westminster: St. Louis (1975), Phoenix (1991), San Antonio (1993), and New York (2003). The San Antonio performance included a premiere of *A Time to Dance* by Carlisle Floyd. ACDA commissioned the work as a memorial to Raymond Brock. The New York performance differed from the others in that it was the Symphonic Choir instead of the Westminster Choir. They performed the Berlioz *Requiem* with the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Charles Dutoit.\footnote{Ibid.}
Dr. Betsy Weber, director of undergraduate choral studies at the University of Houston, offered this perspective on Flummerfelt’s leadership:

When I attended Westminster Choir College (1980–1982), Joe had been in the position for ten years, and those of us who came to Westminster came in large part to study with him. We still heard rumblings from older alumni who thought that he had ruined the Westminster Choir College sound, but there were recordings in the library of that old sound, and there was no question but that the choral art at Westminster had progressed in the right direction under Flummerfelt’s leadership.  

After surviving early difficulties, Flummerfelt went on to have a long and successful career at Westminster. He is founder and still musical director of the New York Choral Artists, who appear regularly with the New York Philharmonic, and he continues to oversee the choral life of the New York Philharmonic. He also continues in his role as an artistic director of the Spoleto USA Festival. Glenn Parker, internationally recognized accompanist and coach and Westminster faculty member from 1981-95, said the following about Flummerfelt in his Charge to the Graduating Class at Westminster in May of 1995:

Dr. Flummerfelt’s search for honesty in music making is no surprise to any of you. You have experienced it, as have I, on a daily basis in Symphonic Choir, in Westminster Choir or in conducting classes. To me, he is the great example of the honestly and completely examined life. A person who has never been satisfied to accept the easy answer or the pat explanation either in music or in himself, he has been and continues to be my teacher in ways I will never fully comprehend.

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Frauke Haasemann

Ehmann-Haasemann Connection

Around 1974 Joseph Flummerfelt read an important book in the field of choral music entitled *Choral Directing* by Wilhelm Ehmann (1904 – 1989) and suggested that Ehmann be invited to teach a workshop as a part of Westminster’s summer session. Charles Schisler, academic dean of Westminster under Robinson, called Dr. Ehmann sometime in 1974 to invite him to the summer session. (Schisler was the one to call him because he was fluent in German, and Ehmann spoke little to no English.) Ehmann expressed interest in coming because he had recently retired from the Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule, but he insisted that Frauke Haasemann should come as well to assist him. The two of them had become quite a team in leading the Westfälische Kantorei, a professional choir that toured all over Europe as well as the Near and Far East. Haasemann began as a soloist with the choir while a student of Ehmann’s at the Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule, but she quickly established herself as an authority in choral directing as well.55

Ehmann and Haasemann did come for the first time in the summer of 1974 to do a choral workshop in which he did the conducting of the literature and she did the warm-ups. This was perhaps the first time that this model was introduced in the United States. They returned in 1975 to do something a little different but also a strong interest of Ehmann’s: the *Musikalisches Exequien* by Heinrich Schütz. In 1976, Robinson had the idea of taking the summer session to the west coast, so they went to San Anselmo, just

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across the bay from San Francisco, where they held workshops at a Presbyterian
seminary.56

_Haasemann Comes to Westminster_

The Westminster board was so pleased with Robinson’s work to improve the
national status of the college (they had just had Bob Hope as a commencement speaker)
that they granted him a sabbatical. They knew, however, that he would never take a well-
deserved break if they did not basically force him to do it. Robinson left Princeton, but
he did not leave his work. He spent the fall semester of 1976 in Innsbruck, Austria,
during which time, he went to Herford, Germany to visit Ehmann on campus at the
Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule for the purpose of discussing Flummerfelt’s
upcoming sabbatical in the spring of 1978. Robinson met with Haasemann and Ehmann,
and they came up with the perfect solution that Ehmann would come and the students
would study the six motets of Bach with him and ultimately record them. Ehmann was
going to come in the fall of 1977 and stay for the whole school year, but he ended up not
coming until after Christmas. Haasemann came in the fall instead in order to get to know
Flummerfelt and be there for the preparation of his performance of Bach’s _B Minor Mass_,
which took place in November.57

They were so impressed with her work that they contracted her to teach full time
at Westminster the next year (1978 – 1979) before Ehmann even arrived for the spring
semester. She brought such an understanding of voice building through choral singing

56Robinson, Interview.
57Ibid; Flummerfelt, Interview.
that they knew they could not let her go. So, in the fall of 1977, Haasemann became a full faculty member at Westminster Choir College.58

Once Ehmann left Westminster in the spring of 1978, he would return only once more for the Schützfest in March, 1983 before his death in 1989. This allowed Haasemann to make a name for herself independently from Ehmann by traveling all over the United States doing workshops on Group Vocal Technique until she was no longer physically able.59

At Westminster, Haasemann’s responsibilities consisted of teaching classes in conducting and in voice building for choirs, warming up the Symphonic Choir and Westminster Choir, and for a time, conducting the Chapel Choir. With the assistance of James Jordan, she published her materials entitled Group Vocal Technique in 1991. Jordan, being an insightful music educator, realized that Americans needed more tools (a more user-friendly book format, instructional video, and exercise cards) in order to learn the concepts being taught by Haasemann. Group Vocal Technique grew out of another text written by Haasemann and Ehmann entitled Voice Building for Choirs. Hinshaw Music released Group Vocal Technique just after Haasemann’s death, and it is still available. According to Roberta Marchesi-Van Ness, the President of Hinshaw Music, they still sell an average of 400 copies per year. Given that little marketing is done, this is incredible for a book like this. This is a testament to the quality of the material, given how many methods books exist today.60

58Robinson, Interview; Flummerfelt, Interview.
59Ibid.
Haasemann spent her days trying to instill the idea of voice building, the accepted method in German choirs, within American choral musicians. At the time she came to this country, few if any had ever heard the term “voice building.” Directors were doing warm-ups with their choirs, but they did not understand that exercises must be integrated with the music, and more specifically the sound, that was to be achieved first in rehearsal. Constantina Tsolainou, a protégé of Haasemann and student of Flummerfelt, described how even Flummerfelt had to learn this concept:

It used to be kind of a joke to watch Haasemann and Flummerfelt because she had such purpose in everything that she did, and Flummerfelt wouldn’t necessarily understand it. He would get frustrated and say, “The sound is all wrong, the sound is all wrong.” Well, in fact, it was exactly what it needed to be for what her understanding was about what he was going to do first, but if he didn’t do what he had told her he was going to do, then of course it [the sound] was all wrong.61

In time, Flummerfelt did come to understand Haasemann’s methods. He developed a great respect for her and what she did, and theirs was a very valuable and unique partnership for thirteen years. Haasemann found in Flummerfelt her new Wilhelm Ehmann. Since Ehmann had retired from teaching at the school in Herford and from conducting the Westfälische Kantorei, she was no longer professionally active with him. Flummerfelt called Haasemann a “wonderful collaborator” and someone from whom he learned a great deal.62

Dr. Eric Nelson, a student at Westminster from 1981 – 1983, said that Haasemann was the only person to whom he saw Flummerfelt regularly defer. He tells a story of when the Symphonic Choir was preparing Handel’s Messiah. They were working on one of the many melismatic passages in the work, and Flummerfelt was not getting the

61 Constantina Tsolainou, Interview.

62 Flummerfelt, Interview.
articulation that he wanted. He decided to employ the Robert Shaw method of having every other row sing “da, da, da” instead of the indicated vowel. Out of the alto section came the unmistakable voice of Haasemann saying, “You do that, I quit!” In other words, she wanted the singers to learn how to sing the proper articulation rather than achieving it through a shortcut. Flummerfelt retracted his instruction and simply asked the singers to make the melismas cleaner.  

_The Gentle Giant_

Haasemann endeared herself to nearly everyone with whom she came in contact. Perhaps her life experiences made her this kind of person. She had lived a full life even before she came to the United States. She grew up in northern Germany, where her father was a German teacher. She recalls a family tradition of her father reading to her and her three brothers every Saturday evening. “He shared with us a variety of lovely poems, exciting tales and stories in high and low German. Those evenings shaped my life around words, around the music of language, and I shall never forget that time in my life.” She lived in Nazi Germany, and her husband was killed in action during World War II, before she had a chance to have a family of her own. Though a tragedy, this may have been what opened the door for her to vocal music education.  

Though she had no children of her own, she impacted the lives of countless students; not necessarily through words, but just by being who she was. Constantina Tsolainou described her this way:

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64 Constantina Tsolainou, Interview; Frauke Haasemann, _Charge to the 1986 Graduating Class_, Westminster Choir College Newsletter, May/June 1986.
Part of the charm of Haasemann was that she didn’t speak English very well. Even though she had been in this country for so long, she still didn’t have command of English. She would still switch words around and confuse words, so when you’d be in a class with her and she’d try to explain something, she’d get it backwards or sideways. We realized that so much of her getting people to do things, whether they were her workshop participants or her choirs, was that you responded to her. You knew that she knew her stuff, but you wanted to do what she told you to do just because of the way she was. It was so funny because when she’d get up on the podium, she really did seem huge. Some of that was just size (she was close to six feet tall), but some of that was her commanding presence; it was so soft and gentle.65

Glenn Parker, quoted earlier about Joseph Flummerfelt, also spoke about Haasemann in the same address:

I wish that you had all had the opportunity to know Frauke Haasemann. In one of her charges to the graduating class she related an anecdote which I have used constantly since then in my own teaching. She quoted the philosopher Nietzsche who once said that the good teacher teaches with cookies in one hand and a whip in the other. I also remember that she said she had been too often accused of using the cookies at the expense of the whip. I must say, however, that that was never the case in her teaching of me. At many important times in my life when Frauke thought that I was headed in the wrong direction or doing or saying the wrong thing or especially treating a choir in a way she thought unacceptable, she never hesitated to use the whip and to tell me exactly what she thought. Only as the years have passed have I begun to thank her in my heart for the honesty of her confrontation of me.

Her teaching not only reached the students of Westminster Choir College but also countless choral musicians around the country. She was a pioneer because she brought the idea of voice building to the United States. Her summer session workshops on Group Vocal Technique became so popular that a second week had to be added. These were 30-hour courses that met six hours a day for five days. Each session would have at least 90 participants. People realized that her concepts were worth learning, and she was the only one teaching this way.66

65 Constantina Tsolainou, Interview.
66 Constantina Tsolainou, Interview; Flummerfelt, Interview.
Haasemann described a good teacher this way:

A good teacher donates the tools of the trade to the student, and then steps back to observe the manner in which the student uses the tools—much as you might give your child a lesson in bicycle riding. First, you hold a firm hand on the bicycle, explaining the parts and their functions. Little by little, you lessen your grip until the child rides alone, unaware you have freed him or her from your guiding hand. Think of the joy you feel when the child turns the corner triumphantly parading his or her own style of riding. So it is in teaching. Each student should be congratulated for his individual style, his own personal philosophy and ambition. There is no room in the creative world for clones. Each of us stands gratefully and lovingly on the shoulders of our teachers and forefathers.67

_A Life Cut Short_

During the years of 1989-91, Tsolainou recalls Haasemann calling her to ask if she could do some of Haasemann’s workshops that she already scheduled because she was no longer physically able to maintain her heavy schedule. (Cancer was slowly claiming Frauke Haasemann’s life.) For someone so full of life and enthusiasm, 68 years old was much too young for the field of choral music to lose such a master teacher. In March of 1991, just a month before her death, Westminster bestowed upon her a very high and well-deserved honor: an honorary Doctor of Music degree. Born November 25, 1922 in Rendsburg, Germany, Frauke Haasemann died April 12, 1991 in Princeton.68

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67Haasemann, Charge to the 1986 Graduating Class.

Conclusion

What the field of choral music would have been without the expertise of these two individuals, we will never have to know. One thing is clear: Joseph Flummerfelt and Frauke Haasemann significantly influenced thousands of choral musicians throughout the United States and perhaps even the world through their master teaching, and the man that put them in the position to do that was Ray Robinson.
CHAPTER IV
THE WRITING OF *THE CHORAL EXPERIENCE*

Introduction

Countless textbooks address skills needed to be a choral conductor, but *The Choral Experience* by Ray Robinson and Allen Winold presents a four-fold perspective on what creates the total choral experience for both conductor and singer. Robinson defines the choral experience in this way:

Stated simply, it might be defined as an interaction between a singer and a piece of music within a group setting under the guidance of a conductor. More accurately, it is an unusual experience in communication between a composer and a singer in which the singer is able to perceive the universe in a new perspective — through the eyes of the composer. This extraordinary act is accomplished through an empathic relationship between the singer and the conductor which allows both, at least for the moment, to participate with the composer in the creative act.\(^6\)

It was this ability to create an empathic relationship between conductor and singer that Robinson so admired in John Finley Williamson. Robinson describes this empathic relationship as an essential component of the choral art. The choir is trained to such an extent that even the most subtle gestures from the conductor evoke a very specific learned response on the part of every singer. Robinson felt that this empathic relationship was missing in many choirs, and this led him to hold regular meetings during his first year at Westminster to explore how the college could make sure that its graduates would leave with the ability to create this relationship in their choirs. Through this, he discovered a conflict which led to the strong motivation for writing this book.\(^7\)

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\(^7\)Ray Robinson, interview by author, 14-16 June 2006, Boulder, tape recording, University of Colorado, Boulder.
Motivation for Writing

The reason for writing *The Choral Experience* came from the existence of three different schools of thought on vocal training that were present on the Westminster campus early in Robinson's presidency (1969 – 1974). None of these three divisions were necessarily wrong, but they needed to realize that they must coexist rather than fight against one another.

Each school of thought had clear leaders, and it is no surprise that the first division followed what they believed were the ideals of John Finley Williamson. His followers were very loyal to him even though his philosophies did not always make sense. In fact, his teachings changed from time to time, making it difficult to accurately describe what the pillars were. The following will serve to describe what Williamson’s followers sought to perpetuate after he left Westminster.

Williamson believed that a good choir was the result of the choir being comprised of fine singers. There is nothing particularly wrong with this idea, but it is a very singular idea of what a choir will sound like. For example, if a choir is formed by the best opera singers in the world, it is not necessarily going to be the best choir. They will most likely be unable to sing a variety of styles well. This was typical of Williamson’s choirs. While someone like F. Melius Christianson of St. Olaf College believed that the choir should tune to the vowel, Williamson believed that you tune to the best voices.71

Williamson focused on tone. His method of producing this heavy sound involved pushing down the larynx and resulted in a great deal of out-of-tune singing. Williamson focused primarily on producing a particular tone instead of giving singers good vocal training. Williamson went through different periods, one of which was in 1941 when all

71 Robinson, Interview.
the soldiers went away to war and all they had in the choirs were women and community singers who filled in during the war years. He brought people around him who were not singers, and he tried to teach them to sing with this very “hooty” kind of approach. When the GIs came back after the war, they were older and he liked that big sound because it was needed when singing pieces like Brahms *Ein Deutches Requiem*, so that the vocal sound would cut through a large orchestra. His choirs were vocally very heavy with a very dark sound and thus unable to sing successfully in the style of Bach or the Renaissance and medieval period.72

Howard Swan described Williamson’s approach to choral singing in the following way:

> In sum, every precept and technique taught and practiced by School A is directed toward the physical, musical, and emotional maturation of the individual singer. Because of this basic principle, a choir trained by these methods sings with a tone that is big, dark, intensive, and colorful. This last term carries the implication that a singer is less restricted in the nature of his tonal contribution to the sound of the total ensemble than perhaps is true of those trained by other methods and who strive for different objectives. An A choir sings with an unusual balance, that is, not equally distributed among the sections of the chorus. The singers will not produce an impressive blend, their precision in attack and release possibly may be accomplished in a superior fashion, the softer dynamics will not be forthcoming, and clarity of articulation is commendable but often is gained at the expense of a legato flow in the line. Together with all choral attributes, phrasing is conceived as the result of mood or emotion. The interpretive process takes place when the conductor learns for himself the mood expressed in a composition and then by intensity from within gives to his group the same mood. They in turn project this to the listeners. The conductor never forces his chorus to do his will; he allows his singers to create for themselves. The audience will listen because emotion is universal. In the last analysis every facet of choral endeavor is dictated by mood.73

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72 Ibid.


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As Robinson traveled the country, he learned that many people actually believed that Westminster Choir College ruined voices. They said that the good singers from Westminster never lasted very long as professional singers because their voices always gave out. This was a reflection of the Williamson era. He was a voice teacher who lost his voice.\(^7\)\(^4\)

Despite Williamson’s shortcomings as a vocal pedagogue, he was still an important pioneer in the field of choral music. He had the ability to convince people of the need for a school like Westminster, and he was able to surround himself with people who would make it into the school it would become. Warren Martin (1916 – 1982) was one of those people. Although he was primarily a self-taught musician who had only Williamson’s training, he was brilliant and a good musician. Martin and his good friend Elaine Brown (1910 – 1997) represent the second school of thought on vocal training that was present on the Westminster campus.\(^7\)\(^5\)

Warren Martin served on the faculty of Westminster Choir College from 1950 until his death in 1982. He taught courses in theory, composition, and conducting, conducted the Westminster Choir, and served as music director of Westminster. Elaine Brown held a faculty position at Westminster on three separate occasions: 1935-36 as piano professor, 1962-64 conducting teacher, and 1970-71 as conductor of the Westminster Choir. She is known best as the founder Singing City in Philadelphia, an organization, still in existence today, founded to unite different cultures through singing. Since there was no director of choral activities at the time, Robinson asked her to take the

\(^{74}\text{Robinson, Interview.}\)

\(^{75}\text{Ibid.}\)
Westminster Choir on tour in 1971. Her response was that she would only do it if Warren Martin trained the choir.\textsuperscript{76}

Warren Martin and Elaine Brown represented the idea that all styles of music could not be sung in the same way. They felt that there had to be better musicianship at Westminster for the school to remain a frontrunner in vocal training. This put them in conflict with the Williamson school of thought because they were interested in more than just producing a signature tone. Williamson himself was not a good enough musician to concentrate on anything other than tone. It was not that this second school of thought did not think tone was important; rather they viewed tone as a plural instead of singular idea. Choirs must also have strong musicianship.\textsuperscript{77}

The arrival of Joseph Flummerfelt in 1971 introduced the third school of thought. Flummerfelt studied with Elaine Brown while pursuing his Master's degree at the Philadelphia Conservatory, so he understood the importance of strong musicianship and applying proper performance practice to singing. Robinson felt that Flummerfelt placed a lot of emphasis on notes and rhythm, but Flummerfelt described his approach as combining technical aspects of singing with a "deep human connection to the music."\textsuperscript{78}

Obviously all the technical aspects must be in place. For me, it is essential to build in the disciplines of pitch, rhythm, and line so that the choir becomes a living organism that moves and breathes through its own heartbeat. Then the conductor is free to shape the long line and to intimately influence color. Also, the choir must understand the text and how the human gesture implied by the text influences the musical gesture. Further, in every moment of the process, we try to


\textsuperscript{77}Robinson, Interview.

\textsuperscript{78}Robinson, Interview; Flummerfelt, Interview.
make music and to encourage the flexibility that comes from being connected to
the moment, thus allowing musical decisions to emerge spontaneously.\textsuperscript{79}

Although a student of Elaine Brown, Flummerfelt seems to exhibit the ideas of
Robert Shaw more in his approach to choral tone. Howard Swan also discusses Shaw's
ideas as School “F” in the Decker/Herford book. Swan describes the sound of a Robert
Shaw choir in the following way:

We hear: Vigorous tone; \textit{elasticity} in tone; rhythmic elements sounding as though
they are sensed or felt by the singers; diction used primarily to shape a musical
phrase; evidence of sound always in motion; variable and exciting uses of color;
tone quality correlating and implementing other interpretive elements of musical
sound and interpretation divorced from the score.\textsuperscript{80}

Flummerfelt placed such emphasis on rhythm because of the Shaw idea that “poor
intonation is due in part to a poor rhythmic sense.”\textsuperscript{81}

The introduction of Frauke Haasemann into the mix of vocal training at
Westminster Choir College did not bring a significant “change” in philosophy as
evidenced by conversations with students at that time:

Frauke was a good counterpoint to Flummerfelt both in her expertise and
personality. I never thought of Frauke’s expertise as filling a deficiency in
Flummerfelt’s expertise. I always thought of it as helping to augment what was
going on, to fulfill his vision.\textsuperscript{82}

Just about the time that Robinson realized that all of these ideas (tone,
musicianship, performance practice, and vocal training) needed to be brought together,
the Harper and Row Company approached him about writing a book. He had no
ambition to publish any books when he went to Westminster, but he saw this as the


\textsuperscript{80}Swan, 52.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid; Steven Demorest, interview by author, 14 March 2007, tape recording, via telephone,
McKenzie.

\textsuperscript{82}Demorest, Interview.
perfect opportunity to document how all these schools of thought needed to come together in order for Westminster to be a successful school of vocal music. Harper and Row was expanding their textbook offerings substantially, and they were making a huge attempt to publish textbooks in as many fields as possible. They came out with close to forty books. Of these forty books, The Choral Experience is the only one that is still in print. According to Waveland Press, who reissued the book in 1992, The Choral Experience continues to be a strong seller as evidenced by the number of copies sold over the past five years.  

Table 3: Number of Copies Sold of The Choral Experience

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<thead>
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<td>2004</td>
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Collaboration with Allen Winold

To truly cover the principles of the choral experience, Robinson realized that he needed to bring in a theory expert to write chapters on the importance of basic musicianship training. That person was Allen Winold. In addition to the chapters on musicianship, Robinson and Winold contributed equally to the chapters on performance practices.

Allen Winold is Professor of Music (emeritus) of the Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University. He served as a member of the faculty and administration of the School of Music from 1956 -1993, and he still carries out various teaching and

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83 Robinson, Interview.
administrative tasks as an emeritus professor. He has written books in music theory and
music history and is also an accomplished violinist and violist.\textsuperscript{84}

Winold is not without significant experience in choral music as well. He was the
director of youth choirs in the Westwood Methodist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio;
conductor of the Wilmington (Ohio) College Choir, and conductor of three choral groups
in the Columbus State Psychiatric Hospital, where he served three years of alternate
service as conscientious objector during the Korean War.\textsuperscript{85}

Allen Winold describes Ray Robinson as one of his oldest and dearest friends in
music. They first met in August of 1956 while students at Indiana University and quickly
discovered that they had several common musical interests: they both played the viola,
loved choral music, had a fondness for the often undervalued works of Mendelssohn, and
they were (and still are) idealists who wanted to help people come to love music as much
as they did.\textsuperscript{86}

Winold gives all credit to Robinson for the concept behind \textit{The Choral
Experience}, but Robinson is quick to give credit to Winold for his invaluable contribution
to the book.

Summary of Content

\textit{The Choral Experience} is divided into four parts: The Choral Experience,
Rehearsal Technique, Basic Musicianship, and Performance Practices. Part one devotes a
chapter to each of the following topics: The Choral Experience in Historical Perspective,

\textsuperscript{84}Allen Winold, interview by author, 16 October 2006, via email.

\textsuperscript{85}Winold, Interview.

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.
The Conductor and the Choral Experience, and The Individual Singer and the Choral Experience.

**Part One – The Choral Experience**

The historical perspective focuses on the three institutions that nurtured choral music in Western culture: the church, the school, and the singing society. The church was the most influential of the three. From the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the church was the primary patron of choral music. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of music as an absolute art form takes shape, allowing schools and amateur choral societies to have a greater influence on choral music. 87

The school’s influence in many ways was intertwined with the church because the school was so closely associated with the church in the school’s early history. The increasing difficulty of music necessitated a training program for singers. The singing society developed with a greater interest in choral singing for the nonprofessional. There was also a desire to increase the number of public concerts. 88

Chapter two relates the role of the conductor to the choral experience by beginning with a brief history of the conductor from pre-Greek times to the twentieth century. Robinson lists five requirements of a good conductor:

1. Strong leadership
2. Competent educator
3. Competent in elements of basic musicianship
4. A thorough knowledge of vocal production and pedagogy

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87 Robinson, *The Choral Experience*, 5-16.
5. An understanding that the conductor is responsible for the vocal health of
the ensemble. These requirements then lead to Robinson’s seven recommendations for the training of
the choral conductor:

1. There should be a vocal approach to choral conducting. (The choral
rehearsal is, in essence, a class voice lesson.)

2. Strong fundamental musical education especially in the areas of
sightsinging, keyboard skills, and analysis.

3. Learn the importance of teaching and relating to others

4. Study various musical styles and their performance practices. (This is a
career-long study.)

5. Training must include practical teaching experience, not just conducting
classes.

6. Training should be cross-curricular so that the student understands how
music will relate to the world as a whole.

7. Become familiar with both the aesthetic and historical perspectives of the
choral experience. Sing under master conductors as often as possible.
Develop a personal philosophy about the relationship of vocal production
to choral singing. Be a perpetual learner.

The final chapter of Part One deals with the individual singer and the choral
experience.

89 Ibid, 44-47.
90 Ibid, 49-50.
Choral singing is so popular with participants of all ages because no other musical ability accessible to the nonprofessional offers the promise of such direct involvement with the creation of beauty; no other can stimulate such a rebirth of mystery and wonder; no other can offer the individual the same liberation of the human spirit that results from the re-creative activity we call the choral experience.\footnote{Ibid, 54.}

Part Two – Rehearsal Technique

Part two of the book deals with rehearsal technique. While it is not the only factor contributing to the performance of a choir, many times the success or failure of a choir can be traced to the rehearsal technique of the conductor. The three chapters in this section are Choral Sound, Choral Diction, and Rehearsal and Performance.\footnote{Ibid, 72.}

Many factors affect the sound of a choir, and some before it even comes together as an ensemble. The sound of a choir begins with successfully auditioning and classifying voices. Conductors should consider these four things in this process: the quality (timbre) of the voice, pitch of the speaking voice, range of the voice, and the register of the voice. Posture must be addressed for both sitting and standing. Bad posture causes breath support to disappear, tone quality to deteriorate, and poor intonation.\footnote{Ibid, 74-83.}

Since good posture leads to better breathing, the book logically addresses breathing and breath control next. This section deals with all types of breathing, not just those proper for singing. For instance, he addresses clavicular breathing first since it is so undesirable for singing. Three other types of breathing are diaphragmatic, costal, and diacostal. Diacostal is the most efficient and desirable for singing because it combines...
both diaphragmatic and costal breathing. Breathing also has a psychological side. Breaths can take on certain moods which are influenced by singers mentally conceiving different moods and the conductor's gesture. Robinson suggests using various melismatic passages from Handel's *Messiah* to develop solid breathing techniques. The text contains four pages of these examples, making it easy for the conductor to use them in rehearsal.

To introduce the topic of resonance, Robinson describes the voice in terms of a three-fold machine: a vibrator (the vocal cords), a generator (the singer's breath), and a resonator (the singer's head, mouth, and throat cavities). After giving a brief explanation of the various resonators in the body, the section gives a number of exercises which "are designed to accomplish four purposes: to establish a fully resonant sound, to coordinate resonance with breathing and breath support, to develop resonance through vowel formation, and to build facility through vocalises that are constructed to establish resonance."  

Registration is somewhat of a controversial topic among voice teachers, but Robinson uses his experience as a string player to explain vocal registers:

Registers in the singing voice are similar in their behavior to registers in other instruments. A string player changes register each time he plays on a different string. This change can be delayed by extending the melodic line on the same string, but sooner or later the violinist will have to change the string when the melody soars into the upper tessitura.

The exercises that follow in the book focus on bridging the break between registers.

Choral diction is "the clear and accurate articulation of the phonetic elements of the text of a musical work for the purpose of communicating its meaning to the listener."

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94 Ibid, 96.
95 Ibid, 101.
The chapter begins with general diction rules as applied to English, and then it discusses five diction rules for five other languages in terms of English when possible: Latin, Spanish, Italian, German, and French. The chapter also utilizes the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and includes a chart showing how IPA applies to these five other languages. The chart includes another helpful aid which is not often seen: how IPA symbols translate to symbols used in the Merriam Webster dictionary. There is a representative piece for each language with IPA symbols written in under the text. This is a technique that conductors may choose to employ to assist their choirs in learning to pronounce other languages frequently used in choral music.96

Rehearsal and Performance is a broad topic for one chapter, but Robinson gives a wealth of practical information, much of it in the form of step-by-step processes. Some examples of these processes are how to make the rehearsal stimulating, how to approach problematic passages in the music, pacing the rehearsal, and introducing a new work.

The rehearsal must be prepared and organized in order to live by the rehearsal motto: “Talk little, sing a lot.” The rehearsal should always begin with a planned warm-up that is designed to improve the music currently being studied. A carefully planned warm-up sets the tone for the entire rehearsal and will help singers achieve the musical goals for that day. Preparation for the next rehearsal actually begins as soon as the current rehearsal ends because the conductor should immediately evaluate the rehearsal in order to plan the next one. Robinson also takes into account non-musical factors that affect the rehearsal. It is important to maintain “positive human relations” not only among singers but between conductor and singer as well.97

96 Ibid, 114-151.
This chapter addresses choir formation in regards to both rehearsal and performance. Robinson suggests rehearsing in a circle formation to further develop a positive group dynamic and feeling of ensemble. This develops the discipline of listening to all the parts. Individual sections can rehearse in circles in order to improve blend. In regards to performance formation, Robinson describes arrangements used by prominent choral conductors and their ensembles: F. Melius Christiansen (St. Olaf College), John Finley Williamson (Westminster Choir College), and the Robert Shaw Chorale.

When planning the performance, the conductor must give consideration to the audience as well as to performance practice. When conducting the performance, the conductor has five important responsibilities:

1. He must prepare the singers for the first entrance and subsequent entrances and changes of tempo.
2. He must provide those gestures that will establish the correct pace (tempo), dynamic level, articulation, style, and tone quality.
3. He must evoke an empathic response that will inspire and sustain the choir throughout the entire performance.
4. He must create a feeling of involvement in and commitment to the music that will communicate the inner essence of the work to the audience.
5. He must bring the movement or work to an effective and appropriate conclusion.

This is the only section in the book dedicated to gesture, and a great deal is devoted to the preparatory gesture.98

97 Ibid, 162.
Part Three – Basic Musicianship

There is an increasing demand for conductors to include basic musicianship training in the rehearsal despite the time constraints already placed on rehearsals. This section is designed to help the conductor employ lessons on rhythm, pitch, harmony and texture, and form in the rehearsal. This section reveals the expertise of Allen Winold in writing series of exercises appropriate for teaching these concepts.

The chapters on Rhythm and Pitch seek to address specific problems in each of these fairly narrow topics. The chapter on rhythm seeks to correct the problem that students “tend to see just individual notes and to hear and perform isolated individual durations rather than developing the ability to project foreground durational patterns against background metric structure.”99 Pitch presents two separate but related problems:

1. The discrimination of different pitches, or the development of sight singing skill in pitch;
2. The fine tuning of an individual pitch in relation to others, or the development of intonation.100

The chapters on Harmony and Texture and Form address aspects of music with larger dimensions. “The complete choral musician must be as aware of these larger dimensions as he is of the smaller. It is not enough for him merely to sing the right pitches at the right time; he must also be aware of the role his line plays in the overall

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99 Ibid, 209-211.
100 Ibid, 239.

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texture and the overall form of the work.\textsuperscript{101} The chapter on form gives a pedagogical approach to teaching form to an ensemble as well as two examples of analysis of contrasting choral works.

\textit{Part Four – Performance Practices}

Part Four of \textit{The Choral Experience} addresses the all-encompassing topic of performance practice. As noted earlier, Robinson and Winold divided the writing duties in these five chapters: The Renaissance Period, The Baroque Period, The Classical Period, The Romantic Period, and The Twentieth Century. Each chapter addresses the following five problems as they relate to choral music in each time period:

1. \textit{Choice of Voices and Instruments}. This would include not only the types and numbers of voices and instruments but would also include such questions as vibrato, tone quality, bowing, and other instrumental problems.

2. \textit{Problems of Notation}. These are problems relating to the interpretation of pitch, rhythm, and other symbols. Included in this category would be such matters as \textit{musica ficta} in the Renaissance, over-dotting in the Baroque, or the interpretation of signs for quarter tones in twentieth-century music.

3. \textit{Ornamentation and Improvisation}. This would cover such problems as the interpretation of specific written signs for ornamentation, the conventions and traditions applying to ornamentation that are not specifically indicated, improvisations, figured bass realization, and the performance of aleatory music.

4. \textit{Interpretation of Tempo}. This involves such problems as establishing a correct basic tempo, the possibilities of tempo modification, and the performance of rhythmic figures in various tempi.

5. \textit{Phrasing, Articulation, and Dynamics}. This includes not only such specific questions as whether to play loudly or softly or whether to play smoothly or in a detached manner, but also, in some cases, more general questions relating to the basic structure of the music.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101}Ibid, 263.

\textsuperscript{102}Ibid, 324-325.
Although intended as only an introduction to this vast topic, the authors hope that this final part of the book will encourage conductors and singers alike to base performance practice decisions on knowledge and understanding as well as sensitivity and intuition.
CHAPTER V

TEACHING PHILOSOPHIES

Introduction

Through years of experience, most teachers develop their own philosophy of teaching. That philosophy develops through individual experience (both positive and negative) as well as gleaning traits from the more-experienced. Ray Robinson has had more than the average set of experiences for an educator. The people that influenced him were, and still are, giants in the musical world. Despite all his experience as a college president and scholar, he chose to return to how his career began – teaching students. Therefore, it seems only fitting to spend this final chapter examining his teaching philosophy.

Pillars of Robinson’s Philosophy

Potential for greatness

“I guess the most important thing that a teacher has to recognize is that he or she is working with students, and those students are placed in our charge for one hour a day, or one hour a day three times a week, to bring out the potential that’s there.” Many teachers say that they teach a particular subject, but Robinson stresses the importance of teaching students first. He believes that there has been a rejection of depth both in the school and the church, yet students and parishioners alike are told not to settle for just the “gloss on top.” The result of this inconsistency is that educators fail to realize that every student has the potential for greatness.103

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When Robinson took over as director of choral activities at Palm Beach Atlantic University, many of the public school music teachers in Palm Beach County told him he would never turn that situation around. In other words, he would not be able to instill a love in the students there for the great masters like Bach, Mozart, Brahms, and Mendelssohn. Robinson found just the opposite, because he believes that an educator will never have trouble "selling" greatness. Many choral directors look only for entertainment value in the music they put in front of their choirs, thinking this is what will make them successful, but Robinson has found just the opposite to be true. By exposing students to the highest quality literature, they gain a greater respect for the art. He quotes Alfred North Whitehead to further support this idea:

Moral education is impossible without the habitual vision of greatness...An atmosphere of excitement, arising from imaginative consideration [of greatness] transforms knowledge. A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities. It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energized as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes. ¹⁰⁴

Developing the individual

In order to realize this potential for greatness in every student, teachers must seek to instill a vision of greatness in their students. This requires the teacher to develop the individual, making this pillar of Robinson's philosophy the practical side of teaching. For the choral music educator, this involves teaching basic musicianship skills and treating the choral rehearsal like a group voice lesson in order to teach vocal technique. ¹⁰⁵


¹⁰⁵ Robinson interview.
In Robinson’s opinion, this is how John Finley Williamson made Westminster Choir College successful. He took ordinary people like truck drivers and housewives, people who had singing ability but no education, and turned them into a choir. This was no average choir. Williamson’s choir toured Europe in the 1920s and received rave reviews. Robinson attributes this to the fact that Williamson saw inherent greatness in everyone.106

Williamson believed in his own ability to teach anyone who had even the most basic level of skill. Anyone can appear to be a good teacher when the only students they teach are the highly-talented, but taking the ordinary and making it great is the sign of a skilled educator.

Shepherding the flock

Robinson believes that there is much more to teaching than just academics. He recognizes that teachers need to have time for students outside of the classroom. He wants to be available to his students just like he tried to be there for his own children when they were growing up. His students knew that his door was always open. He in no way expects teachers to be available 24 hours a day, but teachers need to be there when they say they are going to be there, and when they are there, they need to give students their time. In a day where many family situations are in such decay, students need to know that someone is committed to them.107

One of the ways that Robinson showed this was arriving to rehearsals five to ten minutes early and simply standing on the podium while the students came in. He never raced in at the last minute or five minutes late. This also let students know the kind of

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106 Robinson interview.
107 Ibid.

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discipline he expected from them: be at rehearsal early so it can begin on time. Robinson believes that it is important that students know clearly what is expected of them, and this is just one of many ways that one part of Robinson’s philosophy serves to support another part.  

Commitments Required of Educators

Commitment to teaching

Saying that teachers must be committed to teaching sounds a bit redundant, but as Robinson so wisely states: “You can make your living at teaching without making a commitment to it.” In an article in which he addresses this commitment to teaching, Robinson goes on to say that “…every choral conductor is a teacher, a transmitter of knowledge and experience from one generation to another.” When a teacher fails to carry knowledge from one generation to another because it seems easier to just perpetuate the trends of the current generation, this commitment to teaching breaks down.  

Commitment to multicultural education

The United States has long been referred to as a “melting pot” of various races and ethnicities. Robinson recognized this fact as important for educators to consider when planning curriculum. While doing research in the early 1980s for long-range projections about what Westminster would look like in twenty years, Robinson learned that 51% of kindergarteners in Los Angeles that year were Hispanic. This struck fear in some at that time, but Robinson was wise enough to realize that he and others like him had to make a commitment to multicultural education. This realization proved valuable to him when teaching in such a multicultural area like West Palm Beach. Robinson cites

108 Ibid.


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that some of his most talented, serious students were of different ethnic origins than his own.\textsuperscript{10}

A commitment to multicultural education does not mean taking any emphasis away from any of the pillars of strong teaching already mentioned. To Robinson, it means recognizing where they were coming from and trying to deal with some of the issues they faced. Regarding choral music, no choir is going to perform one type of music all the time, but if they are going to perform a Hispanic piece, a gospel piece, or whatever the genre, the selections should always be the best available.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Commitment to festivals and celebrations}

Even the most serious academic situations need to be interlaced with fun and celebration. Choirs are no exception. One way to do this is to participate in some type of choral festival. Many choirs travel to exciting destinations, but a simple area choral festival can provide a fulfillment for a choir that will encourage them to strive for higher levels.\textsuperscript{12}

Robinson started a choral festival in south Florida for area colleges and universities that included individual choirs performing as well as a mass choir experience. The original participating choirs were Palm Beach Atlantic University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University, and Hobe Sound Bible College. Lasting just one day, each choir performed for a visiting clinician in the morning, rehearsed together in the afternoon under the direction of a guest conductor, and

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\item \textsuperscript{10}Robinson, "The Challenge of Choral Leadership in the Twenty-First Century;" Robinson interview.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Robinson interview.
\item \textsuperscript{12}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
ended the day in a concert which began with individual choirs and ended with the mass choir. Each choir had something different to offer, and the festival was in no way a competition. It simply provided a new, high-quality experience for each choir.

Commitment to people

Choral conductors must make a commitment to people. Robinson includes this idea in the pillars of his teaching philosophy, but he reiterates when talking about commitments because of how key it is to the choral conductor. Transitioning from the instrumental rehearsal to the choral rehearsal, Robinson realized the critical difference between conducting singers and instrumentalists. Singers do not put their instrument in a case at the end of a rehearsal; they carry it with them all the time. Therefore, choral conductors must be sure to care for the whole person because singing is so personal.

Influential Figures

Every professional can point to someone who influenced them, pointed them in the right direction in their career. For Ray Robinson, that list of people is quite impressive, but he learned something specific from each one.

Robert Shaw is the first person on the list. He never studied conducting with Shaw, as so many claim, but he had the opportunity to observe Shaw over sixteen summers at Westminster. From Shaw, he learned that choral music is hard work and you must be committed to it.113

From Wilhelm Ehmann, Robinson learned about the psychology involved in singing in a choir. In his book on choral conducting, Ehmann talks about the magic circle that exists in a choir, and a group “ethos” must be built. Robinson learned from Ehmann

113Ibid.
that “choral singing is very special and a choral group doesn’t want to let somebody in the group that isn’t competent. They’re jealous about the quality of the group.”

While living in Cambridge, Robinson lived close to David Willcocks, long-time Choir master at King’s College. They saw quite a bit of each other during those two years, and Willcocks became a great influence in Robinson’s life. Robinson related the following story about one especially memorable experience with Willcocks:

He called me up one morning, and he said, “What are you doing tonight?” and I said, “Nothing.” He said, “Do you have your viola with you?” And I said yes because I was playing in the Cambridge Early Music Group at that time. He said, “I’m conducting Messiah tonight, a reading session on Messiah, in Royal Albert Hall. I’m going to have 5,000 sopranos, 4,000 altos, etc., and I need an orchestra of 300. I want you to play viola.” So, I went down there to Royal Albert Hall, and here were thousands of people singing, and it was fun! Everybody had such a ball. Willcocks taught me the importance of having fun with music.

Though a lesser-known name, Wilfred Bain holds an important place in musical higher education as well as in the life of Ray Robinson. Bain built Indiana University into the musical powerhouse it is today. Bain’s role in Robinson’s career was described in an earlier chapter, but he taught Robinson that if someone has an idea, they should never give up on it if it is a good idea.

Robinson mentioned a number of conductors (Herbert von Karajan, Pierre Boulez, Leonard Bernstein, Kurt Masur, and Robert Shaw) with whom he came in contact while living in the northeast that influenced him. He had the most to say about

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114Ibid.
115Ibid.
116Ibid.
von Karajan and Bernstein, and in particular, a time when von Karajan conducted the Berlin Philharmonic performing Brahms' Symphony No. 4 at Carnegie Hall:

He stood there, and he closed his eyes. There was a little bit of noise in the hall, and then all of sudden with just a tiny gesture...he had this ability to mesmerize a person who was playing under him.\textsuperscript{117}

And, in regards to Bernstein:

Bernstein was influential on me in the fact that he was so alive, and the music became so alive with him. When "Lenny" got on that podium, he would dance. You can't believe how he'd dance.\textsuperscript{118}

Robinson is so grateful to have been around these types of influences, but he never set out to copy any of them; rather, he would take a principle and seek to make it his own.

Application of these Philosophies

Robinson had the chance to put all of these ideas together while teaching at Palm Beach Atlantic University in a series of classes called “Capstone” courses. Working with Tim Steele, the school’s resident musicologist, they designed four of these courses which focused on one composer while covering the major periods of music history over the four semesters. The four composers were Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Penderecki. Robinson felt it was important to cover a 20\textsuperscript{th} century composer, and given his relationship with Penderecki, it only made sense to study him. The unique thing about these courses and the reason for focusing on one composer was that each semester culminated in a class trip to trace the life of that composer. Robinson made this a

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid.
condition for his teaching these classes because he wanted the subject matter to come alive for these students.\textsuperscript{119}

For the Bach trip, they started out in Bach’s birthplace of Eisenach, worked their way through Mühlhausen to Lübeck, Berlin, and on to Leipzig. The Mozart trip began in Munich where he composed \textit{Idomeneo} and continued on to Innsbruck, Salzburg, Vienna, and the little town of Baden where Mozart composed his \textit{Ave verum corpus}. The trip included a visit to Prague where the students saw the little opera house where \textit{Don Giovanni} and \textit{La Clemenza di Tito} were performed. The Mendelssohn trip concentrated on tracing him in Germany, primarily Berlin and Leipzig. After the Penderecki course, Robinson took the entire concert choir to tour Poland.\textsuperscript{120}

These courses not only brought music history alive to the students, but it brought enjoyment to the instructor. Enthusiasm on the part of the instructor can be a great influence on students.\textsuperscript{121}

Conclusion

Most educators begin their career the way Ray Robinson ended his. (His career is far from over, but this is meant in the sense of a fulltime position in higher education.) Most people begin at a small, liberal arts college with aspirations of becoming dean of a school like Peabody Conservatory, or even president of a school like Westminster Choir College. Were it not for his commitment to the Palm Beach Symphony, he might even be tempted to go to another small college to see if he could help establish it as he did the music department at Palm Beach Atlantic University. His career path proves his

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
commitment to excellence in education, but he never claimed that it would be an easy path. He once asked Robert Shaw why he thought no one wanted his (Shaw’s) job, and Shaw’s response was, “I think that they’re not willing to work hard.” Perhaps that is what led Robinson to conclude his remarks about his teaching philosophy with the following statements: “You should only go into music if you can’t go into anything else. If you go into music half-hearted, you become a half-hearted conductor or teacher or influencer.” And, “Never stop studying, never stop working, and never stop trying to perfect your skills.”

\[122\] Ibid.
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