

Conversations with Charles Dodsley Walker, Part II

Neal Campbell

Part I of this interview was published in the March 2010 issue of *THE DIAPASON*. Charles Dodsley Walker celebrated his 90th birthday on March 16. He is a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists and is the founding director of the Canterbury Choral Society, which he began in 1952 at the Church of Heavenly Rest—a position he still holds, preparing and conducting three concerts per season. Part I ended with Mr. Walker about to leave for France to serve as organist at the American Cathedral in Paris.

NC: So, you're in Paris.

CDW: Yes, I'd longed to go to France; this was my first time there. I'd been to a French-speaking country during the war—Algeria, on the way to Sicily. At Trinity College, I had immersed myself in the study of the French language and culture, and this was a dream come true.

I lived in the deanery—a lovely three-story stone building separated from the cathedral by a garden. The church sexton was a man named Lucien; he was also a master chef, and he did a lot of things beside dust the church pews off, I'll tell you that! I lived there on the top floor of the deanery, and he would come up and wake me up in the morning with a plate of what he called *paingrillé*, which was a word I hadn't learned in my study in French, but it turns out it was actually two words, *pain* and *grillé*—toast.

NC: Quite a few well-known American organists have held that post, haven't they?

CDW: Yes, Robert Owen preceded me and Donald Wilkins followed me. They were great years over there, especially if you were a Francophile.

NC: What were services like at the American Cathedral? They were in English, I assume?

CDW: Yes, they were just as if you were here in the States. Everything was in English, we chanted the canticles and so forth.



Brahms Requiem at the American Cathedral, Paris, 1949

One of the things I tried to do was to get more Americans in the choir. I had a lot of French opera singers already in there. They'd sing [mimicking the French pronunciation of English] *oly, oly, oly, looord Gott ufosts, aven ant urse are fuel of zei gloory*, so I was trying to get more Americans, and Janet [Hayes, later Mrs. CDW] was part of that campaign after we married.

One day after service, a little man came up to talk to me and said, "I am Pierre Duvauchelle and I am the conductor of the Paris Chamber Orchestra. You have a beautiful acoustic here in the cathedral." Well, he wanted to do a series of three or four concerts at the cathedral. And I thought quickly and said, "I will see to it that you may have the use of the cathedral, heated and lighted, for the first three concerts, and then for the fourth

concert I want to conduct your orchestra and do a concert with my chorus and your orchestra." All my life I'd wanted to do works for chorus and orchestra. Many of the orchestra players were members of Lamoreux Orchestra, which was an important orchestra in Paris. So we did the Palestrina *Missa Brevis* unaccompanied, of course, and then his orchestra joined us for the Bach *Magnificat*. It was recorded on acetate discs, which I still have, and it was broadcast over the Radiodiffusion Française.

I must have met Langlais by then, because I remember that he came to that concert and complimented me on the Palestrina. He also brought along a friend, a pupil I think, named Pierre Cochereau, whom I met for the first time.

Not too long after I arrived, the dean gave me a new job, in addition to the



Charles Dodsley Walker teaching aircraft recognition while in the Navy, 1944
(Official U.S. Navy photograph)

cathedral, as director of the American Students' and Artists' Center on the Left Bank—a beautiful building on what had been Chateaubriand's estate. The place had been closed up because the Germans had taken it over during the war.

NC: So this was an umbrella of the cathedral or part of its ministry?

CDW: Yes, exactly, to students in Paris. On the first floor it had a theater with a balcony. It didn't have a very big stage, more of a lecturers' stage than a theater stage. And there was a big lounge, and a billiard room. On the second floor they had a library and on the opposite wing was the director's apartment. I had administrative charge of the operations of the center.

NC: And that's where you lived?

CDW: That's where *we* lived—I was married by then. The apartment provided for the director was very comfortable. The building was designed by prize-winning architect Welles Bosworth, who

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Organ recital series, American Cathedral, Paris, 1949



Janet Hayes and Ned Rorem, American Embassy, Paris, 1950



Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Avenue and 90th Street, New York City

had been J. D. Rockefeller's architect in charge of restoring Reims Cathedral. He also designed all those buildings for MIT along the Charles River that have those rotundas. And several former Harvard students were over there—Robert Middleton, Noel Lee, Douglas Allanbrook. Leon Fleisher was there at the time, also.

NC: Those were pretty heady years to be in Paris; you must have met many well-known persons?

CDW: Yes, including Poulenc, and notably Nadia Boulanger, whom I had known from her time in Cambridge while I was at Harvard. A lot of people were studying with her in Paris in those days. Janet studied with her. She was Nadia's favorite singer, and everyone said she sang French songs better than the French did.

NC: Boulanger didn't teach voice, did she?

CDW: No, she had been a very close friend of Fauré, and coached singers working on his songs. She didn't exactly teach vocal technique. She said some things I don't agree with. For instance, she would say—I forget exactly how she put it, but something like "Oh, you don't have to sing those songs in a sexy way." Well, many of Fauré's songs are incredibly sexy and you *do* need to bring that across. Her forte was teaching composition.

One thing that Nadia did that *was* influential was that every Wednesday she had a salon—a sort of open house—and young people who liked to trail on the footsteps of the stars would pop in on Wednesday afternoons.

Actually, you were supposed to know her to show up at these. Well, one of the times I was there, Robert Shaw, who I guess had heard of these, showed up, and apparently he didn't know her. I was sitting there with several others, and the doorbell rang, and Nadia asked if I would answer the door, and when I did, it was Robert Shaw. I brought him in, introduced him, and Nadia was sitting there like a grand dame, which she was!

So, he sat down and the rest of that afternoon the conversation was all about how difficult it was to find a garage to park your car in Paris. There wasn't a word about Fauré and his use of modality or anything musical like that! This is what was going on, and she was just being friendly, and I don't recall her addressing a word to Bob Shaw. Nothing! It was funny.

NC: Poulenc?

CDW: For some reason, I remember having dinner with him at an outdoor restaurant on one of those avenues that lead up to the Opéra. He hadn't even written his now-famous *Gloria* at this time. He gave quite a few small concerts with singers. There was this singer named Pierre Bernac, and Poulenc would accompany him. I'd run into them a couple of times and we were just friendly.

NC: Ned Rorem must have been around in those days.

CDW: Yes, Janet did a concert with

him at the American Embassy; he accompanied her. One of the things Boulanger did was to act as a resource to the American ambassador in Paris in providing Franco-American musicians for concerts of the Cultural Relations of the American Embassy. And on this concert Janet sang some of Ned's songs.

Janet had gone to the New England Conservatory on the recommendation of Eleanor Steber, and she won the Frank Huntington Beebe award for study abroad, which is what brought her to Paris. She knew Ned at the New England Conservatory and he dedicated a piece to her—A *Sermon on Miracles*, which we performed in his presence at the Church of the Heavenly Rest many years later, in 1973.

We also toured throughout Germany during the summers of 1950, '51, and '52 under the auspices of the United States Department of State as part of a cultural exchange program established after the war. The state department wanted to present our musicians so the German people wouldn't think we were all barbarians. That was the whole point. There were American artists, poets, authors, and musicians presenting their work all over Germany. We performed in forty different cities in West Germany during those summers, playing a lot of American music, including works by Sowerby, Piston, Bingham, Pinkham, Lukas Foss, and Rorem—that was part of the propaganda to show the Germans that we had composers and performers, and that we cared about these things.

While we were there we crossed paths with Daniel Pinkham and a young violinist named Robert Brink, who were touring doing the same thing.

NC: There must have been many Americans with whom you rendezvoused in Paris?

CDW: Yes. Clarence Dickinson and Seth Bingham paid courtesy calls at the cathedral. Thornton Wilder was a member of the bridal party for a wedding I was playing, and I was introduced to him as if I were being introduced to the next-door neighbor. A lot of people found their way to the American Cathedral.

NC: Edouard Nies-Berger?

CDW: Yes, he visited at the cathedral and at the Students' and Artists' Center. He was a very friendly man. I also met Hugh Giles over there. I'd only spent a year in New York before coming to Paris, so I hadn't met many of the big name organists until they came through Paris.

NC: Tell me about the organ recital series you organized at the American Cathedral.

CDW: When I got there I found out what a wonderful organ it was. It had been a big three-manual Cavaillé-Coll. In 1930 it was enlarged, and a fourth manual added. It was one of the very few organs in France at that time with capture combination action. Leaving all that aside, it was a real Cavaillé-Coll, with wonderful reeds and an abundance of everything you wanted. The Solo division was not so big. It was built by Maison Pleyel, successors to Cavaillé-Coll,



Bach, *St. Matthew Passion*, Canterbury Choral Society, Good Friday, 1957

and they had been sent to Ernest Skinner in America in order to learn from him. The result was that it was a rather typical E. M. Skinner Solo division. It had nice strings, a French Horn, one of the few in France, a Tuba Mirabilis, and a Philomela which was huge! No chorus reeds, but, of course, there were 16, 8, and 4 reeds on the Great.

Anyway, I saw this organ and thought it would be nice to have a recital series. So I told the dean I'd like to invite a bunch of famous French organists to play on this organ, and he said "Fine, go ahead." I wish I could remember the fee we paid them, but it was ridiculously small. I think it was 10,000 francs, which was about \$30.

So, I picked up the phone—believe it or not—and called Marcel Dupré, whom I had met through Clarence Waters in this country. He was the only one I knew, and I didn't call him Marcel, either! It was "Maitre, would you be willing to play on a series on this organ? I want to help raise the reputation of the American Cathedral as an artistic center in Paris." He agreed and I thanked him,

and put the phone down. Then I called André Marchal, and repeated my story, saying that Dupré had agreed to play, and would you do it, and he said yes. Of course, if Dupré hadn't agreed to do it, it might have been a different story. I didn't know Marchal from a hole in the ground! It was the same with Langlais, Messiaen, and Duruflé. These names were legend, even back then.

Then I called up Mlle. Boulanger, telling her that I had asked each of these eminent organists to conclude with an improvisation, and asked her to submit the themes for each of these players. I must have caught her at a weak moment and she agreed. As it turns out, I had to chase her up each week to get the themes in time for the recital. It wasn't that she gave me all five at once in advance.

NC: Was that part of the promotional packaging of the series, that she would be supplying the themes?

CDW: It wasn't on the advertising, but on the program I inserted a little slip sheet stating that the themes for each of the improvisations had been kindly submitted

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At an event with AGO president Harold Heeremans, 1960

by Nadia Boulanger. The recitals were a week apart in Lent, and there were big crowds and wide newspaper coverage.

NC: How did the organ in the American Cathedral stack up in comparison with the famous Paris organs?

CDW: Well, for one thing, it was in better tune than any of the others, and that was because of the Germans. They had taken over the cathedral and used it as their army church. Say what you will about their politics, but by golly if they were going to have a *Wehrmachtskirche*, it was going to have an organ that was in tune. So the organ was in great shape when I got there. It was amazing.

NC: Did you have an opportunity to hear any of these organists in their own churches?

CDW: Very little. Duruflé, for example, at St.-Etienne-du-Mont didn't have the organ; it was down. I don't think he had any organ to play. With all my duties, I didn't get to other churches very often. In retrospect, I certainly wish I could have heard more. I did go to Ste. Clotilde from time to time, because I was very close to Langlais.

One thing that might be of interest is my impressions of these great men as they came to the cathedral to practice. For one thing, I was . . . skeptical is too strong a word, but I was not convinced that every note that Messiaen wrote down was for real, or whether he was trying for effect in one way or the other. But of all those organists, Messiaen was the one who practiced the longest; he actually got me in there and asked me to play some passages (and I'd never even played any of his music, but he wanted

to hear what it sounded like out in the church). And before he came to practice he said, "you know, I want to have some time there *pour choisir mes couleurs*, to choose my colors." And he went way up in my estimation. But he was the most concerned that it be a good recital.

The main thing I remember about Duruflé was that he arrived at the appointed time outside the cathedral riding a bicycle.

NC: How did you happen to go back to New York?

CDW: One of the real reasons I wanted to come back was, as you can imagine, that I was so busy being the director of the Center—I think we had five or six hundred members. It wasn't a musical job at all, but it was my full-time job, and the cathedral position was secondary.

So when I found out that Heavenly Rest had an opening, I made every effort to look into it. It was the Rev. Richard R. P. Coombs, who had been a tenor in my choir in Cambridge and who had gone to seminary during the war, and who had told me of the opening at the Paris Cathedral—he was now the curate at Heavenly Rest and told me of the vacancy there.

NC: So he had a hand in your going to Paris and in your coming back to New York?

CDW: He did!

NC: What sort of process did you have to go through when you applied for the job?

CDW: I simply wrote to anybody who was anybody who knew my work—Frank Sayre [the Very Rev. Francis B. Sayre,



At a rehearsal of Haydn's *Creation*, with Ara Berberian, Blake Stern, and Louise Natalie, 1960

Jr.), Eddie West at the Cathedral [Canon Edward N. West, later Sub-Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York]—I mean personal friends who were in a position to be helpful and who knew my work.

NC: What was the musical tradition at Heavenly Rest as you found it?

CDW: For one thing, there was an assistant organist I inherited, so that made a smooth transition. I had never heard a service there previously, but my impression was that it was pretty run of the mill. They did have a men and boys choir, but with some female ringers in it. One of my so-called claims to being a candidate was that I was considered experienced at dealing with boys. And I built up that choir a lot, until, one fine day when every one of the best boys I had, every one of them—let's say there were thirty kids, and the eight best ones either went off to prep school or their voices changed. And with what I had left, I felt I really couldn't do the repertoire, so I wrote the vestry saying I thought we needed to strengthen the women's sections, and from that time you really couldn't say it was a boy choir.

Still, we continued to have a boy choir as a separate choir, and we did lots of

things, including several television performances: one with Victor Borge, on a program at Christmas time—just because it was Christmas time and I had a boys' choir.

Talk about TV—I did later do a program with CCS with Robert Merrill on "I've Got a Secret," and the secret was the star, it was his birthday. So, in the course of the show, they had a barber-shop quartet sing "Happy Birthday" to him. Then they laughed and scratched for a while, then a larger group came in and they sang "Happy Birthday" to him. And they laughed and scratched and did some more things. Meanwhile, there was a stage at the other end of the studio with the curtains closed, and at the given point, the curtains were opened and there were one hundred members of the Canterbury Choral Society and Robert Merrill in the middle of them to put the finishing touches of "Happy Birthday" in a paraphrase of a Mozart opera chorus, as I recall. That was a lot of fun.

NC: What was the organ like at Heavenly Rest as you found it?

CDW: It was a 1929 Austin, and it had either three or four 8-foot diapasons on the Great and they were all leather lipped. It was a big four-manual organ, with a typical complement of stops on each division, except it only had about four ranks in the Pedal! It did have a drawknob console. Anyway, it was like a whole set of foghorns.

NC: It must have been quite a difference from the Cavallé-Coll at the Paris Cathedral?

CDW: It sure was! I had correspondence with G. Donald Harrison about ways to improve the organ, and he suggested ways to brighten up the Great reeds, which Austin revoiced to have a little more overtone interest, a little more French sound. Of course I later had Austin completely renovate the organ.

NC: I'm eager to hear you talk about the beginnings of the Canterbury Choral Society.

CDW: Well, one day the rector came to me and said, "Charlie, all the big churches have Evensong on Sunday afternoons at 4:00. The Cathedral has Evensong, St. Thomas has Evensong, St. Bartholomew's has Evensong. What's the matter with us? Let's have some Evensong services." So I said, "Well, you know we have a paid choir, you're talking about some serious changes in the budget." He said, "Just get a bunch of volunteers." [Huge laughter from each of us.] And so I said, "Yes, sir." So I talked to some of the paid singers and asked if they would volunteer to start this Evensong choir and they said they would.

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Charles Dodsley Walker in rehearsal, 1960

NC: Did he have in mind doing this every Sunday?

CDW: I think he did, but we started out doing them just in Advent.

NC: Did he have any idea what he was asking for, do you think?

CDW: No!

NC: Was this typical of his approach to work?

CDW: No, he was really a fine man and smart, but he just had this idea and hadn't really thought it out. I can imagine that from other clergy I've known! [More laughter.] Anyway, some of the members in the choir were personal friends by this time and said that they would try it for a while, and so forth. And one of the vestrymen was a former member of the Harvard Glee Club, and he said he would be glad to volunteer to sing bass. He had a daughter who taught at the Chapin School, and he talked her into getting friends of hers from Chapin to come sing in this volunteer Evensong choir.

So, I said we were going to do a chorus from *Messiah* on each of the first three Sundays in Advent, and on the fourth Sunday we would get some instruments and do the entire first part of *Messiah*. It was quite successful; we had between thirty and forty singers, and the soloists were professionals from the church choir. In every case, the choir outnumbered the congregation. So the rector said, "OK, we're not the Cathedral, we're not St. Bartholomew's, we're not St. Thomas, nobody's coming to our Evensongs, so let's forget it."

Then, when I told the chorus that they were no longer needed, they said "We like singing here and want to keep coming." This was Advent of 1951, after I arrived in January.

So, I asked, "How would you like to sing Brahms *Requiem*?" And they said, "Wonderful." And more people joined. So we put on the Brahms in the spring of 1952. We billed ourselves as the Oratorio Choir of the Church of the Heavenly Rest.

The concert was a success. We had harp and timpani in addition to the organ accompaniment, which was played by my assistant, Marion Engle. Anyway, after we did this successfully, we had a meeting and everyone wanted this organization to be permanent. So I said, "Well, we've got to have a name for ourselves, how about the Carnegie Hill Choral Society?" You know that part of Manhattan is called Carnegie Hill, the Carnegie mansion is across the street from the church. They felt that it sounded too much like Carnegie Hall Choral Society, and so forth, and someone suggested Canterbury Choral Society. We were Anglican, after all, even though this was to be a community chorus, and so the name chosen was Canterbury Choral Society.

At this time it was rare to have an orchestra in church. I think Trinity Church may have had one on Ascension Day, and St. Mary the Virgin from time to time. But the norm was to do oratorios with organ accompaniment, and there were organists who did it very well—I've mentioned David McK. Williams. But performing these works with the instrumentation as envisioned by the composer was something I really wanted to do. Of course this took money, so we set up a system of membership—friends, sponsors, and so forth. For the first season of this new plan, we had two sponsors at \$25 each, and one was my father!

NC: Was this under the aegis of the church?

CDW: It was a choir of the church, but membership was open to anyone who could pass the audition. I handled it as a choir of the church, in that the professional singers of the church choir were required to sing in it, and the assistant organist was the accompanist. But a big part of my time in those days was spent raising money for this new organization.

NC: From a practical point of view, this must have doubled your work load: a big additional choir and



With Jean Langlais, 1967

fundraising duties. Did the church recognize this in any way, such as a salary raise?

CDW: It was more work, but not more compensation. I was making \$4,000 a year, and I don't think they raised that in my first decade at the church. But I loved what I was doing, and I had a nice school job. From 1952–61 I was director of music at Kew-Forest School out on Long Island in Forest Hills. Up until then, I really had been living from hand to mouth. The school had a Hammond organ, and the headmaster loved organ music and was thrilled to have someone on his staff who knew about the organ. I was involved in the Guild more and more at that time, and he would excuse me from staff meetings and classes when Guild duties conflicted. His name was Dr. James L. Dixon, and he was a lovely person to work for. I distinctly remember the job paid \$3,400. Well, to jump from \$4,000 to \$7,400—it was just wonderful! Of course, it was hard working two jobs.

By the way, it so happens that one of my students there was Donald Trump. He was one of these kids who needed personal attention. There would be twenty kids in the room and you'd have to focus on him. He could sing all right, but he was difficult.

The next big thing that happened is that Eleanor Steber came into the picture. She was a big star at the Met by this time, but we had known her previously and we were together at a dinner party one night. After dinner and much of our host's fine Perrier Jouet champagne, I went up to her and said, "Eleanor, my choral society is going to be singing the Brahms *Requiem* with orchestra in about a month and a half and I don't have a soprano soloist yet; will you do it?" And she said, "Brahms *Requiem*, I love that work—sure, I'll do it." For \$100, by the way! [Laughing.] She sang for me once again and I paid her \$100, and she sent it back! She wasn't interested in the money, she was a good friend. I mean, she was a big star at the Met by this time, singing all the Mozart operas, *Rosenkavalier*, and so forth. She also had a radio program. This was in 1955 and she was really famous.

So, having secured Eleanor Steber to sing the soprano solo, I pulled out the same technique I had used in Paris! I picked up the phone and called John Brownlee, one of the leading baritones at the Met who worked with Eleanor all the time, especially in Mozart operas. And I said, "Mr. Brownlee, I'm doing the Brahms *Requiem*, isn't it a wonderful

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With Lee Hastings Bristol, Jr., 1972



As the new president of the AGO on the cover of *MUSIC*, 1971

work?" "Oh, yes it's a wonderful work," he replied in his deep voice. And I continued, "Eleanor Steber is going to be my soprano and I need a really good baritone. Would you do it?" [Laughing] He was an Australian, did you know that?

NC: I did not know that.

CDW: So he said [Imitating an Australian accent] "Well, if Eleanor is going to do it, of course I'll do it. Count me in." So, that really packed the house. This was our third season, March 1955. I was just lucky to have an "in" with a couple of these prominent people.

And then, I'd call up people I didn't know who were at the Met, and just asked them. I had Jean Kraft as my alto, and Shirley Love, Ara Berberian—he was an old friend. I gave him his first paid date in New York.

NC: In a nutshell, it sounds like the Canterbury Choral Society took off right from the start.

CDW: Yes, it really did. The next thing we had Eleanor for was the Mozart C-minor Mass. She was soprano I and Phyllis Curtin was soprano II. Mack Harrell was the bass, and David Lloyd was the tenor.

NC: I sense that the social aspect of CCS is important now. Was it always?

CDW: I think it was. And I think that perhaps is the thing that differentiates it from many other choral groups. They love to party. And they love to sing.

NC: I know that you later presented the Mahler Eighth Symphony at regular intervals, but prior to that, what were some of the early high points?

CDW: We did the Berlioz *Te Deum* at the Cathedral [of St. John the Divine] and that was tremendous. I struck up a friendship with Hugh Ross, who was a leading musician of the city for years. He was the director of the Schola Cantorum, which did all of the choral work with the New York Philharmonic; he taught at Spence School and Hewitt School, and his kids,

David and Grace, sang in my choir. It was he who put the idea in my head that there are lots of important choral works that feature children's choirs, and encouraged me to do that. So, for this Berlioz we had scores and scores of children in the chorus, from Brearley School chorus—this was in 1968 and I was already teaching at the Chapin School, so we had the Chapin Chorus, and others . . . lots of children.

NC: What prompted you to have the concert at the cathedral, as opposed to Heavenly Rest? Space?

CDW: In addition to that, we were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Church of the Heavenly Rest, and I took the position that we ought to observe the occasion at the cathedral church.

NC: Was this the first time CCS had held a concert off the campus of Heavenly Rest?

CDW: [Thinking for a while.] No. Nineteen fifty-nine was the 200th anniversary of Handel's death, so all the musicians of New York collaborated in a citywide Handel festival. I decided to do Handel's *Samson*. We did that at St. Thomas Church, since it was in Midtown nearer where the other concerts were held. Ara Berberian sang the bass lead. We also had a choir of girls, because in *Samson*, Delilah has an entourage that in the score is called "Delilah's Virgins," but I called them, to be discreet, "Delilah's Handmaidens." [Much laughter.] Anyway, it was broadcast by the Voice of America all over the world. I got a tape of it later. So that was a big event, in 1959.

And then our appearances on television . . . I guess it was in the 1950s that we did the most TV dates.

NC: Was there someone at the church in broadcasting who facilitated these appearances?

CDW: As a matter of fact, yes. The father of two of my choirboys—one of whom was Philip Morehead, who later became the director of the Chicago Lyric Opera Chorus—was related to the director of the CBS studio orchestra, so I did have an entree through him. And some good-looking gal in CCS was the casting director of "I've Got a Secret." That's how we got on that show with Robert Merrill.

NC: You worked with a lot of well-known soloists over the years. At the risk of appearing to be name dropping, who among them stands out?

CDW: Well, in addition to Eleanor Steber and John Brownlee whom I mentioned . . . Adele Addison who sang a lot; people like Robert Shaw used her.

Donald Gramm was a star at the Met, and he sang a lot for us, particularly the Vaughan Williams *Five Mystical Songs*, I remember. He was just one of those people I was fortunate enough to be able to call and ask, "Are you available on May 14?" and he would if he could.

Louise Natale was the soloist at Riverside Church for Richard Weagley, and she was really wonderful. I remember



Teaching at the Chapin School, 1975



Conducting Mahler's Eighth Symphony, Carnegie Hall, 1987

particularly a Haydn *Creation* she did—a very good, really top-notch singer, and very funny and down to earth. I think her husband was a firefighter in Nutley, New Jersey, or someplace like that.

And I've mentioned Ara Berberian. He had been a lawyer, and he was in the Army Chorus in Washington. He sang in the Heavenly Rest choir for a while when he first came to New York.

The first time I did the Verdi *Requiem*, I had Ellen Faull as the soprano. The mezzo was Rosalind Elias, who was a big star at the Met and a friend of Janet's from New England Conservatory. I then found out that these two were part of a road company that would travel around the country giving concerts. And the other two were Gabor Corelli, another Met singer, and Louis Sgarro, whom I remember particularly as being mentioned by the announcers at the Met broadcasts. So I thought it was really something to have four well-known Metropolitan Opera stars to sing my Verdi *Requiem*! And we packed them in.

We did the Bloch *Sacred Service*, and Arthur Wolfson, the cantor of Temple Emanu-El, sang the part of the cantor. We did it again with Howard Nevison, who was an excellent cantor at Emanu-El after Wolfson.

Seth McCoy . . . he sang with us several times . . .

NC: Was that ever an issue at Heavenly Rest in those days? The racial thing?

CDW: Yes . . . yes it was. You know there's a kook in every crowd, and . . . you remember Richard Neel who sings in CCS?

NC: Yes.

CDW: He went to some advanced-

type school, his mother was quite a liberal thinker for that era . . .

NC: She was the famous artist, Alice Neel?

CDW: Yes. Richard and his brother sang in my boy choir, and we encouraged the boys to bring in friends. The choir up to that point was lily white, and Richard brought in this African-American boy; I auditioned him, and he was good! So I took him into the choir. I later got a phone call—I remember the unpleasant tone of the voice—from the mother of one of the other boys in the choir saying, "you took a black boy into the choir without consulting with us." And I said, "Yes, I did!"

NC: Did it ever go further than that? To the rector or vestry?

CDW: No, but can you imagine the nerve of that woman? I think I did tell the rector about it and he said that I should ignore that telephone call.

NC: You talked once about Thomas Beveridge; can you tell me a little more about him?

CDW: Tom was in my choir at the age of nine, and he was an ideal chorister in every way, bright and talented. I was honored that his father, Lowell Beveridge—one of the most distinguished members of our profession—was encouraging his boy to be in my choir. For many years I didn't see Tom, but he later became a singer, and I hired him for a performance. His father, Lowell Beveridge, was the director of music at St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University, which used to be a big job. Searle Wright was his successor. Lowell went from there to Virginia Theological Seminary.



Marriage to Lise Phillips, 2001



2004 portrait

NC: We haven't talked a lot about church life at Heavenly Rest. What were services like?

CDW: They were sort of middle-to-low church—Morning Prayer and all that. And they had lots of extremely fancy weddings, sometimes in questionable taste. The one I remember most clearly was a bride who came up to me and said, "I've been to some of your concerts and I know you know how to conduct an orchestra." I said, "Sure." She said, "I'd like to have an orchestra at my wedding," and requested that we do the *Siegfried Idyll*—you know, the piece that Wagner composed for his wife on Christmas morning. So I had to have a pretty big orchestra.

NC: Talk about the Blue Hill Troupe that you directed for a long time.

CDW: This is a wonderful organization that does Gilbert and Sullivan operas. During my time, we did every one of the thirteen operas *at least twice*, with full pit orchestra and staging, which I liked a lot. I became the director in 1955 and stayed for thirty-five years.

NC: When you left Heavenly Rest, did that alter the life of CCS?

CDW: Musically it didn't affect it at all. We had to go through all the legalities of making it an independent non-profit organization, separate from the church. We still had most of our concerts at the church, where I now had the title of Organist and Choirmaster *Emeritus*. The church gave us an office and storage space for music. But we did have to find the money to pay the professional singers and the accompanist, *and* we paid the church for using the facilities.

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NC: So as a result you had to have some fundraisers.

CDW: Yes, you're leading up to the Mahler! I first became aware of the Mahler Eighth Symphony when I was AGO president. I went into the office one day (this was back when the offices were at 630 Fifth Avenue across the street from St. Patrick's Cathedral) and picked up a copy of *Cathedral Age* [magazine of Washington National Cathedral] and read about Paul Callaway doing the Mahler at Washington Cathedral; I salivated at the idea of this huge choral work, and just wondered if we could pull this off.

So, first we programmed Part I, which is only 25 minutes long, and paired it with Jean Kraft singing the *Kindertotenlieder*. I arranged for hundreds of kids from various schools and churches to sing the *Knabenchor* and we put this on at Heavenly Rest. By then we had the tradition of doing a concert every five years at either Philharmonic Hall [later named Avery Fisher Hall] or Carnegie Hall. So the next fifth-year anniversary was in 1977. We already had Part I under our belts, so we took the bit in our teeth and hired Philharmonic Hall, and I got hold of hundreds of kids, eight soloists, and the huge orchestra. I went into it with fear and trepidation, but we pulled it off. We packed the place and did it again in '82. Then I decided to do it in Carnegie Hall in '87, then in '92, '97, '02, and of course in '07 when St. Luke's participated with us.

And we made enough money on those concerts to cover the annual deficits for the next five years. We're in a little downturn right now in this economy and need to do a bit more fund-



With Neal Campbell, 2010

raising, but that has been the pattern. But it's remarkable—it actually *makes* money! Everybody loses money on a big production like that, but we charge the market price for tickets, and have good, loyal financial backing from our friends and patrons.

NC: After Heavenly Rest, you took up a new job, didn't you?

CDW: Yes, for almost twenty years I was at Trinity Church in Southport, Connecticut, where there already existed the Trinity Chorale, a choral society. We did concerts there, and they joined with CCS on occasions, as well.

Incidentally, Lise and I were married there in the context of the regular Sunday morning service, which is sort of unusual. [Janet Hayes Walker died in 1997.] We had a full choir, and it was really wonderful. That was on January 14, 2001. I had met Lise Phillips as a singer in CCS. The wedding was a big community affair. Everyone in the church was invited to the wedding and to the reception, which was arranged by CCS. And quite a few members of Canterbury came out to Connecticut, sat up in the gallery and sang along with the church choir.

NC: What do you admire about church music or church life in general these days—what's changed for the better since the early days of your career?

CDW: [Longer pause than usual.]

NC: Maybe nothing! [Both laughing.]

CDW: No, that's a good question, one that makes you think. I think of my first

teacher as being an exemplary practitioner of the art of church music, as an organist, as a choirmaster, *and* as a teacher—Coke-Jephcott. He was a hard-working, dedicated musician in the service of the church. He was a real inspiration.

NC: I know that by nature you are an optimistic person not inclined to the negative, but from your perspective, what could be better these days?

CDW: I do think it is regrettable—that tendency on the part of some, to make musical choices reflecting the tastes of people with no musical background *at all*, with the result that music of inferior quality has, in many places, risen into such prominence in church life; whereas music of good quality could be lifting up the noble and worthy aspects of worship to their rightful place.

NC: You've never really retired, have you?

CDW: No! I just love doing what I do, playing, conducting, teaching. I would feel strange not doing it, but guess you can't do it forever. I'm just very glad to be here.

NC: As you reflect on your long career, for what would you like most to be remembered?

CDW: I feel that being a good church musician, doing your job from Sunday to Sunday, is a very worthy thing, and if you have the good fortune to be able to develop more elaborate musical programs—that's good, too. But our job as church musicians is to provide, with the resources available, the best possible music for our church, week by week. I like that. ■



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