January 2013

Mennonite Music Education In Southern Manitoba: A Descriptive Study Of Mennonite Collegiate Institute And Steinbach Christian High School

Troy Landon Toavs

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.und.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Toavs, Troy Landon, "Mennonite Music Education In Southern Manitoba: A Descriptive Study Of Mennonite Collegiate Institute And Steinbach Christian High School" (2013). Theses and Dissertations. 1601.
https://commons.und.edu/theses/1601

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeinebyousif@library.und.edu.
MENNONITE MUSIC EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA:
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE AND
STEINBACH CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

Troy Landon Toavs
Bachelor of Arts, Concordia College 1999
Master of Music, University of North Dakota 2002

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota, Grand Forks
In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota
December
2013
This dissertation, submitted by Troy Toavs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

Barbara Lewis, Chairperson

Elizabeth Rheude

Gary Towne

Royce Blackburn

Kimberly Porter

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Dr. Wayne Swisher
Dean of the Graduate School

Date

December 12, 2013
Title         Mennonite Music Education in Southern Manitoba: A Descriptive Study of Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Steinbach Christian High School

Department    Music

Degree        Doctor of Philosophy

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my dissertation work or, in her absence, by the Chairperson of the department or the dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this dissertation or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my Dissertation.

Troy Toavs
12-3-13
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ vii

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................................. ix

ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER

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

II. MUSIC EDUCATION IN MANITOBA ................................................................. 35

III. MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE ......................................................... 68

IV. STEINBACH CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL ...................................................... 138

V. SUMMARY ............................................................................................................... 201

REFERENCES............................................................................................................... 213

APPENDICES............................................................................................................... 234

Appendix A: Henry Engbrecht Interview................................................................. 235

Appendix B: Marilyn Houser Hamm Interview......................................................... 291

Appendix C: Rick Heppner Mueller Interview 1 ....................................................... 313

Appendix D: Rick Heppner Mueller Interview 2 ....................................................... 336

Appendix E: Rudy Krahn Interview ....................................................................... 358

Appendix F: Darryl Loewen Interview ................................................................... 403

Appendix G: George Wiebe Interview ................................................................... 425
Appendix H: Timothy Wiebe Interview .............................................. 461
Appendix I: James Fast and Johanna Hildebrand Interview ................... 480
Appendix J: Elroy Friesen Interview .................................................. 509
Appendix K: Henry Hiebert Interview ............................................... 547
Appendix L: Kristel Peters Interview ................................................ 586
Appendix M: Emery Plett Interview ................................................... 614
Appendix N: Harvey Plett Interview .................................................. 625
Appendix O: Roland Sawatzky Interview .......................................... 653
Appendix P: Rudy Schellenberg Interview ....................................... 665
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mennonite settlements in Manitoba (1874-1876)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mennonite Collegiate Institute in 2008</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mennonite Collegiate Institute Building with 1912 Addition</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Steinbach Christian High School in 2008</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 2013-2014 MCI Fee Schedule</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the people I interviewed for graciously spending their time answering my many questions and for their continued correspondence. I felt incredibly honored to have that opportunity. I would also like to thank Barbara Lewis, Elizabeth Rheude, Gary Towne, Royce Blackburn, and Kimberly Porter for all of their time serving on my committee and for their helpful feedback. I am especially grateful to Barbara Lewis for her numerous readings and editing of the many initial drafts that this project entailed. I would also like to thank Theresa Meyers for editing the transcripts to make them more readable. I appreciate Pastor Marvin Penner for reading my paper and calling me whenever he found mistakes. I appreciate George Wiebe’s extensive editing of his transcript so that it more accurately reflected what he wanted to say. Most of the quotations used in the chapters are from my original transcripts and may be slightly different from the transcripts in the Appendices. My friends and family have been an enormous source of encouragement and occasional prodding for which I am very grateful. My parents also assisted by helping provide the financial resources to allow me to conduct the study. Thank you all.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the music programs at Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) founded in 1889 and Steinbach Christian High School (SCHS) which has its origins in Steinbach Bible College founded in 1936. The Kanadier, Mennonites who came to Manitoba in 1874 (e.g., Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthaler), had previously rejected part-singing in Russia. However, they became more open to part-singing after they came to Manitoba. The Bergthaler in Gretna helped establish MCI. The Mennonite Brethren (MB) and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) were influential in promoting choral music among the Kleine Gemeinde in Steinbach. Steinbach Bible College became a joint effort of the MB, EMB, and Kleine Gemeinde (now the Evangelical Mennonite Conference or EMC). The Russländer (or Russlaender) who came to Canada in the 1920s, many of whom were MB, were culturally more progressive than the Kanadier and influenced both MCI and SCHS. The researcher interviewed teachers, administrators, a museum curator, visited archives, and attended a Sängerfest (or Saengerfest) at MCI and a concert at SCHS. Both schools are known for their choral programs and do similar repertoire. Regarding the religious musical heritages of the two schools, MCI is more deliberate at including German hymns and traditional favorites known as Kernlieder in their programming whereas the emphasis at SCHS is sacred music in general.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

The province of Manitoba has one of the densest populations of Mennonites in the world. The Mennonites who settled in Manitoba in the 1870s were primarily Germans from Russia who brought a mixture of musical traditions with them. These Mennonites were mostly of northern European descent and were distinctly different from Swiss and south German Mennonites (Visser, 1994). Because many of them originated from the Netherlands, Kroeker (2005) has suggested the term Dutch-Russian to distinguish them from Swiss-German Mennonites.

Mennonites began moving to the Vistula Delta region in Poland near Danzig in the mid-sixteenth century (Berg, 1985). These Polish lands then became part of the Prussian empire in 1772. By the 1780s, the Prussian government had started to put more pressure on the Mennonites to support the Prussian military by taxing them for military schools and restricting their ability to purchase land (Epp, 1974). As a result, a number of the Prussian Mennonites decided to leave for Russia. The Mennonites living in Poland had a German culture. Before the unification of Germany in the nineteenth century, German-speaking people made up a Kulturnation where “nationality was conceived through the lens of a shared culture” (Minor, 2012, p. 47). Hence, these Manitoba Mennonites are identified as Germans from Russia.
The Mennonites who remained in the Danish speaking areas continued to be influenced by the unison psalm singing music traditions of the Dutch Reformed Church. In contrast, the Mennonite groups that moved to Prussia beginning in the sixteenth century and later to Russia in the eighteenth century were influenced by the Lutheran choral and Moravian Brethren music traditions. Thus, the choral singing tradition of Manitoba Mennonites is unique to those with a Germans from Russia heritage.

Some of the Mennonites who came to Manitoba in the 1870s as well as those who came in the 1920s after the Russian Revolution (1917) also incorporated German translations of American gospel songs into their hymn repertoire while still in Russia. These gospel songs were especially popular among the Mennonite Brethren. A few Mennonite groups that had come to Manitoba in the 1870s remained committed to tradition and resisted musical innovations such as gospel music and choral singing. These traditionalists retained the old way of singing which consisted of singing embellished melodies in unison from hymnbooks without notation.

**Russian Mennonite Colonies.** In 1788, 228 of the most conservative Mennonite families in Prussia left for Russia and in 1789 they founded the Chortitza Colony (Bergmann & Krahn, 1955; Epp, 1974). Beginning in 1803 and lasting for more than 60 years (Epp, 1974), 1200 more Mennonite families emigrated from Prussia to Russia (Letkemann, 1986). This second wave of Mennonites founded the Molotschna Colony in 1804 (Bender, 1956; Krahn, 1957) along the Molotschnaya River approximately 100 miles southeast of Chortitza (Krahn & Sawatsky, 2011) just north of the Sea of Azov in what is presently the Ukraine. During the decade between the founding of the two
colonies, over 400 families emigrated from Prussia to Russia (Berg, 1985; Letkemann, 1986).

Chortitza consisted of 18 villages on a tract of land over 100,000 acres while Molotschna consisted of 58 villages on a tract of land over 300,000 acres approximately 100 miles southeast of Chortitza (Kroeker, 2005). Both of these colonies also started a number of daughter colonies resulting in a total of several hundred villages. The Russian Mennonites were poorer, less educated, and more isolated than the Mennonites who had stayed in Prussia. The Mennonites who stayed in Danzig and Prussia adopted the use of organs and the 1806 edition of the *Gesangbuch* contained printed music. The immigrants who were already living in Russia were not affected by this edition, however.

The Chortitza Colony (also known as the Old Colony) used the 1767 *Gesangbuch* which consisted of German translations of Dutch hymns. The book contained hymn texts without music notation as well as the names of the tunes to which they could be sung. *Vorsänger* (song leaders) led the unison congregational singing (Letkemann, 1986). The leader and congregation sang the tunes from memory, and over time the tunes became ornamented and embellished (Berg, 1985; Letkemann, 1986). This ornamented style of singing, which musicologists call the “Old Way of Singing”, is a phenomenon that develops among communities with declining music literacy and reliance on oral transmission (Berg, 2002). This old way of singing became the tradition “in at least some parts of the Russian Mennonite colonies for almost a century” (Berg, 2002, p. 60) and was still in practice when they started leaving for Canada in 1874. This oral tradition can
still be found among “the Old Colony Mennonite congregations of Northern Alberta, Belize, and Mexico” (Berg, 2002, p. 59).

The Mennonites who later came to Russia and settled in Molotschna had been exposed to more of the Prussian school system than the Chortitza Mennonites and had had more contact with Lutherans before leaving for Russia (Letkemann, 1986). Thus, the Molotschna Mennonites tended to be more progressive in their education and music. Many of these Mennonites had adopted the choral traditions and repertoire from Lutheran Pietists, German Baptists, and German Methodists (Berg, 1985).

The Mennonites in the Chortitza Colony became the Old Colony Church. Mennonites living in daughter colonies were still considered to be Old Colony Mennonites, but they identified themselves by the name of the daughter colony. For example, Mennonites from Bergthal would be called Bergthaler. Old Colony Mennonites tended to be conservatives who sought to preserve their heritage by means of separation from outside influence. In contrast, the Molotschna Colony’s Großekirche (big church) otherwise known as the Große Gemeinde (big brotherhood) was “the official church of the Molotschna colony” (Klassen, 1989, p. 8). Rather than seeking to keep a distinctive Mennonite identity through isolation, these Mennonites favored developing institutions and offering a broader education to preserve their religious identity. The spiritual revival movements in the Molotschna Colony resulted in the formation of other denominations such as the Kleine Gemeinde and the Mennonite Brethren.

In 1814, Klaas Reimer led a group called the Kleine Gemeinde (little brotherhood) that separated from the official Molotschna Colony church. Reimer, who was concerned that the colony’s spiritual life was too lax, wanted to restore authentic Anabaptist
Christianity (Bender, 1956; Dyck, 1993). The Kleine Gemeinde thought of musical instruments and higher education as being worldly. This group had reservations about higher education because the teachers were often hostile to the beliefs of Kleine Gemeinde students (Plett, 1987). The Kleine Gemeinde emphasized personal morality, opposed the financial support of the Russian military (e.g., Napoleonic wars), and opposed Mennonite civic leaders’ use of corporal punishment (Kroeker, 2005).

The Mennonite Brethren originated in 1860 as the result of a split in the Großekirche as a consequence of a revival movement that was precipitated by contact with Moravian and Lutheran pietists. Eduard Wüst, a separatist Lutheran pastor, was particularly influential on the Mennonites who founded the Mennonite Brethren (Dyck, 1993). Wüst’s preaching emphasized God’s free grace and an emotional response to salvation (Krahn, 1959).

Immigration to Manitoba. The first groups of Russian Mennonites to settle in Manitoba were from the Chortitza Colony and the Kleine Gemeinde segment of the Molotschna Colony in 1874. They emigrated because they believed the Russian government was impinging upon their freedom to practice their faith. These pioneer era Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba collectively became known as the Kanadier. Mennonites who chose to settle in Manitoba rather than the United States did so because the Canadian government gave them greater assurance that they would be able to run their own education system and be exempt from military service.

The Kanadier settled predominantly in two reserves set aside by the Manitoba government (Klassen, 1989). In 1874, the Kleine Gemeinde from the Molotschna Colony founded the town of Steinbach which is located in the area known as the East Reserve.
(Penner, 1959). Many of the Bergthaler Mennonites left the East Reserve and settled on the West Reserve where they could find better farmland. The names of the reserves referred to their location in respect to the Red River (see Figure 1). The terminology referring to these regions as reserves currently is typically used only in historical resources. It is interesting, however, that Klassen’s (1989) ethnomusicological research on Low German songs revealed that a Chortitza dialect could still be found on the West Reserve and a Molotschna dialect on the East Reserve.

After arriving in Manitoba in 1874, some groups of Old Colony Mennonites who had begun to sing choral music while in Russia reverted back to the old way of melismatic singing in unison. Some of the groups that had rejected choral singing in Russia (i.e., Bergthaler) embraced it in Manitoba. Of the groups that had adopted choral singing, their repertoire consisted of chorales, art music, and a few gospel songs. Other Mennonite groups that had also adopted choral singing believed that gospel style songs were better for evangelizing and were, therefore, the right music for praising God (i.e., Mennonite Brethren).

Although there are some excellent instrumentalists among Manitoba Mennonites, vocal music has traditionally been predominant in Mennonite history (Lehman, 1973). Some congregations freely adopted instruments into their services while others strictly forbade them (e.g., Kleine Gemeinde). In some communities there were musicians who secretly played instruments in every place except the church. Some of these congregations gradually adopted the use of instruments into their services (Epp, 1982; see Appendix K for Hiebert interview; Warkentin, 1971).
Among the Russian Mennonites in Manitoba of the 1870s, music practices varied according to the village from which they had come in Russia and the desire of the people in their new villages in Manitoba as to whether or not they wanted to retain the old melismatic way of singing. The Bergthaler in particular were willing to try something new. The use of *Ziffern* notation (using numbers for scale degrees) had helped the Molotschna Mennonites improve their music literacy. The Bergthaler would have also been familiar with *Ziffern* from the Old Colony Mennonite schools under Johann
Cornies’ authority back in Russia. H. H. Ewert, Mennonite Collegiate Institute’s principal from 1891 to 1934, was a Prussian from Kansas who encouraged choral singing among the Manitoba Bergthaler in the Gretna region beginning in the 1890s.

**Later migration.** There were two reasons that some Mennonites remained in Russia during the 1870s. Either they were more progressive and did not feel their privileges were in danger, or they did not have the means to emigrate. After the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), the Mennonites still in Russia were living in horrific circumstances. Beginning in the 1920s, about 20,000 more Mennonites emigrated from Russia to Canada. These immigrants became known as the *Rußländer*. One of their contributions was to prolong the usage of the German language among Mennonites in Manitoba. They differed from earlier immigrants because, while living in Russia from the 1870s to the 1920s, this group had cultivated a High German ethnic identity (Loewen, 2008) and valued higher learning (e.g., a university education). Such cultural differences between the conservative *Kanadier* and the *Rußländer* created tension in the Mennonite community in Canada. However, music leaders among the *Rußländer* helped the Mennonite choral tradition in provinces such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan to grow.

When the *Rußländer* first came to Manitoba, they had often depended on the hospitality of the *Kanadier*. Some *Rußländer* were able to live in homes vacated by the most conservative groups of *Kanadier* who had left for Mexico and other Latin American countries beginning in the 1920s. The *Kanadier* who had left were upset with Manitoba’s education acts which had resulted in an increased loss of school autonomy (e.g., compulsory attendance, increased English language requirements, abolition of denominational schools, and the requirement to fly the Union Jack flag) (Ens, 1994). The
majority of the Kanadier who remained in Manitoba assimilated into Canadian society. Meanwhile, the Rußländer became active in promoting schools and musical activity in Mennonite communities (Berg, 1985; Dyck, 1993).

**Evangelical movement.** When Mennonites began adopting English as their language of communication in North America, they found that fundamentalist publications and educational resources (e.g., Sunday school curriculum, Bible schools such as Moody Bible Institute) were the closest to traditional Anabaptist theology. The fundamentalist movement, which was a reaction to liberal theology, had its origins in the nineteenth century (Epp, 1982) and impacted immigrant groups such as the Mennonites. According to Guenther, “The appeal to a spiritual unity and doctrinal ‘essentials’ within trans-denominational institutions that transcended all other denominational, theological, and ethnic differences served as a powerful, albeit inadvertent, engine of acculturation” (2008, p. 370). Evangelicalism’s emphasis on personal authority to read and understand the Bible displaced the traditional Mennonite practice of “communal religious authority” (Nolt, p. 32; Wenger Shenk, 2003) and the English churches with their activities such as evening meetings and Sunday school became the new model.

Pastor Ben Reimer was an administrator and teacher at Steinbach Bible College from the 1940s through the 1960s and supported evangelical practices. In 1952, Reimer and Archie Penner led the Kleine Gemeinde to change its name to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Henry Hiebert, personal communication, 2013; Loewen, 2006). The Steinbach congregation “purchased a piano, diminished distinctive dress, and rejected shunning . . . in favor of aggressive church growth and the planting of a new church in the city of Winnipeg” (Nolt, 2012, p. 30). In 1957, a Billy Graham-styled
evangelical preacher named George R. Brunk II, a Mennonite from Virginia, held tent meetings across southern Manitoba in Mennonite communities. Brunk encouraged people to give up traditional symbols of their faith such as German ethnicity and stressed “individual conversion and personal religious authority” (Nolt, 2012, p. 32; Regehr, 1996). Thus, many of the Mennonites in Manitoba began to outwardly resemble their Canadian neighbors yet still continued to practice their faith.

**Purpose**

This study builds on previous studies of Mennonites, music, and education (Berg, 1979; Ens, 1994; Ewert, 1951; Kehrberg, 1984; Lehman, 1973; Letkemann, 1986; Maust, 1968; Miller, 1953; Miller, 1974; Schellenberg, 1968; Waldie, 1992). The present study provides a description of the music programs at two Mennonite schools in southern Manitoba: Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna (population, 556) and Steinbach Christian High School (SCHS) in the town of Steinbach (population 13,524) (Statistics Canada, 2012a; 2012b). SCHS was at one time a department of Steinbach Bible College and they continue to share the same school board and the same campus.

The primary purpose of the study was to compare and contrast the music programs of MCI and SCHS. Related to this was the researcher’s examination of similarities and differences between these Mennonite schools and their local public schools. Historically, Mennonites have used educational institutions to perpetuate their “beliefs, practices, and traditions” (Miller, 1953, p. 74; Koontz, 1998). The secondary purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine whether or not discrepancies between the two Mennonite schools could be related to the differing beliefs and customs of the specific Mennonite groups associated with each school. For example, Schellenberg
(1968) found that General Conference and Mennonite Brethren musicians tended to view music performance as a worthy end in itself. Alternatively, “traditional Mennonite musicians” in Schellenberg’s study tended to participate in music solely for religious purposes.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the status of music education at MCI and SCHS?
2. What are current music education practices at MCI and SCHS, and do they reflect traditional Mennonite ideals?
3. Do the music education practices in each school reflect the ideals of their differing Mennonite communities?
4. Based on the current trends, are there any changes in music education at MCI and SCHS that might be anticipated?

**Hypotheses**

The two schools in this study are Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Steinbach Christian High School. SCHS is located in the East Reserve in which the *Kleine Gemeinde* from the Molotschna Colony settled. MCI, located in the West Reserve, was founded by the Bergthaler. Historically, the two areas have been divided not only geographically but by “their pattern and era of immigration, their parochial biases, inter-village differences, the East/West Reserve dichotomy, and tensions in the social hierarchy” (Klassen, 1989, p. 12). Thus, there may be contemporary differences in music education programs at MCI and SCHS due to religious and ethnic differences between the groups (Bramadat & Seljak, 2008). The following are the hypotheses for this study.

1) The instrumental program at MCI will be more important than at SCHS.
With the help of H. H. Ewert’s leadership, the Bergthaler and other Mennonites who founded MCI appear to have had a positive view of instruments from the time the school was started. Although the Mennonite Brethren (MB) and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB) in Steinbach used instruments, the Kleine Gemeinde were reluctant to adopt instruments even though they acknowledged that the Bible did not forbid them (Fast, 1987; Harder, 1970).

2) SCHS will have a more traditional view of performance than MCI.

3) Choral singing will be equally important in both schools. Although the Bergthaler had rejected choral music in Russia, they adopted choral singing when they came to Manitoba. At Steinbach Bible College (from which SCHS originated), the MB and EMB were known for their singing and choral music. The Kleine Gemeinde had also become receptive to choral music by the time the school started in the 1930s (Hildebrand, 1997).

4) MCI students will perform more hymns, and SCHS students will perform more praise and worship music. MCI is primarily affiliated with Mennonite Church Manitoba (formerly General Conference) which has a strong choral and hymn singing tradition. The Evangelical Mennonite Church (formerly Kleine Gemeinde) and Evangelical Free Church tend to have a tradition of using praise and worship music (i.e., contemporary worship). Therefore, examination of MCI and SCHS may show that there are differences in their music programs attributable to cultural and theological idiosyncrasies.

5) MCI and SCHS will both emphasize choral music more than instrumental music.
6) There will be a higher rate of participation in music among the Mennonite schools than the public Manitoba schools.

7) The MCI music program will emphasize their Mennonite identity to a greater extent than the music program at SCHS. The MCI mission statement mentions developing the students’ appreciation of their Mennonite heritage whereas the SCHS mission statement mentions developing the students’ appreciation of their Evangelical-Anabaptist heritage (MCI Mission Statement, n.d.; SCHS Our Mission, 2013). One manifestation of the difference in mission may be that SCHS students will have a more traditional Mennonite view of music making as a religious activity rather than as a performance activity.

Procedure

The researcher collected data from the following sources:

- Interviews
- Attendance at the 2008 MCI Sängerfest and the SCHS Spring Concert
- Recordings of choral ensembles under the direction of SCHS conductors Kristel Peters and Elroy Friesen
- Printed programs from MCI Sängerfeste stored at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg
- Liederperlen manuscripts with Ziffern notation (number music notation system used by Germans in Russia for learning part singing) in the museum at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach
- Marilyn Hauser Hamm’s copy of Gerald Ens’s MCI Grade 12 “Menno Project” consisting of his interviews with Hauser Hamm and George Wiebe interspersed
with video footage of Mennonite Church Manitoba congregational singing and Old Colony singing

- The MCI and SCHS websites
- Surveys from two local provincial elementary school principals and a music teacher pertaining to their student enrollment, amount of time spent on music per week, and the curriculum
- Tours of the music facilities at both schools

The researcher made three day trips to MCI in the months of May and June in 2008 to conduct interviews, attend chapel, observe a band and choir rehearsal, and to attend the morning and afternoon portions of MCI’s *Sängerfest*. The researcher also visited SCHS on two different days in June 2008 for the purpose of conducting interviews and attending the Spring Concert. An additional day trip to Steinbach was made by the researcher in July 2008 to conduct interviews and visit the Mennonite Heritage Village and archives. The researcher also made two trips to the Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg in May and June 2008 to conduct interviews and look at holdings in the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives. Moreover, the researcher made a day trip to Altona in June 2008 to conduct an interview. He made another day trip to Winnipeg in July 2008 to conduct two interviews at the University of Manitoba.

The oral history material in this study was obtained by means of the researcher’s interviews with administrators, teachers, and knowledgeable community members (e.g., former students, historians). The interviews were used to provide a description of the music programs at MCI and SCHS. When the researcher visited the schools, the principals introduced the researcher to the current teachers and helped provide contact
information for former teachers as well as people who would be knowledgeable about the schools or music education.

The researcher developed specific lists of questions for the interviews. The questions pertained to the educational background of the interviewees, the qualifications of the music directors, performance repertoire, and a variety of other aspects of the music program. Questions were also asked about the relationship of the music program to the missions of the schools. No current students were used in the study, although it should be noted that the administrators and some of the teachers had been former students.

The length of the interviews ranged from approximately 20 minutes to three hours. Consent forms approved by the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board were signed by all interviewees. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviewees had opportunities to read the transcripts, check for accuracy, and make amendments. The researcher hired an editor to revise the transcripts in the appendices so they would be more concise and easier to read.

The researcher asked for the following information during the interviews:

1. What is the status of the music program (e.g., enrollment, scheduling, funding, facilities, equipment)?
2. Describe the music program (e.g., ensembles, repertoire, performances).
3. Describe the music teachers (e.g., educational background, professional influences, teaching philosophy).
4. What are the students’ previous musical experiences at church and in elementary schooling?
5. What is the role of the music program in the mission of the school?
Administrator questions.

1. What does your school look for in a music educator?
   a. Please list the past music teachers from the beginning until now.
   b. What were their backgrounds (educational, religious, ethnic)?
   c. Have any of these teachers had a lasting impact on music education here? How?

2. What role do music performances (concerts, tours, festivals, musical theater, chapel, other) have in your school? Community?

3. Have choral ensembles changed over the years (e.g., enrollment, repertoire)? How?

4. Have instrumental ensembles changed over the years? How?

5. Has music education had an impact on the community? How and to what degree?

6. Describe the following aspects of music education at your school and how they have changed over the years (feeder schools, enrollment, curriculum, autonomy, scheduling, funding, choral programs, instrumental programs, general music, facilities, equipment, music library, other)?

7. What is the outlook for the future regarding the music program (e.g., enrollment, curriculum, ensembles)?

8. How do the guiding principles (religious philosophy) of the school impact the program?

9. Would you like to share any memorable stories or make any final comments?
Faculty questions.

1. What is your educational background (training institution)?
   a. To which professional organizations do you belong?
   b. What role do professional organizations have in your teaching?
   c. Are you involved in other musical activities outside of school?
   d. What was your school looking for in a music teacher (job description)?

2. How long have you been here?

3. What repertoire have you done?
   a. How does the repertoire relate to the mission of the school?
   b. How does it compare to the musical heritage of the community?
   c. Are there traditional favorites?
   d. Is there music you will not do?

4. What role do music performances (concerts, tours, festivals, chapel, musical theatre, other) have in your school and how often do they occur?
   a. What role do they have in the community?
   b. Has this changed over the years? How?

5. Have choral ensembles changed over the years? How?

6. Have instrumental ensembles changed over the years? How?

7. What is your philosophy of music education?
   a. How does this relate to the mission of the school?
   b. Has music education changed with the influence of teaching philosophies such as Orff, Kodály, and Dalcroze?
8. Has music education had an impact on the community? If so, how and to what degree?

9. How would you describe the status of music education at your school? (i.e., feeder schools, enrollment, curriculum, autonomy, scheduling, funding, choral programs, instrumental programs, facilities, equipment, music library, other)?

10. What is the outlook for the future regarding the music program?

11. Would you like to share any memorable stories?

12. Would you like to make any final comments?

**Knowledgeable people questions.**

1. What is your occupation and educational background?

2. What is your relationship with the community and school?

3. What do you remember about the school and the music program?

4. How has it changed over the years?

5. Did you know any of the teachers?

6. Were there any who were particularly influential?

7. Were there any particular memorable events you would like to share?

8. Are there connections between the choral school festival and workshop tradition and current practices?

9. Would you like to make any final comments?

**Local elementary program background questions.**

1. What is the enrollment for the different grades?

2. How many times a week do you meet and for how long?

3. What materials do you use in your curriculum?
4. What kinds of performance opportunities are available for the students?

5. What is the percentage of your students who will attend the local funded independent institution?

Participants

Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Steinbach Christian High School were chosen for inclusion in this study because they were recommended by current researchers in Mennonite Studies. The two schools provide a contrast in terms of their location, history, and ethnic Mennonite heritage. The first school in this study, Mennonite Collegiate Institute, is a residential school located in the town of Gretna and has about 155 students in Grades 7-12 (MCI, n.d.; Vandermeulen, 2012). MCI receives support from 22 Mennonite congregations that are mostly Mennonite Church Manitoba. Of those 22 congregations, two are Mennonite Brethren, and one is Sommerfelder.

The second school in the study, Steinbach Christian High School, is located in the town of Steinbach southeast of Winnipeg and has about 250 students in Grades 5-12 (James Fast, personal communication, 2013). SCHS is associated with the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Southland Community Church, and Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church.

Limitations. A limitation in this study is that the descriptive statistics are mostly comprised of estimates by the interviewees, information from the school websites (e.g., enrollment figures, pictures), and yearbook pictures rather than data generated by the researcher. For example, the researcher used pictures to count the number of students in different ensembles to double check the information provided by the ensemble directors.
A second limitation was that the interviewees were speaking from memory. Consequently, although there were occasional discrepancies (e.g., dates and names) when compared to written sources, the researcher was able to make corrections after consultation with written sources and the interviewees. Additionally, some of the information has become obsolete since the time of the interviews. The researcher has used information from the school websites, online newspapers, and correspondence to update the information.

**Delimitations.** There are many Mennonite schools in Manitoba representing different varieties of Mennonites. The schools chosen for this study both serve as a geographical and cultural representative of the historic East and West reserves that existed during Manitoba’s early pioneer days. The membership of these two schools in the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools (CAMS) provides evidence that they both formally identify themselves as Mennonite schools. The researcher made the decision to choose only these two schools for their historic ties to the Mennonite communities they serve (i.e., Bergthaler and *Kleine Gemeinde*). Urban CAM schools in Winnipeg as well as public schools in Mennonite communities were not included in this study. Investigation of additional private Mennonite schools was beyond the scope of the project. The researcher’s time was also a factor in the decision to limit the study to the examination of two schools.

Another delimitation in the study was that the time this researcher spent at Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Steinbach Christian High School was mostly devoted to doing interviews. He did, however, observe a choir rehearsal, band rehearsal, *Sängerfest*, a chapel service at MCI, and a spring concert at SCHS. Therefore, the
information about the programs in the two schools in the study comes mostly from interviews and represents perspectives from school administrators, teachers, former students, and local historians.

**Definitions**

**Ethnicity.** Mennonite churches and schools do not restrict membership by ethnicity. Although the first Mennonites in Manitoba were Germans from Russia, many Mennonite churches now include a variety of nationalities. The focus of this study was on descendants of Russian Mennonites originally from the Chortitza (Old Colony) and Molotschna colonies. This study also takes into consideration when they came to Manitoba (i.e., the *Kanadier* in 1874, and the *Rußländer* in the 1920s). Although some people associate Mennonites with old order customs (Loewen, 2008), acculturated Mennonites such as those in this study are more concerned with Anabaptist convictions such as discipleship, believer’s baptism (e.g., voluntarily consenting to get baptized and become a member of the church), and peacemaking (Kraybill, 2003) than with external signs of separateness (e.g., closed communities, limited technology use, clothing).

**Conservatism and progressivism.** The development of conservative and progressive trends among Mennonites goes back to their emigration from Prussia to Russia. The Mennonites who had moved to Russia in the eighteenth century lived in predominantly secluded Mennonite communities that were self-sufficient (Dyck, 1993). As European society became more spiritually and intellectually free, the Mennonites who lingered in Prussia until after the 1830s before immigrating to Russia experienced more religious tolerance than the earlier immigrants. This may explain why the conservatives
favored isolation whereas the progressives believed, “obedience meant going into the world with the good news . . .” (Dyck, 1993, p. 302).

Both groups share the same ideologies (e.g., following Christ, settling disputes without force, and believer’s baptism), however, the conservatives have a stricter interpretation concerning how to keep church and state separate (Klassen, 1989). According to Good and Good (1995), the majority of Mennonites favor higher education for their children, but more conservative Mennonites such as the Old Order groups do not believe that high school and college are beneficial to the gaining of wisdom and growth in Christian obedience. Some conservative Mennonites are willing to pursue higher education if it prepares them to provide a service (e.g., nursing).

**Manitoba Mennonites.** The different waves of Manitoba Mennonites include: 1) the more conservative Kanadier who arrived in the 1870s, 2) the more progressive Rußländer who arrived in the 1920s, 3) the Neueingewanderte or “newly immigrated” who came after World War II, 4) the Auswanderer who emigrated from Manitoba to Mexico and Paraguay “in the 1920s and after 1948” (Klassen, 1989, p. 5), and 6) the Umsiedler or “resettled ones” who moved to Germany and Canada from the Soviet Union after the 1970s.

As far as the groups associated with the schools in this study are concerned, the Kleine Gemeinde, which became the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), was a conservative Mennonite group within the Molotschka Colony. It is one of the denominations affiliated with SCHS. In addition to the EMC, other churches that are represented on the SCHS board include the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, Southland Community Church, and Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church (SCHS, 2012).
The Bergthaler Mennonites, who had roots in the Chortitza Colony, founded the MCI in Gretna, Manitoba. MCI is a society school (i.e., a school supported by a society of congregations) consisting of approximately 20 congregations that are predominately affiliated with Mennonite Church Manitoba (part of Mennonite Church Canada). There is also a Mennonite Brethren congregation and a Sommerfeld congregation that support MCI (see Appendix F for Loewen interview).

**Significance of Music for Mennonites**

Mennonite hymnals typically consist of hymns from other Christian denominations. The *Gesangbuch* that was used by the first Mennonite colonists in Russia included Lutheran chorales, psalmody from the Reformed tradition, German translations of Dutch hymns, and some original Mennonite hymns (Berg, 1996; Letkemann, 1986). Because of the broad range of sources, “The study of Mennonite hymnody is therefore not primarily the history of an indigenous tradition but the story of anthologies of hymns assembled to meet the needs of different groups of people at different times in their history” (Berg, 1988, pp. 91-92).

In addition to music and theology from German speaking Methodists, German Baptists, and Lutheran Pietists, German translations of gospel songs from American Revivalists were popular with many Mennonites from Russia who had brought this repertoire with them to Canada. Collections such as *Evangeliums-Lieder* which included translations of Moody and Sankey songs were especially popular among the Mennonite Brethren congregations as well as those of Fanny Crosby. Although Manitoba Mennonites had been successful in maintaining the German language, in North America between the 1940s and the 1960s there was a transition to English shown by the
publication of English hymnals. One of the first successful English hymnals was the *Mennonite Hymnary* published by the General Conference for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1940 (Regehr, 1996). In the 1960s, there was a joint effort between the General Conference and the Mennonite Church to produce *The Mennonite Hymnal*. Mary Oyer wrote in the introduction,

> Mennonites who have remained close to their German background still sing Lutheran chorales. . . . Those who spoke English in the early nineteenth century absorbed the American tradition of Watts’ texts—along with authors such as Wesley and Newton—and replaced their Germanic past with American tunes and folk hymns from the singing-school tradition. (Oyer, 1969)

Both the German and the English hymn traditions are represented in *The Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) which had its sixteenth printing in 2011. This and the new *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (1992) are predominantly used by Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada (i.e., General Conference). Both hymnals include a number of hymns by John and Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, and Fanny Crosby as well as English translations by Catherine Winkworth of German hymns. The hymnals also include English translations of Latin hymns. Current members of Mennonite Church Manitoba are familiar with many of these hymns.

Mennonites have a tradition of and a reputation for fine singing (Houser Hamm, 1998). Historically there have been a number of Mennonite practices that have contributed to good singing. For example, the seating arrangement in church helped children hear the part-singing of adults (Kropf & Nafziger, 2001). Women sat on one side and men on the other. Thus, “girls were always surrounded by sopranos and altos;
boys, by tenors and basses” (Kropf & Nafziger, p. 24). The acoustics in the plain wooden churches also helped create a live singing space that encouraged singing (Kreider, 1998).

Kropf and Nafziger (2001) posited that the function of music in the Mennonite church is similar to a sacrament and takes the place of the weekly celebration of the Eucharist: “Singing is the moment when we encounter God most directly. We taste God, we touch God when we sing” (p. 24). Rempel (1998) also compared music to a sacrament. His rationale was that the text sung by a congregation expresses God’s grace in the visible and physical act of singing together. The words express the substance of the invisible eternal truth and the voices singing together are the outward sign of that reality. It can also be said that like icons Mennonite music points to a higher reality beyond itself (Bartel, 1998). Regardless of how the importance of music and its function in church is understood, beautiful singing in harmony (Grunau, 1998) is a cherished Mennonite tradition.

**Singing tradition.** In the past, the Mennonite hymn singing tradition has resulted in a pool of students in Manitoba communities with experience in part-singing from attending church. However, people within Mennonite congregations as in other Protestant denominations have differing views as to the type of music that should be sung (Kropf and Nafziger, 2001). The increasing use of folk and rock music in some Mennonite church services has indicated that some young people are not interested in continuing the four-part singing tradition (Miller, 1974). In many Mennonite churches, the praise and worship team (e.g., contemporary worship music with band) has grown in use (Dueck, 2005). Moreover, the acoustics in newer churches often favor sound systems rather than unamplified congregational singing (Berg & Dyck, 1994). It may be that such
developments have discouraged congregational singing and have turned the congregation into spectators who simply watch the praise and worship team rather than participate (Jacoby, 2005).

Some congregations have simplified the music to make congregational singing easier for visitors (Longhurst, 1998). Longhurst noted that “Hymnals published in the past decade clearly show a trend to use lower pitched musical settings based on the assumption that all voice parts will likely be singing the melody” (1998, p. 88). Some congregations favor using a balance of traditional and contemporary church music to perpetuate hymn singing (Nafziger, 1988). Considering the different types of Mennonites in Manitoba, it is reasonable to expect that there would be many ideas as to the best way to perpetuate their hymn singing tradition. One strategy to reinvigorate congregational singing has been to include more world music (Epp, 2005a; Oyer, 1998). Current hymnals include music from a variety of cultures in addition to European music (Grunau, 1998). Trends in hymnody such as the use of 1) new texts and music, 2) music from the global church (e.g., Africa), 3) the expansion of instrumentation (i.e., orchestral, band, Orff instruments, recorder, handbells, guitar), and 4) music chosen to fit the theme of the service (Hauser Hamm, 1998) are various strategies Mennonites have used to maintain congregational enthusiasm for singing.

Some music leaders from other denominations have been inspired by the quality of Mennonite congregational singing and hymnody (Bell, 2001). The relationship between Mennonites, community, and music in Manitoba is worth attention:

. . . Manitoba—and in particular, the geographical areas where Mennonite traditions constitute a strong cultural influence—has a well-deserved reputation for
the richness of its choral music activity. The province probably has more than its share of passionate, highly qualified leaders, and the vitality of choral music within communities at large means significant support for school-based programs in some areas. This kind of community commitment to choral music is often matched by a broader attitude of commitment and serious engagement in education generally. (Bowman, 2005, p. 14)

Thus, the Mennonites in Manitoba have a reputation for the encouragement of choral music making both in their churches and in their communities.

**Mennonite Educational Conceptual Framework**

The mission statements of MCI and SCHS are both confessionally Anabaptist (MCI Mission Statement, n.d.; SCHS Our Mission, 2013) and an understanding of the Mennonite perspective of education requires examination of their theology. For Mennonites, Scripture is the basis for determining correct thought and behavior (Wenger Shenk, 2003). Although somewhat dated, Daniel Hertzler’s 1971 book *Mennonite Education: Why and How?: A Philosophy of Education for the Mennonite Church* helps provide an understanding of the premises underlying Mennonite education.

We begin with our basic concept of the nature of man as a choosing and decision-making agent in a social matrix. We interpret the changing view of man’s nature in the light of the biblical position that man is sinful. Man is assumed to be free enough to be held responsible, yet the nature and extent of his choices are limited by the environment in which he finds himself, and by failure of will. (Hertzler, 1971, p. 25)
Hertzler (1971) noted that although learning theories are useful in that they deal with the importance of the unconscious, importance of childhood experiences, and understanding of behavioral development, they tend to emphasize the role of environment rather than individual responsibility.

Hertzler used J. Lester Brubaker’s September 13, 1968 paper on “Current Philosophies of Education Developed and Evaluated from a Christian Perspective” which was “presented to the Philosophy of Christian Education Research Committee” (Hertzler, 1971, p. 50) to evaluate the educational philosophies of “Idealism, Realism, Neo-Thomism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism” (pp. 28-29). Hertzler and his committee used this information and their knowledge of Mennonite theology to develop their philosophy of education.

**Evaluation of learning theories.** According to Brubaker’s analysis, Mennonite educators can appreciate Idealism’s emphasis on finding meaning, however, Idealism also tends to promote valuing people on the basis of their cognitive ability. Mennonite educators can appreciate Realism and Neo-Thomism’s emphasis on created order and meaning in history, but Brubaker believes this theory tends to reduce people’s actions to scientific determinism. Instead, Mennonites believe that the human will is free enough for people to be held accountable for their actions. Mennonite educators, according to Brubaker, can appreciate Pragmatism’s emphasis on active learning throughout life and that learning is not restricted to the school environment. Mennonites differ from Pragmatists in that Mennonites emphasize moral and theological absolutes. Mennonite educators can also accept Existentialism’s emphasis on personal choice, but this theory
has the tendency to emphasize the present and make each person his or her own moral authority. Thus, theological premises shape the way Mennonites think about education.

**Theological axioms.** Seven theological axioms provide the foundation for Hertzler and his research committee’s philosophy of Mennonite education. The purpose of this theological basis is to place the educational philosophy within the context of Biblical faith. An abbreviated version of Hertzler and his committee’s axioms\(^1\) are as follows:

1. **God at work in the world.** . . . We confess that God is working purposefully in history and will prevail.

2. **Jesus Christ and the new world of the converted.** We accept Jesus Christ as the Supreme Revelation of God. In His name people are called to join the new order of God, to accept God’s judgments and priorities instead of society’s, to live as new people. . . .

3. **The “pioneering minority” church.** We assume that the community of faith is more than an established church; rather it is continually being formed and reformed through the work of the Spirit of God. The people of God are not confined to any one race or clan or nation. Rather they are called from loyalty to the natural order to a new loyalty in response to the call of God through Jesus Christ.

4. **The new community of the converted: its mutual responsibilities.** Within the brotherhood members are expected to support each other in service and mutual discipline.

---
5. *The new community of the converted: its life in the world.* Members of the
Christian Church are called to a life of suffering love. . . .

6. *The Bible and the church.* The Bible is the criterion by which the
faithfulness of God’s people is measured. . . .

7. *Personal responsibility to choose.* . . . Church education is concerned about
the will as well as the mind. (Hertzler, 1971, pp. 15-16)

**Philosophy of Mennonite education.** This theological framework provides a
schema for outlining foundational beliefs Mennonites/Anabaptists consider important in
all that they do. This includes music education. The following is Hertzler’s philosophy
of education developed for the Mennonite Church (now part of Mennonite Church USA
and Mennonite Church Canada) (see Footnote 1):

**In summary our philosophy holds the following as important:**

1. The people of God are a distinct people with a distinct calling and
unique educational goals. They must educate to
   a. Transmit their history and make their identity clear;
   b. Train in the skills needed to carry on the work they consider
      important;
   c. Teach the values they consider important;
   d. Help the young develop his own personal view of reality.

2. The task of education is carried on not only in schools, but it is the
work of the whole people. In fact, it is only as they are practiced by
the group that values taught in schools can be expected to be taken
seriously.
3. The educational task is seen as a part of the people’s faithfulness to God and thus should be subjected to regular scrutiny to keep it in touch with the goals and needs of the People of God.

4. The ultimate purpose of education as practiced by the people of God is to aid in living as a reconciled and reconciling people. (1971, p. 29)

The preceding philosophy helps define what Mennonite education is. In practice, Mennonite schools are very much like public schools. The fundamental difference however is that their missions include the infusion of Mennonite ideals into the curriculum. The defining feature of Mennonite institutions is that they have trustees, administrators, and “persons in other key mission defining positions who are Mennonite in faith and practice” (Lapp, 1998, p. 109). “Everything in Mennonite education must be subordinated to the spiritual” (Miller, 1953, p. 211).

Like public schools, Mennonite schools should be “committed to meeting or surpassing all baseline academic standards” (Roth, 2011, p. 127). According to Roth, Mennonite educators acknowledge the importance of assessment, but they have other priorities as well. Thus, they believe students should not be judged by how academically gifted they appear to be since God has given every person his or her own unique gifts. Instead, Mennonite schools should “model alternatives to the social norms” (Roth, p. 167) that are based on Scripture for the purpose of guiding students to model their lives on Jesus (Wenger Shenk, 2003). To this end, Biblical references and stories should be integrated into students’ education at home, church, and school in order to cultivate discipleship. Discipleship is “largely associated with crossbearing, self-denial, obedience, and servanthood . . .” (Wenger Shenk, 2003, p. 47). Discipleship should help
students grow in deeper knowing (e.g., discerning truth through corporate Bible study). Thus, Mennonite schools should provide a community that holds students accountable for their actions while also offering forgiveness and restoration when students make mistakes.

A Mennonite education does not guarantee that students will be Christian, be Mennonite, or act ethically (Roth, 2011). In Roth’s view, Mennonite education allows students to respond to the realities of contemporary life from a Biblically-based frame of reference (Roth, 2011). Mennonite schools cultivate intuitive thinking by providing students with experiences in the arts to help students develop an awareness of realities other than those than can be seen and comprehended. Hence, a tradition that provides an ethical foundation and promotes personal responsibility for making proper judgments is necessary for the discernment of truth rather than exclusive reliance on scientific reasoning (Wenger Shenk, 2003). Mennonite schools use Bible classes, chapel services, bulletin boards, and interaction with other Christians to give students a greater understanding of their own tradition and appreciation for other Christian traditions (Roth, 2011).

Membership in Anabaptist-Mennonite organizations such as the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools also draws attention to a school’s Mennonite identity. This association helps member schools define the distinctive features Mennonite education has to offer (CAMS, n.d.). CAMS membership encourages awareness, cooperation, and interaction with other Mennonite schools by means of music festivals, inter-school tours, and conferences (e.g., faculty, administrative).
The mission of a Mennonite school varies depending upon the location and population of the school. For example, in rural communities with large Anabaptist-Mennonite populations, the mission might be to pass on a distinctive Mennonite heritage to the next generation. However, in places where there is a small Anabaptist-Mennonite population, the mission might be to serve people with “diverse faith backgrounds” (Roth, 2011, p. 205).

Mennonite schools help students develop intellectually, physically, spiritually, aesthetically, emotionally, and socially (MCI Mission Statement, n.d.; SCHS Our Mission, 2013). Teachers in Mennonite schools, therefore, have to be role models for students. For example, teachers are expected to model curiosity and demonstrate Christian humility (i.e., acknowledge that human knowledge is limited) (Roth, 2011). Teachers should also demonstrate rational thinking (because it demonstrates acknowledgment of God’s order in creation) and model joy (because it demonstrates the hope Mennonites have because God is in control). Teachers should be patient (because God is patient) and show love (I Corinthians 13: 4-8) because it demonstrates a spirit of charity by “seeking the best for each pupil” (Roth, 2011, p. 121). These qualities should be manifested in teachers’ daily interactions with the students as well as in their prayers for them.

Mennonite education has a different emphasis than that of a public school. Whereas public schools focus on cognitive outcomes, Mennonite schools also work towards fostering a culture of worship. All work in school is framed “as an expression of worship” (Roth, 2011, p. 98). Ideally, students demonstrate qualities such as patience, dedication, and humility in their daily work. Mennonite education is perceived as being
just as much a matter of shaping the heart (i.e., human desires) as it is shaping the mind
(i.e., rational thinking). Because of sin, people have fallen into disordered desires, and
Christian education is about promoting rightly ordered desires beginning with a desire for
God. Having rightly ordered desires means putting God first in relationships and
activities.

Mennonite education, therefore, in its broadest sense is the process by which the
Christian community under a commission from Christ, and under the guidance
and power of the Holy Spirit, uses all of its resources both human and divine, to
cooperate with God in reconciling men to Himself, regenerating their inner
nature, restoring them to the image of God, and preparing them for a life which
expresses in all of its relationships the cultural implications of the Lordship of
Jesus Christ. (Miller, 1953, p. 210)

According to Roth (2011), rightly ordering desires shapes people’s relationships not only
to God but to other things such as “sports, music, drama, [and] academic achievements”
(p. 100).

In conclusion, Mennonite education is holistic. Like public schools, Mennonite
schools educate students to develop physically, socially, and morally. Mennonite schools
also aim to help students develop spiritually and stress that all aspects of a student’s life
must be developed in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the practical aims of
education (e.g., making a living) should not supersede the primary aim of Mennonite
education which is to promote Christian living.
CHAPTER II

MUSIC EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

The province of Manitoba provides funding for public schools and partially provides funding for independent institutions such as Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Steinbach Christian High School that follow the provincial curriculum. According to Waldie’s (1992) study on Manitoba public schools, 448 out of 517 public elementary and secondary schools that responded to his survey had music programs. Most of the public school programs (399) were taught in English while the remaining ones were taught in French. Of the 517 public schools surveyed, there were 266 choral programs, 182 band programs, 10 orchestra programs, 48 guitar programs, 19 keyboard programs, and 343 general music programs. The Kodály method was an important aspect of 66 elementary programs and the Orff approach was taught in 148 elementary programs. Sixty-nine schools reported that they had other programs such as “Jazz Band, Musical Theatre and Jazz Choir” (Waldie, 1992, p. 54). There were also “recording studio/electronics courses, steel band, handbells, music therapy, and special music education for the mentally handicapped” (Waldie, p. 54).

The directors of ensembles such as band and choir reported that they tended to focus on performance as a goal rather than following curriculum guides. Choral directors reported that they often included music theory as it pertained to the music they were working on. The ten keyboard programs in Winnipeg appeared to consist entirely of
group instruction while schools in smaller towns mostly arranged private piano or organ lessons for students (Waldie, 1992).

As of 2007, there were four private Mennonite high schools in Manitoba offering the “provincial university entrance curriculum” (Friesen, 2007, p. 141). Since 2000, these schools have received about 50% of their support from government grants, and “the rest of the costs are paid by tuition and by donations from the supporting constituency” (p. 141). Although the curriculum in Mennonite and public high schools is similar, students in the Mennonite schools also “take courses in Bible, Mennonite history, ethics, world religion, and theology” (p. 141). Two of these Mennonite schools are in Winnipeg, and the other two are in the communities of Gretna and Steinbach.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the development of music education among the Mennonites from Russia in Manitoba. The existence and nature of the Mennonite choral tradition in Manitoba can be traced to a combination of factors including the influence of educational developments in Prussia, Pietism, Johann Cornies’ educational reforms in the Russian Mennonite colonies, and the choral festival and workshop tradition in Russia that later became a part of the cultural life of Mennonites in provinces such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

**Music, Education, and Culture**

It is significant that the choral tradition developed among Mennonites in Manitoba at all because it seemed to be unlikely from the start.

Neither the Swiss Mennonites nor the first Dutch Mennonites in Canada, namely the Kanadier, had been a very fertile field for the cultivation of music. Both groups were in the beginning opposed to musical instruments, to four-part
singing, and to special musical groups, including choirs, quartets, and the like. In the 1930s, this was still the case among the most conservative among them, namely the Old Order among the Swiss and the Old Colony among the Dutch. (Epp, 1982, p. 462)

Sixteenth century Mennonites in northern Europe were mostly from the Netherlands and northern Germany. There were some Swiss Mennonites who sought refuge in the Netherlands and were either assimilated into Dutch Mennonitism or relocated to Pennsylvania (Visser, 1994). Whereas the Mennonites who remained in the Netherlands retained the Dutch culture and tended to reflect the musical values of their Calvinist neighbors who had rejected choral singing (Letkemann, 1986), some German-speaking Mennonites eventually reflected the musical values of their Lutheran neighbors who had a strong choral tradition.

Some Mennonites began moving from the Netherlands to the Vistula Delta in Poland during the 1550s (Kizik, 1994). This area became part of the Prussian empire in 1772. The Dutch language was used in this area until the end of the 1600s although by the mid-eighteenth century Mennonites were speaking Low German as well as Dutch. The German language became common among Mennonites when the Vistula Delta region in Poland became part of Prussia. Some of these Mennonites used High German, and “Service leaders would quite often use texts taken from Lutheran hymns and postils” (Kizik, 1994, 59). Thus, the Mennonites in this region who began to emigrate to Russia in 1788 and eventually to Manitoba in the 1870s had a German language and culture. It was their German language and culture that provided the basis for the development of a choral music tradition in Manitoba.
Educational Developments in Prussia

In the early nineteenth century, the Prussian government sought to improve education by incorporating Pestalozzian ideals. Previously, little attention had been given to singing in the Prussian schools and the quality of singing at this time was reportedly very poor. In 1809, the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi asked Michael Traugott Pfeiffer and Hans Georg Naegeli to develop a music method book based on his educational principles. This resulted in “a small booklet entitled Pestalozzische Gesangbildungslehre nach Pfeiffer’s Erfindung kunstwissen-schaftlich dargestellt im Namen Pestalozzis, Pfeiffers und ihrer Freunde [The Pestalozzian Method of Music Instruction, devised by Pfeiffer and Presented Artistically and Scientifically in the Name of Pestalozzi, Pfeiffer and their Friends]” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 124).

Pfeiffer and Naegeli’s methodology was organized according to Pestalozzi’s principle of Anschauung. This is the principle of moving from the simple to the more complex by starting from what is known and going to what is unknown. The teacher begins with the more concrete and progresses to the more abstract. Letkemann summarized the process for learning a song using note reading: “Rhythm and melody were to be learned independently of one another. Only after these elements had been mastered separately were they to be combined. Finally, words were to be added” (1986, p. 125).

In 1810, “Pfeiffer and Naegeli published their Gesangbildungslehre nach Pestalozzischen Grundsätzen [The Teachings of Music on Pestalozzian Principles]” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 126; Pfeiffer and Nägeli, 2012). In 1812, Naegeli condensed the book and published it with the title Auszug aus der Gesangbildungslehre (Zurich). These
works were used by music teachers who developed curricula in both Europe and North America (e.g., Reverend William C. Woodbridge and Lowell Mason) (Letkemann, 1986; Rainbow, 2009). Pfeiffer’s former student Karl August Zeller had also incorporated Pestalozzian principles in his 1810 publication *Elemente der Musik*.

In 1809, the Department of Education and Culture had called Zeller to Königsberg (former capital of East Prussia, now called Kaliningrad) to “found a Normal Institute” (Letkemann, 1996, p. 126) in which he was to use Pestalozzian methods to improve public school education in Prussia. In the meantime, the minister of the Department of Education and Culture, Wilhelm von Humboldt, sent Bernhard Christoph Ludwig Natorp (1774-1846) to Potsdam to help improve Prussian schools in the province of Brandenburg (Letkemann, 1986). Natorp’s educational principles had been influenced by his study with August Hermann Niemeyer and familiarity with Pestalozzi’s writings.

Natorp had served as a Lutheran pastor until 1809 when he began to devote more time to pedagogy and the publication of “books on elementary education” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 127). Natorp and Pestalozzi had similar goals: “to arouse the humanness in the person, or to educate the person toward humanity” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 128). Natorp believed music could be used to achieve these idealistic goals. Thus, he sought to improve congregational singing by first improving the singing in the public schools (*Volksschulen*) (Letkemann, 1986). The school repertoire primarily consisted of chorales, but it also included secular songs of a serious nature intended to cultivate morality.

Natorp published his first volume of *Anleitung zur Unterweisung im Singen für Lehrer in Volksschulen* [*Introduction to the Teaching of Singing for Teachers in Volksschulen*]
Elementary Schools] in 1813 and the second in 1820 (Letkemann, 1986). The 1813 book was a simplification of Naegeli and Pfeiffer’s Gesangbildungslehre (Rainbow, 2009). Although both works were systematic and graded, Natorp departed from pure Pestalozzian ideals by allowing rhythmic and melodic elements to be combined at certain stages throughout the learning process instead of waiting until each element had been mastered. Natorp also included two-part exercises toward the beginning of his book while Naegeli and Pfeiffer placed them at the end of their book (Letkemann, 1986; Natorp, 2011).

The first version of Natorp’s Anleitung used Ziffern. The 1816 revision used both notes and Ziffern. Ziffern was a form of cipher-notation that could accommodate an entire vocal part on a single line. The diatonic scale was written using the numbers 1-7 to show pitch in place of notes on a staff. Numbers could be placed above or below the line to show in which direction the melody was supposed to move. The time signature was placed before the first measure as in standard notation. A number was automatically given the value of a quarter note. The numbers could also be dotted and tied. Note values could also be changed by adding lines above the numbers (e.g., eighth notes had one line, sixteenth notes had two lines) (Berg, 1985). Ziffern was an efficient notation system for teachers and students who had to make their own school songbooks. Because students had the task of copying music and text from the teacher’s copy to their own notebooks, music was combined with the subject of calligraphy (Letkemann, 1986).

Natorp’s two volumes of the Anleitung, the 1816 abridged version of Part I (Lehrbuchlein der Singekunst), and the 1820 Singefibel became “a standard for music instruction in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century and enjoyed
widespread use in Brandenburg, Westfalen and other provinces of the Prussian Empire” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 132). In the 1850s in Germany, the system was barred when new students in German universities could no longer “read the traditional patriotic students’ songs . . . printed in staff notation” (Rainbow, 2009, p. 98).

Mennonites from Prussia who became teachers in Russia were likely to be familiar with Natorp’s method books and their Pestalozzian premises. There was evidence suggesting that Tobias Voth was using Natorp’s version of Ziffern in Russian Mennonite schools as early as the 1820s even though Heinrich Franz (1812-1889) has often received the credit for introducing Ziffern to Russian Mennonites (Letkemann, 1986).

Heinrich Franz was the son of Simon and Helena (Bartel) Franz (Unruh & Thiessen, 2010). Friedrich Wilhelm Lange had been one of Franz’s secondary teachers (Letkemann, 1986). Franz passed examinations to be a Prussian teacher in 1832 before leaving for the Molotschna colony. In Russia when he became the Gnadenfeld village school’s first teacher in 1835, Franz introduced the Ziffernsystem to students (Letkemann, 1986). Franz went on to teach at the “Chortitza Zentralschule from 1846 to 1858” (Unruh & Thiessen). Franz’s 1837 Choralbuch (Berg, 1979) used cipher notation. It was a compilation distributed as a manuscript before Breitkopf & Härtel published it in 1860 specifically to be used by Mennonites. Both the 1860 version and the 1880 reprint were in four-part voicing (Franz, 1880). A melody-only version was published in 1865 “especially for use in the schools” (Berg, 1979, p. 16). According to Berg, Franz’s Ziffernsystem and the Choralbuch led to the advent of the Russian Mennonite choral tradition.
In an action that was to have a profound effect on Mennonite church music, Heinrich Franz, Sr. (1812-1889), a Prussian who worked as a teacher among the Mennonites of southern Russia for fifty years, assembled a *Choralbuch*, a collection of melodies for the hymns of the *Gesangbuch*. His collection used ciphers (*Ziffern*), rather than notes, for it was believed that ciphers (the numbers 1 to 7 acting as solmization syllables for the notes of the scale) were better than notes for teaching music to children and to adults who had no previous musical experience. (Berg, 1979, p. 12)

Although there were other *Ziffern* systems in use among the Russian Mennonites, Franz’s system “became standard in almost all Russian Mennonite schools and music publications” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 152).

According to Letkemann, Franz’s *Ziffern* system resembled those of both the Galin-Paris-Chevé method (which was modeled on Rousseau’s system) “and the Natorp methods, but was identical with neither of them” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 152). Rousseau’s system had become accepted in places such as Germany, Switzerland, France, England, and Russia in the early nineteenth century (Rainbow, 2009). The system “captured the interest of educators concerned with new methods of education for the Masses” (Letkemann, p. 134). The impetus for improving music education, however, appears to have been motivated by the desire of those in the Pietist movement to improve congregational singing. Pietism had a profound effect on Mennonites. According to Westermeyer, “If Zwingli along with some Anabaptists and Puritans consciously excluded music from the church, this mindset unconsciously removed it” (1998, p. 230).
Pietism

Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) was “the progenitor of German Lutheran Pietism” (Westermeyer, 1998, p. 225). His ideas concerning musical aesthetics led to the development of a “Lied-ideal” for church music. Pietists looked down on art music because it was too complex to move the emotions of average people (Letkemann, 1986; Westermeyer, 1998). Pietist hymns tended to be “simple and often sentimental” (Westermeyer, p. 229). These ideals were stated in the prefaces of the hymnbooks that the Mennonites from Prussia took with them to Russia.

Mennonites, like other Pietists, emphasized a personal relationship with God rather than doctrine and liturgy. Letkemann described how Pietism facilitated the transition to new musical practices among Mennonites:

Mennonites leaving Prussia for Russia after 1788 took with them their musical practices and their copies of the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* and Rogall’s *Kern alter und neuer Lieder*, together with the view of music outlined in their prefaces. The restriction of music in worship to the unison congregational singing of two or three hymns per service was to undergo great changes in Russia in the second half of the century. These changes came about through contact with representatives of Moravian and Württemberg Pietism, the German *Erweckungsbewegung*, the German Baptist church and the *Christlicher Sängerbund*. From these various groups they adopted a positive attitude toward the use of four-part congregational singing and choral music in worship. (1986, pp. 106-107)

However, congregational singing and choral singing continued to be utilitarian (i.e., functional—used to fulfill spiritual ideals rather than to promote art for its own sake).
The Mennonites borrowed the music they performed from diverse sources ranging from sacred to secular. The Gesangbuch (Königsberg, 1767), which was popular during “their first seventy years in Russia” (Berg, 1979, p 10), consisted of German translations of Dutch hymnals “as well as hymns from various other German hymn collections” (Berg, 1979, pp. 10-11). The 1767 edition of the Gesangbuch contained the hymn texts but not the notation for the melodies which were sung by memory (Berg, 1979). The Vorsänger (song leaders) chose the hymns, gave the pitch, and started the melody for the congregation to join in singing. Over time this resulted in versions of the hymns that were full of flourishes and embellishments (Berg, 1979). This embellished style of singing can still be heard among Old Colony Mennonites. Wiebe described their singing as unaccompanied in unison with a nasal and penetrating tone quality. It was also a portamento style of singing, had a slow tempo, and was sung with “auxiliary notes between the intervals of the chorale tune” (Wiebe, 1962, p. 71). The chorales were embellished to the point that even familiar tunes were difficult to recognize (see Appendix G for G. Wiebe interview). Johann Cornies’ educational leadership in Russia helped reintroduce music literacy and transform the singing.

**Johann Cornies**

In 1804, Johann Cornies left Prussia with his parents to settle in Molotschna settlement (Dyck, 1993). The Russian government noticed his agricultural success and in 1817 made him “permanent chairman of the Agricultural Association, which came to include all of the educational activities in the Mennonite colonies” (Dyck, 1993, p. 176). Cornies’ educational reforms (e.g., modernizing the curriculum, improving teacher training, founding the first Russian Mennonite secondary school in 1820, and reforming
teaching practices) were very influential in the Molotschna Colony. He wrote treatises on how to teach and treat children. His reforms were less influential among the Kleine Gemeinde who had broken away from the official church of the Molotschna colony (Epp, 1974). The Kleine Gemeinde stressed church discipline, personal accountability, and spiritual fervor. As such, they focused on worship and work. Thus, Cornies’ educational reforms which included the teaching of part-singing had less of an impact on that particular group from the Molotschna Colony (Warkentin, 1971). The Department of Crown Lands also put Cornies in charge of the Chortitza (Old Colony) schools a year before his death (Quiring, 1955). This included schools in the Bergthal Colony. Cornies died before he could staff the Bergthal schools with “teachers trained in the Molotschna Colony” (Ens, 1990, p. 2). Since Bergthal was “isolated geographically from both the Khortitza and Molotschna settlements, and still in their pioneering phase in the 1840s, the Bergthalers were preservers of tradition rather than innovators” (Ens, 1990, p. 2).

Education had often been used to preserve traditions in Mennonite colonies. Cornies’ plans were more progressive, and he believed that schools should stimulate students rather than inculcate them (Letkemann, 1986). Thus, elementary school religious instruction among Molotschna Mennonites included Bible study and “singing according to ciphers from the Gesangbuch” (Berg, 1979, p. 16) since by 1837 Heinrich Franz’s Choralbuch was available in manuscript form. Students were “pleased by the novelty of singing by number, but were also stimulated by the fact that their parents disapproved” (Berg, 1979, p. 17).

H. A. Ediger, a student of Heinrich Franz from 1871 to 1874, reported in Der Bote VII (28 May 1930) that songs were practiced from the Choralbuch during the noon
recess, and that students had to sing by themselves if they came late (Berg, 1979). Berg noted, “choirs were formed first in schools, where choral singing was a natural outgrowth of instruction in hymn singing, then in village and communities, and finally in the churches, though not without opposition” (1979, p. 18). After the more conservative Mennonites left Russia for Manitoba in the 1874 immigration, those who remained tended to accept choirs. Even though some people considered choirs to be worldly and unnecessary, choirs played a vital role in the teaching of new music to congregations.

Eventually through the use of Ziffern, Mennonites were able to read and perform masterworks such as Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” (Berg, 1985). The Ziffern system was comprehensive and simple, but because of the lack of published repertoire with this notation choral directors and singers had to spend many hours “transcribing works from notes into Ziffern and copying them into his or her personal choir book” (Letkemann, 1986, p. 155). The situation improved somewhat between 1883 and 1915 when 17 choral anthologies were published specifically “by and for Russian Mennonites” (Letkemann, p. 155). According to Letkemann, “The choral music in these anthologies was largely borrowed from non-Mennonite sources, but the combination of these various German, Swiss, American and Russian sources produced a repertoire that was uniquely Mennonite” (1986, p. 155). The Mennonite repertoire could be thought of as repertoire sung by Mennonites long after it had ceased to be popular with the rest of society (Grijp, 1994).

**Choral Festivals in Russia**

Russian Mennonites adopted the practice of harvest festivals from the Moravian Brethren. One of the traditions involved the inviting of guest speakers. Pastor Wüst’s
preaching led to the organization in 1860 of the revivalist group (Dyck, 1993) known as the Mennonite Brethren. The Mennonite Brethren were influenced by German Pietism and the Moravian Brethren. The Mennonite Brethren favored “a warmer, more emotional spiritual life . . . accompanied by the simpler, more appealing songs adopted from the English and American revival movements” (Berg, 1979, p. 19).

The Mennonite Brethren congregations embraced the practice of choral singing. Choral directing, like preaching, was a lay ministry among Mennonites and had not traditionally been a professional vocation. With the increase in choirs among Russian Mennonites “from 1870 to 1890” (Berg, 1979, p. 21), the need arose for trained choral directors. These choral directors received their training by holding “choral workshops and choral festivals” (Berg, p. 22).

The practice of holding choral festivals had originated in Germany during the choral movement that started in 1829 (Berg, 1979; Milnor, 2012). The German choral movement resulted in the formation of a number of amateur choirs. Not only was there an interest in choral music, but in the preservation of folksongs as well. Although choral teacher colleges provided choral training in Germany, the Mennonites living in isolated colonies in Russia were trained by choral associations and attending workshops (Berg, 1985).

This [training] was always an important element in the Russian Mennonite choral festival, of course, but the emphasis on the education of choir directors, the result of the Mennonite tradition of lay ministry, seems to have injected a new element into an old German tradition. (Berg, 1979, p. 23)
Friedrich Schweiger, the director of the Russian Choral Association, gave a choral workshop in 1894 (Berg, 1979; Huebert & Huebert, 2009b). The workshop topics included “instruction in conducting pattern, articulation and pronunciation, singing with the proper spirit, . . . [and] the distinction . . . between conducting and beating time (dirigieren und taktieren)” (Berg, 1979, p. 25). Schweiger worked with Aron Sawatzky (Huebert & Huebert, 2009b) who eventually emigrated to Canada where he gave choral workshops in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Minnesota, and Nebraska (Huebert & Huebert, 2009a). As far as the effect of the workshops in Russia, “It is clear that by 1910 choral music was being cultivated and encouraged wherever Mennonites had settled in Russia” (Berg, p. 34).

**Kanadier**

Mennonites from Russia who came to Manitoba in the 1870s became known as the Kanadier. These Mennonites had three primary reasons for leaving Russia: a new law in 1870 making the learning of the Russian language in schools a requirement, land shortage, and the threat of mandatory military service. The most conservative Mennonites who emigrated chose Manitoba as their new home because there they were offered military exemption and autonomy to operate their own schools (G. Ens, 1990, p. 4). More progressive Mennonites “tended to choose the United States” (Epp, 1974, p. 287) and settled in places such as Kansas, Minnesota, Dakota Territory, Nebraska, and Iowa (Dyck, 1993).

About half of the immigrants who came to Manitoba were from the Reinländer Church (Old Colony), and were “largely untouched by Cornies’ reforms” (Ens, 1990, p. 3). “This group came from the Khortitzer (two thirds) and Fuerstenland Colonies (one
third) and was particularly hostile to higher education” (Ens, 1990, p. 3). Although Cornies had influenced education on the Chortitza Colony itself, outlying daughter colonies had resisted changes until immigration to Canada. In Manitoba, the geographical separation of the Chortitzer Church on the two reserves resulted in the formation of the Bergthaler Church on the West Reserve. The West Reserve bordered the United States on the west side of the Red River and included the town of Gretna. (The East Reserve was southeast of Winnipeg on the east side of the Red River and included the town of Steinbach.)

The Bergthaler were difficult to classify since there were both progressive and conservative factions among them. The progressives accepted urbanization, public schools and the changing styles. They also were the earliest to pick up the English language. In their church life they tended to sing more rapidly and have fewer verses, and occasionally they invited outside speakers. (Epp, 1974, p. 286) Epp pointed out that “new ideas, however, had to be treated cautiously because the majority of the Bergthaler leaned toward either the firmness of the Old Colony on cultural-educational issues or the rigidity of the Kleine Gemeinde on personal ethical issues” (1974, p. 286). The Bergthaler were largely responsible for the founding of Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. The Kleine Gemeinde became influential at Steinbach Bible College.

The Kleine Gemeinde had roots in the Molotschna Colony in Russia and was the smallest of the groups to be part of the Kanadier. The Kleine Gemeinde had been started by Klaas Reimer from Prussia. He was disappointed in the worldly behavior of the Russian Mennonites. In 1812, Reimer tried to restore traditional Anabaptist values by
offering separate services from the official *Großekirche* (Fast, 1987). This group’s children attended the same schools in Russia as other Mennonite children, and there were *Kleine Gemeinde* (KG) teachers in the school system (Plett, 1987). In 1863, however, the KG began to move further away from Molotschna. In Russia, they mostly kept their children away from higher education because the teachers at the secondary schools were hostile to KG beliefs (e.g., telling KG students they were not saved). In 1874, they and the Mennonite groups from the Old Colony (e.g., Chortitza) traveled to North America.

The *Kanadier* varied with regard to the amount of education they believed was desirable for their children. Despite the range of opinion concerning education, “the *Kleine Gemeinde*, the Bergthaler (organized as the Chortitzer Church), and the Old Colony” (Ens, 1990, p. 5) had some commonalities as well. “They believed that every child should attend school, that instruction should be simple and geared to Mennonite village society, and that education was the responsibility of the church not the state” (Ens, 1990, p. 5).

Different groups had strong views concerning what was musically appropriate. The *Kleine Gemeinde* originally promoted unison singing without instruments, but in Manitoba they eventually accepted choirs to help keep the young people in their church. Old Colony Mennonites were less unified in their music practices. The Chortitza Mennonites in Russia had begun to use the Franz *Choralbuch* with *Ziffern* because of Johann Cornies’ educational reforms, but they considered it to be worldly. When they got to Manitoba in 1874 they returned to the old way of singing (Berg, 1979). On the other hand, members of the Bergthaler (a daughter colony of Chortitza who had rejected Cornies’ reforms) adopted the *Choralbuch* and the singing of chorale tunes without
embellishments when they got to Manitoba. Thus, it was among the Bergthaler church that “the formation of choirs, the use of quicker gospel songs, and the introduction of musical instruments” began to appear (Berg, 1979, p. 52). Gerhard Ens recalled seeing a minute book for a choral society as early as 1889. The minute book for the organization “was probably destroyed when the Mennonite Collegiate Institute burned down in 1963” (Berg, 1979, p. 52).

While the Bergthaler were embracing Choralbuch singing, the Old Colony Mennonites were experiencing their own changes in musical tradition. As conservers of tradition, the old style of singing was one of the practices they wished to reestablish in Canada. Not all of the Old Colony Mennonites wanted to return to that style of singing, and the issue was serious enough to cause some communities to change their church affiliation. For example, in the early 1880s the entire Hoffnungsfeld village was dropped from the Reinländer Church because “they insisted on singing hymns from the new section of the hymnbook” (Berg, 1979, p. 53).

Heinrich Voth, a Mennonite Brethren minister (who had come from the Molotschna region to Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1876), visited Hoffnungsfeld, Manitoba in 1884 and over the next four years established the first Canadian Mennonite Brethren congregation in 1888 (Berg, 1979; Neufeld, 1988). Like other Mennonite Brethren churches at the time, the Hoffnungsfeld MB congregation soon had a choir. Of the Kanadier, Old Colony Mennonites who had become Mennonite Brethren and the Bergthaler who used Franz’s Choralbuch laid the groundwork for choral activity in Manitoba. Rußländer coming to Manitoba in the 1920s also had a commitment to choral music and provided leadership to promote choral singing in the following decades. The
Kleine Gemeinde, in part because of the influence of the evangelical movement and as a response to the Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, also adopted choral singing.

**Early Mennonite Schools**

During the early years the Mennonites lived in Manitoba, teaching was not an attractive occupation for young men. Wages were low and those who did teach intended to quit as soon as they got the chance. After the teachers trained in Russia began retiring, their replacements often had little more training than their students. Sometimes, a student would work as an apprentice for the existing teacher and then become the new teacher.

Friesen’s description of the schooling indicates that “schools provided instruction in the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. They also taught the church’s religious heritage and nurtured children toward faith in God and membership in the church” (2007, p. 34). The majority of Manitoba Mennonites thought that any education beyond what was necessary for integration into Mennonite society could lead to vices such as confusion, pride, and worldliness. The purpose of education at that time, therefore, was to prepare students to participate in church life and for occupations (e.g., farming, preaching, or teaching).

Before school buildings were built, students met in the teacher’s home. Often classroom space and the teacher’s living space were separated by a hallway. According to Friesen (2007), “The village council hired the teacher, but the church leaders supervised the school system” (pp. 34-35). The curriculum the students were taught was in German and consisted of four levels. The students’ competency rather than their age determined their level. “Penmanship and embellished lettering” (Friesen, 2007, p. 34) as
well as “memorizing and reciting arithmetic tables, poems, and hymns” (p. 34) were common educational experiences. School lasted from six to seven years. Girls attended until they were 12 years old and boys until they were 14 years old (Friesen, 2007). Until the 1920s, teachers organized student presentations consisting of “a carefully scribed and memorized poem at Christmas time” (Friesen, 2007, p. 34) so that parents could evaluate what kind of education their children were getting. Ministers also visited the schools regularly to check if the teaching was meeting church expectations.

**Denominational, Private, and Public Schools**

From 1870-1890 Manitoba operated a denominational school system to accommodate English speaking Protestants and French speaking Roman Catholics (Peters, 1985). The Protestant School Board encouraged Mennonites to register with them. The communities that registered their schools were eligible for government funds, but that meant they were subject to government inspection. With the exception of Old Colony Mennonites such as the Reinländer, many Mennonite groups (e.g., Kleine Gemeinde, Chortitzer, Bergthaler) registered with the provincial government (Friesen, 2007; Redekopp, 2004). The Chortitzer and other Mennonite groups withdrew a few years later when the Protestant School Board wanted to have authority over Mennonite school teachers and their qualifications (Friesen, 2007).

Educational autonomy was important for Mennonites because they wanted their children to be taught traditional Mennonite values and practices.

To aid in this the Kleine Gemeinde, Chortitzer and Sommerfelder churches all had a detailed *Schulverordnung* (a set of school rules). These rules strongly forbade part (harmony) singing in the school or bringing a Christmas tree into the building
since, in the eyes of the church, this led, not to humility but to idolatry. (Peters, 1985, p. 29)

Although official denominational influence remained strong in private schools, official denominational influence declined in the government supported denominational schools after the English population gained control of the legislature and established the Department of Education in 1890 (Friesen, 2007).

Manitoba’s 1890 School Act abolished denominational schools (Ens, 1990). The result was that English was the only language of instruction allowed in public schools. Mennonite communities with public schools were still able to influence education through the teachers they hired, and pastors still visited the schools in an unofficial capacity. The new language requirements were not specifically aimed at bilingual German Mennonite schools but rather they were an “attack by the Manitoba government on French culture and Catholic religion” (Friesen, 2007, p. 36). After the legislation was passed, most of the public Mennonite schools became private again. “In 1891, only the six Kleine Gemeinde schools, plus two others, remained registered as public schools” (Friesen, 2007, p. 36). For a time, the legislation had no effect on schools that operated privately.

In Manitoba public schools, the school boards and teachers reflected the values of the community. After bilingual schools had been abolished in 1890, the Laurier-Greenway Compromise was reached in 1896 to allow schools to be bilingual if there were ten students of a language other than English (Ens, 1990). The Schools Act was then amended in 1897 (Crunican, 2012), and the Laurier-Greenway Compromise also permitted religious instruction if “parents of at least ten students in a rural district
requested it” (Friesen, 2007, p. 36). As a result, teachers in Mennonite communities had to be fluent in both English and German. The Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) in Gretna, the predecessor of MCI, was the first Mennonite school in Manitoba to train teachers for that purpose.

Further complications arose when Premier R. P. Roblin’s Union Jack flag legislation requiring that all schools “fly the British flag” (Friesen, 2007, p. 37; Peters, 1985) passed in 1906. The government hoped this would instill a sense of patriotism for the British Empire in the eastern European immigrants who were coming to Manitoba. Some Mennonites raised concerns that the flying of the flag went against their religious beliefs because it was a military symbol. In 1907 the government announced that the flag law also applied to Mennonites (Ens, 1994).

The Prussian born H. H. Ewert was the MCI principal and the government school inspector responsible for getting Mennonite schools to register as public schools. He saw the flag legislation as problematic because of the Mennonite commitment to pacifism. Controversy ensued.

Eleven schools which had gone public immediately reverted to private status. Others, which had considered going public, had their minds made up. Where the public schools were closed down by local Mennonite trustees, they were forcibly kept open by the government under its own official trustee. But the results were the same in that the parents refused to send their children. (Epp, 1974, p. 347) After the flag issue subsided, there was more trouble when the press led a campaign against bilingual education. In 1912, the province required all teacher exams to be in English (Ens, 1990).
During World War I, anti-German sentiment grew among Canadians and the government questioned “the adequacy of instruction in the bilingual school system” (Friesen, 2007, p. 39). The fact that Mennonites spoke German and were exempt from military service resulted in negative public opinion. Friesen described the situation:

The Manitoba Free Press argued that the reason immigrant groups such as Mennonites were not willing to do military service was that the bilingual school system was deficient in that it did not create national solidarity. It had failed to instill in immigrant young people a proper respect for God, country, the flag, and the British Empire. (2007, p. 39)

However, by 1916 about half of Mennonite schools were already bilingual, and the public schools in Mennonite communities were teaching all subjects in English except religious subjects which were taught in German (Friesen, 2007). This did not stop T. C. Norris’s Liberal government from repealing “the bilingual clause of 1897” (Ens, 1990, p. 101).

The 1916 legislation mandated English-only instruction and compulsory school attendance, but still allowed for the existence of private schools as long as classes were taught in English (Friesen, 2007). The 1916 legislation also revoked French rights established in the Manitoba Act of 1870 and affected the Ukrainians as well (Peters, 1985). Peters described the drastic effect this had on the Mennonites:

Approximately half of the Mennonite children in Manitoba were attending private schools in 1916 and the other half went to bi-lingual public schools. The 1916 legislation abolished both of the educational options the Mennonites had chosen. Unilingual English education remained the only legal option. (1985, p. 32)
The Mennonites responded by changing the schools in their communities back to private status, a course of action the provincial government considered to be “an attempt to destroy the public school system” (Ens, 1990, p. 101).

In 1918, J. F. Greenway was appointed “as official trustee for all these schools, giving him total control over their operations” (Peters, 1985, p. 32). He took over the public Mennonite schools, and from 1918-1921 he used legislation to coerce schools that had gone private to become public again (Friesen, 2007). In 1919, an amendment to the School Act allowed “the government to create a school district unilaterally where none had existed before” (Ens, 1990, 102). This meant that parents had to pay taxes for new schools that they did not want. Refusing to send children to the new schools resulted in fines, and parents who did not pay the fines were put in prison.

The Mennonites believed that they had the legal right to run their own schools. When the Sommerfelder appealed charges, they found that there were two versions of John Lowes’ 1873 *Privilegium* which had been granted to the Mennonites by the Dominion government. The Mennonite’s copy of John Lowes’ 1873 *Privilegium* gave the impression that the federal government had granted the Mennonites total autonomy over educational matters and assured them of the right to have denominational schools. The British North America Act (1867), however, had given the provinces control over educational matters. Thus, the *Privilegium* did not grant Mennonites the autonomy they thought they had.

During the 1870s, the system of Manitoba education with Protestant and Catholic boards had easily accommodated Mennonite schools. At this point in time, the Manitoba government had been looking for people to farm the land and increase the population to
keep the province from being annexed to Minnesota. The government’s *Privilegium* to attract Mennonites was expedient. However, with the increase in non-English immigrants and the anti-German sentiment during World War I, the desire for a British society and culture predominated in the legislature. The school system was seen as the means for accomplishing this objective. The legislation of 1916 eventually precipitated the emigration of thousands of Mennonites in the 1920s from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico and Paraguay (Ens, 1990). These emigrants consisted of the “Reinlaender, Chortitzer, and many of the Sommerfelder, representing the majority of Mennonites in Manitoba” (Friesen, 2007, p. 40). From 1922 to 1926, approximately two-thirds of the *Reinländer* from Manitoba left for Mexico (Redekopp, 2004). Members of these groups who could not afford to emigrate often had to join another church. An unofficial group of *Reinländer* still met in the village of Chortitz. In the 1930s they reorganized as the “Old Colony Mennonite Church of Manitoba” (Redekopp, 2004).

Those who remained in Canada tried to continue to use the school to pass on their Mennonite heritage.

Fortunately the new school law allowed religion to be taught in the last half hour of the day. As this instruction lay outside the control of the government, it could take place in the language desired by the parents, namely German. (Ens, 1990, p. 103)

MCI lost its Normal School course during the controversy. MCI was still necessary to help train bilingual teachers although MCI students wishing to pursue teaching had to continue their studies elsewhere. By the 1950s, most Mennonites spoke English.
To help preserve their heritage, Manitoba Mennonites engaged in a variety of activities to supplement their public school education. Approaches varied by community, but three broad categories of activities included 1) schooling (Mennonites in Manitoba used both public and private schools to inculcate their values), 2) supplements to schools (e.g., Sunday schools, Bible schools, Saturday German schools) which became more popular after the majority of Mennonites lost control of their schools, and 3) social activities such as Christian Endeavor, Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization, music festivals, and singing schools (Berg, 1985; Epp, 1982).

**Rußländer**

The Mennonites who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1920s after the 1917 Russian Revolution became known as the *Rußländer*. While the *Kanadier* were pioneering in Manitoba, the Mennonites who remained in Russia developed their school system to protect them from Russification (Epp, 1974). “The Russian government controlled the appointment of teachers, required Russian-language instruction in all subjects except religion and German, and determined the curriculum” (Friesen, 2007, p. 64). Thus, the educational system Mennonites were experiencing in Russia in the 1870s was similar to what *Kanadier* Mennonites were experiencing in Canada after 1916.

In Russia prior to the Bolshevik revolution, the Mennonites had paid for their own schooling, but they had also had a say concerning the hiring of teachers and the curriculum. Their School of Commerce offered a mostly a liberal arts post-secondary education. There were two teacher colleges, “a school for the deaf, an agriculture school, a nurses’ training school, two trade schools, and a number of Bible schools” (Friesen, 2007, pp. 64-65). In 1914 there were approximately 300 students attending universities.
in Russia and in other countries. The *Rußländer* spoke High German and Russian (Epp, 1974). The apparent progressiveness of the Mennonites in Russia and the apparent conservativeness of the *Kanadier* were both means of preserving their heritage.

When the Mennonites in Soviet Russia realized that they would have to relocate, they began learning English. During the 1920s when over 5,000 of the most conservative *Kanadier* were leaving Manitoba for Latin America because of the school situation, approximately 21,000 Mennonites from Russia immigrated to Canada. When the *Rußländer* arrived in Canada, they settled in five provinces from British Columbia to Ontario (Epp, 1982). They were culturally far different from the *Kanadier* and influenced Mennonite cultural life in the Prairie Provinces (e.g., Manitoba, Saskatchewan) by organizing “new school, community, or church singing groups” (Friesen, 2007, p. 95). Music helped them remember their homeland as well as established a sense of community in their new home. “The Russlaender also organized community orchestras, generally composed of string instruments. Guitars were used extensively in informal youth gatherings to accompany folk singing while harmonicas and mandolins were preferred for personal pleasure in homes or in groups” (Friesen, 2007, p. 95).

Choral music was introduced in Gnadenthal, Manitoba after the *Rußländer* occupied the farms vacated by the Old Colony Mennonites who had emigrated to Mexico (1923-1925) (Berg, 1979).

Gnadenthal was a member of the Blumenort Mennonite Church, an association of immigrant congregations located in about nine villages between Gretna and Winkler, and in the 1930s these villages would gather together, four or five choirs
at a time, for three or four small choral festivals a year, under the auspices of an association of young people called the Ebenezer Jugendbund. (Berg, 1979, pp. 90-91)

In addition to the choral activity in the Blumenort church, the Whitewater Mennonite Church (General Conference) in western Manitoba started a choir in 1927 (Berg, 1979).

The Whitewater Mennonite Church (formed in 1927) was made up of six congregations in nearby towns. By 1935, congregations of this church (“Whitewater, Rivers, Ninga, Lena, Crystal City, and Manitou” (Berg, 1979, p. 91)) recognized a need for more training for the choral directors and singers. Choral workshops and festivals during the month of July provided the training and a chance to socialize. These events began on a Saturday and culminated with a festival on the following Sunday.

**Choral Festivals**

The Mennonite Brethren had been the first Mennonites to develop choirs in Russia. The tradition of using choral workshops and music festivals to train directors came from Russian Mennonites. Of the Manitoba Mennonite groups that arrived in 1874, the Bergthal Mennonites were the only ones to have choirs by 1890 (Berg, 1989). Bergthaler from Manitoba, immigrants from the United States, and immigrants from Prussia also took this early choral tradition to Saskatchewan in the 1890s (Berg, 1979). It should be noted, however, that Bergthaler choirs initially sang only at events outside of church services.

Participation in the church service was out of the question, of course, but as early as 1910-11 young people of the conservative Sommerfelder Church would gather once a week for an evening of singing (*Singstunde*), singing songs from the
Evangeliums-Lieder. In the Bergthaler church, choirs were permitted to sing in special services, and Ann Loewen reports that her mother-in-law spoke of choirs in her day (before 1930). A choir did not begin to rehearse regularly in the Altona Bergthaler Church until 1933, however. (Berg, 1979, p. 57)

Choral leaders were itinerants, and some were also ministers. In 1905, the Russian immigrant Aron G. Sawatzky probably led the first Saskatchewan choral festival that had an emphasis on training conductors. This was similar to the conductor workshops in Russia (Berg, 1979). These workshops in the Prairie Provinces provided conductors with the training needed to carry out their role as choral directors. The use of workshops and festivals to train Mennonite choral directors throughout Canada was most prevalent from 1923 to 1942 (Berg, 1979).

The festivals originally had an important social component for these people living in rural communities. With cultural changes and improvements in transportation, the need to socialize at festivals decreased. Mennonite musicians were also becoming more sophisticated and outgrowing the scope of the workshops. Gradually the Mennonite colleges and Bible schools took over the role of training directors and the workshops were no longer needed. Although choral conducting among Mennonites was initially a layman’s activity, it eventually became a professional occupation.

During the years the Mennonite choral directors had been receiving their music education from workshops, they had had primary occupations other than music (e.g., teachers, farmers, preachers, and engineers). After World War II, Mennonite conductors increasingly received a college education. This resulted in an increase in the number of professional musicians (Berg, 1979). While lay musicians likely shared the
musical preferences of their congregation, trained musicians would want to increase artistry and perform more sophisticated repertoire.

Performance standards had already begun to change when the Rußländer came in the 1920s because of the well-trained choral conductors among them.

*Rußländer* conductors included K. H. Neufeld in southern Manitoba, Franz C. Thiessen (Rosthern, Winnipeg, and later Abbotsford), John Konrad (Winnipeg), C. D. Toews (Niverville and B.C.), Nikolai Fehderau (Kitchener), Jake Enns (Waterloo), George Reimer (Yarrow), and David Paetkau (Rosthern). These men, and many more like them, contributed much to the development of choral singing among Canadian Mennonites in the years after 1924. (Letkemann, 2007, p. 57)

Four important leaders were Neufeld, Thiessen, Konrad, and Paetkau.

While Thiessen and Konrad became active in the Winnipeg area (although the latter taught in Winkler for a time), Neufeld did most of his work in southern Manitoba. Thus, he influenced musical life in both the Gretna and Steinbach communities. K. H. Neufeld (1892-1957) who had immigrated to Manitoba from Russia in 1923 became a printer in Winkler and established choirs among recent immigrants. He also popularized and established lay choirs among the Kanadier (the Bergthaler in particular) (Berg & Thiessen, 2012) throughout Canada, inspired young people to love choral music, and was influential in turning the Schulfest at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna “into a full-scale choral festival” (Berg, 1979, p. 106; 1985; 1990) which included choirs from Winkler, Arnaud, Steinbach, Altona, Plum Coulee, and Gretna (Berg, 1979).

Benjamin Horch (1907-1992) was one of the first Mennonites to become a professional musician. Horch helped expand the Mennonite’s attitude concerning what
good choral repertoire was. Horch was from a Lutheran family that had emigrated from Russia to Manitoba in 1909 (Letkemann, 2007). While in Winnipeg, his family became active in the North End Mennonite Brethren Church. Although Horch conducted music workshops and festivals throughout Canada, the majority of his teaching activity was in Winnipeg and Winkler.

Because of their Lutheran background, Horch and his family did not have the reservations towards art music held by other Manitoba Mennonites. One of his contributions was to expand the number of Classical choral works performed by the Mennonites. He also promoted the singing of older chorales rather than the more popular gospel songs.

Unlike most Mennonite young people, whose knowledge of music did not extend beyond the contents of a few hymnals and some German folk-songs, Horch grew up surrounded by the music of the great German composers. He had a collection of recordings available to him in his home, something quite unusual at that time. (Berg, 1979, p. 122)

In addition to Horch’s Lutheran background, he had also been influenced by the English choral sound in his public high school in Winnipeg. Thus, his conducting tended to emphasize the melodic line rather than stress the vertical rhythmic aspects of the music (which was more typical among Mennonites). Ben Horch’s emphasis on the linear aspects of choral singing was influential on the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites (Letkemann, 2007).

John Konrad was another festival and workshop leader. Konrad was also a well-known violin teacher in Winnipeg at the Bornoff School of Music (Berg, 1979, 1985;
Letkemann, 2007). He encouraged young people to study instrumental music and founded an ensemble in 1935 that became the beginning of the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra. Konrad was also active directing choirs with the Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization.

Other important choral leaders in Manitoba were George Wiebe and William Baerg (Berg, 1989). Wiebe became the choral director at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University) and Baerg taught at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University). Wiebe’s postsecondary academic training included Vancouver Normal School (1949), a degree in Christian Education from Canadian Mennonite Bible College (1953), AMM (1955), ARCT (1957), a Master of Music from Southern California (1962), and a Doctor of Music from Indiana (1980) (Spier, 2012).

Wiebe taught at Canadian Mennonite Bible College from 1954 to 1991. He was active with the Mennonite Festival Chorus and the Faith and Life Male Choir. He is known as a conductor, workshop director, adjudicator, and hymnologist. Wiebe has worked on three hymnal committees. He also translated Wilhelm Ehmann’s *Die Chorführung* into English (Spier, 2012). His wife Esther Wiebe is known for her hymn arrangements and church music compositions.

Like Wiebe and Horch, William Baerg also became a professional musician. He graduated from Goshen College in 1962 and received his Master of Music from Peabody Conservatory in 1971. From 1963 to 1966 he studied conducting “with Kurt Thomas and Martin Stephani in Germany” (William Baerg, 2012). Baerg taught at Mennonite Brethren Bible College from 1966-1970 and returned after graduation from Peabody in 1965.
1972. He worked at Mennonite Brethren Bible College as a choral director until 1990. Baerg was also active with the Mennonite Festival Chorus. He and his wife, pianist Irmgard Baerg, were awarded the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra’s Golden Baton Award in 2010 (WSO honours, 2010).

In conclusion, as a result of the choral festival tradition, a number of trained and inspired Mennonite music directors were promoting the enjoyment of choral music in the community. Some of the first choral directors in Mennonite colleges in Manitoba had grown up with this tradition before becoming professional musicians. Some of these professional Mennonite musicians now train music teachers who work in schools. MCI and SCHS teachers who have studied at Canadian Mennonite University and similar institutions likely have had choral directors with musical backgrounds that grew out of the choral festival tradition.

Summary

Mennonites with Dutch and North German ancestry adapted a German culture when they lived in Prussia. Music teachers from Prussia became familiar with the use of Ziffern notation and Pestalozzian ideals in music education. Contact with German Pietism influenced Mennonite’s choice of repertoire and their acceptance of choirs. The first Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba tended to be the most conservative. The older Chortitza Colony in Russia had conservative tendencies whereas the newer Molotschna Colony tended to be more progressive in matters of music and education. The Russian government put Johann Cornies in charge of education in the Mennonite Colonies. Cornies initiated education reforms that included singing from Ziffern. The Kleine Gemeinde, a conservative group among the Molotschna Colony, was initially opposed to
choral music. A revival movement among Russian Mennonites resulted in a group known as the Mennonite Brethren who readily accepted choirs.

Although the Bergthaler in Manitoba had had their origins in the Chortitza Colony, choral singing became acceptable with the help of H. H. Ewert, the new principal at MCI who was from Kansas and had a Prussian background. The MCI was built to train teachers to work in the public Manitoba school system in Mennonite communities. After 1916, English was the only language allowed in the public schools and attendance was compulsory. While some Mennonites emigrated to Latin America, others sought to work within the system. During this time Sunday schools and German Saturday schools developed to supplement German and religious instruction. Sunday school and German Saturday school teachers were often trained in Bible schools such as Steinbach Bible College.
CHAPTER III
MENNONITE COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) (see Figure 2) provides students with an accredited high school program and also aims at educating the whole person: mind, body, and spirit (MCI Academics, n.d.). The music program is a prominent part of the school’s public image and includes “annual dramas, musicals, and growing visual arts and music programs” (MCI Fine Arts, n.d.). The emphasis, however, is “on choral and sacred music” (MCI, 2002, p. 5; MCI, 2005; MCI, 2007).

MCI’s Origins and History

Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna was started in 1889 after much discussion. Previously Johann Funk, the elder on the West Reserve, rallied support from the Bergthaler and proposed building a teacher training school in 1885 (Ens, 1990). In 1888, merchants in Gretna made another proposal for a teacher training school. Wilhelm Rempel (a teacher) and his brother-in-law Peter Abrams attended a “teaching demonstration at a Mennonite school in Mountain Lake, Minnesota in May of 1888” to “see what the Mennonites had achieved there” (Ens, 1990, p. 10).

Rempel was impressed by the instruction in German and English, the historical presentations, and by the singing. He returned to Manitoba full of praise for the school and soon aroused a good deal of enthusiasm for a similar school in Manitoba. (Ens, 1990, p. 10)
On November 23, 1888, the School Society held a meeting in Gretna to start a Fortbildungsschule (secondary school). A committee was appointed to work out a program and statutes for the School Society. The School Society wanted to emphasize the Christian faith and opened the membership to anyone, including non-Mennonites, who paid the annual ten-dollar fee (Ens, 1990). Non-Mennonites, however, could not be on the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee. In addition to being a Christian school for people speaking German, MCI would train teachers to be fluent in English and German. These bilingual teachers would be able to replace retiring teachers who had received their training in Russia. The Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna functioned as a teacher training institution from 1889 to 1960 (Ens, 1990).
Church

From the 1950s through the mid-1980s, MCI relied on the surviving “culture of choral music and choir singing in churches” (see Appendix F for Loewen interview, p. 403). These church choirs gave students experience singing in parts. Engbrecht said, “We learned a lot just sitting beside each other and sitting through what was often not a very good rehearsal, but we just sang songs from beginning to end” (see Appendix A, p. 246). Therefore, these students came to schools such as MCI and Westgate (in Winnipeg) knowing something about choral singing regardless of whether or not they got choral experience in elementary or junior high school. Houser Hamm observed,

If you grow up hearing homophonic four-part sound, it affects how your ears listen to things, how you perceive sound, and how you perceive yourself in the creation of sound and [as] a part of a sound that is happening around you. (see Appendix B, p. 300)

Among churches supporting MCI, trends in church music include using more praise and worship music and only organizing church choirs for special occasions. There are not as many Mennonite church and Mennonite youth choirs as there used to be. For example, most of the churches in Altona are Mennonite and yet the United Church is the only one with a standing choir (see Appendix E for Krahn interview). Heppner Mueller suggested that church activities such as youth choirs became less of a focus as other activities and the overall busyness of the late 1980s and 1990s became more prevalent. In congregational singing, there has also been a switch in some Mennonite churches to use worship bands and contemporary music. Thus, schools have to take more of a role in
teaching “the hymn tradition of the church” (see Appendix B for Houser Hamm interview, p. 300).

The result is that many students do not come to MCI with the choral experience that students in previous years used to get in their home congregations. A few MCI students do not even have “much of a church background, but they’re really musical and gung-ho” (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 357). Heppner Mueller said that a church background still helped even if not in the same way as it used to:

So musically the churches aren’t having as strong an influence as they used to, but from a faith standpoint, a theological standpoint, and community standpoint, it still has helped for sure. And you know it’s the church and the parents, they’re the ones that are shaping these children to a large degree and the students we have here—they’re just gold, they’re wonderful to work with. So maybe the churches musically [are] not as strong an influence, but you’re still getting students with just great character. (see Appendix D, p. 357)

MCI Leadership

Heinrich H. Ewert. In 1891, H. H. Ewert was MCI’s second principal, and he provided the leadership that established the school (Schaefer, 1990). The first principal, Wilhelm Rempel, resigned at the end of his first year because he was overwhelmed with the task of teaching 60 students ranging from elementary to those studying to become teachers (Ens, 1990). Ewert had been born in Prussia and grew up in Kansas. Ewert brought an American model of education and church life with him. Ewert was also hired as the government inspector in 1891 to make sure that English was taught in the Mennonite public schools in addition to German and to see that the schools were meeting
government standards (Schaefer, 1990). Reactions to Ewert were mixed. Cultural differences included his Prussian and American background rather than a Russian and Canadian background. The Bergthaler were also divided on the issue of making an arrangement that included oversight by government inspectors.

By 1900 there were two distinct courses of study at MCI. The Lehrerkursus was the “teacher training program,” and the Fortbildungskursus was the “more elementary program” (Ens, 1990, p. 24). Both courses had classes in Bible and religious instruction, and all students had classes taught in German and English, although the government required that nearly 80% of instruction be in English by the time students got to their third year classes (Ens, 1990).

In the beginning, the school was poorly attended, but by 1903 the building was too small to accommodate all of the students. Three different locations were suggested for a new school: Gretna, Winkler, and Altona. In the end, the new Mennonite Education Institute, or MEI as the school was originally called, was rebuilt in Altona, and Ewert remained in Gretna where the school was reopened in 1908 as Mennonite Collegiate Institute (see Figure 3). An addition to the school building was added in 1912 in order to accommodate the increase in students (Ens, 1990; Schaefer, 1990). Both MCI and MEI had 67 students and similarities between the schools (i.e., mission to train teachers) resulted in competition for students (Ens, 1990).

There were also some major differences between the two schools. “The Altona MEI employed many more non-Mennonite teachers and American Mennonite teachers who were less traditional than H. H. Ewert” (Ens, 1990, p. 72). Ewert’s stronger emphasis on tradition and Mennonite identity had more long term appeal among MCI’s
supporters. MCI’s largest support base remained in Gretna. It also drew students from places such as “Edenburg, Halbstadt, Lowe Farm, Plum Coulee, Steinbach, and Winkler” (Ens, 1990, p. 73).

In addition to drawing support from the Bergthaler Church, the MCI was attracting the children of Mennonite Brethren, Holdeman, Kleine Gemeinde, Bruderthal and Sommerfelder families in the area. The school was also drawing students from as far away as Saskatchewan and Alberta. (Ens, 1990, pp. 73-74)

In 1914, Ewert hired John Linscheid, a graduate of Bethel College in Kansas, “to teach English and history” (Ens, 1990, p. 81). Silas Hertzler and Ewert were also fulltime teachers at this time. Ewert’s sister-in-law Emilie Ewert taught music. During
this time there was also a *Normalkursus* program which consisted of short continuing education classes for teachers working at Mennonite private schools.

In 1916, when legislation eliminated bilingual schools and made school attendance compulsory (Bruno-Jofre, 1998; Epp, 1982), MCI attracted the attention of many churches previously hostile to the school. The increased curiosity resulted in greater attendance at MCI’s annual *Schulfest* held in June (Ens, 1990). *Schulfeste* “consisted of the performance of a major work by the school choir, recitations, speeches and Bible stories organized around a central theme” (Ens, 1990, p. 89). These were followed by several sermons.

In the 1920s, MCI also attracted *Rußländer* teachers who needed to learn English in order to resume teaching in Manitoba (Friesen, 2007). Attendance was good until the time of the First World War (Ens, 1990). Factors such as the Mennonites fear of possible military service, the uncertainty of wartime conditions, the abolishment of bilingual schools, and the establishment of “good public high schools in . . . Winkler and Steinbach” (Ens, p. 75) created difficulties for both MCI and MEI. The war era nearly closed MCI, and did close MEI in Altona from 1917 to 1920 before it was “closed for good after the school burnt down in 1926” (Ens, p. 75). The booming farm economy during the war era also resulted in potential students’ decisions to farm instead of going to school (Ens, 1990).

Ewert’s leadership in promoting traditional Mennonite values such as the preservation of the German language was one of the reasons MCI succeeded. Additionally, some of the Russian immigrants he aided in the 1920s became new students (Ens, 1990). Some administrative decisions he made also helped to save the school. In
order to provide the school with greater financial stability, Ewert advocated more church involvement with the school, and by 1931 MCI was under church control (Ens, 1990). At this time the Bergthaler Church briefly withdrew when they realized the Rußländer “would dominate the board” (Friesen, 2007, p. 83) but they later returned. “In 1939 a new society of churches was organized, which included the Bergthaler again, even though they were still in the minority and had little control” (Friesen, 2007, p. 83).

Although the Chortitzer and Old Colony received elementary teachers from MCI, these groups “did not have representatives on the board” (Friesen, 2007, p. 83).

The teaching style of the school was one of formal authority. Ewert’s teaching style generally consisted of reading the textbook and explaining difficult passages (Ens, 1990).

With H. H. Ewert it was not technique but the man himself who inspired his students. This was reflected in his training of future teachers. He placed a good deal of stress on character development, since to him the most important factor in religious instruction in the schools was the teacher himself. Ewert felt that the example of a Christian teacher, whose heart was in his work, and whose personal life in the school and community was exemplary, influenced a student profoundly. (Ens, 1990, p. 38).

Ewert’s musical influence was extensive. Ewert was active in convincing congregations to accept Sunday schools and choirs as well as organizing a mixed choir for Gretna residents (Ens, 1990). He conducted MCI’s choir until 1933 (Schaefer, 1990). His school choirs sang from the same German hymn books that the Russian Mennonites were using, books like Heimatkaenge, Frohe Botschaft, and
Glaubensstimme, and he introduced German cantatas to his constituency, in what must have been a startling change of musical fare for people accustomed either to the old, ornate chorales or the new, catchy gospel songs. Ewert was also responsible for the first choral concert in Southern Manitoba, in the second decade of this century. (Berg, 1979, pp. 54-55).

George Wiebe (see Appendix G) suggested that MCI’s repertoire in Ewert’s first years would probably have included music from the Evangeliums-Lieder and Gesangbuch mit Noten. The Evangeliums-Lieder consisted mostly of gospel songs translated from English into German. Wiebe mentioned that Ewert expanded MCI’s repertoire to include chorales from the 1890 Gesangbuch mit Noten. With the Gesangbuch, “You have more chorales and also good translated English songs—translations of Watts and Wesley, and so on. This book was being used . . . in the more progressive churches at that time, and that would have been promoted by Ewert” (see Appendix G, p. 453). The most popular of these gospel songs and chorales among these Mennonites became known as Kernlieder (i.e., core songs).

For the Mennonites, the term Kernlieder has come to mean the central songs of the faith. Kernlieder repertoire includes chorales, gospel songs, and songlike hymns (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview). According to Engbrecht,

They [Kernlieder] were really the bookmarks of the day as far as music that we would sing that came out of Russia. And there were some groups that were more chorale based—German chorale (and of course there were Lutheran communities near the Mennonite communities in southern Russia in the Ukraine as well). . . . And there were those who were more gospel oriented—here represented more by
the Mennonite Brethren churches. But both sang each other’s sort of favorites . . .
in the course of the twentieth century. (see Appendix A, pp. 256-257)

Ewert also played the piano and owned an extensive record collection of classical
music. Ewert loved music and helped his students learn to love music. He died on
December, 29, 1934, but the principals who came after him continued to pursue Ewert’s
vision for MCI until the 1960s (Ens, 1990). Ewert’s leadership kept the school running
during difficult times and established choral music at the school.

**Gerhard H. Peters.** Gerhard H. Peters, who followed Evert, was principal from
1935-1948. Peters was the first of the Rußländer to become principal. With one
exception, Ewert and Peters appeared to be similar in their approach to MCI. Ewert’s
intention was that the school be a college for training teachers whereas Peters focused
MCI on remaining as a high school. Religion and German in the curriculum were
strengths. Required subjects were expected to be taught as well as in public schools.
Reasonably strict rules were used to instill in students “the habits of a well-ordered life”
(Ens, 1990, p. 137). Peters, along with the board, believed that the German language was
a distinguishing feature of the Mennonite faith and education.

Peters was a competent pianist and an excellent choral director (Ens, 1990),
however, D. P. Esau became the choral director as the responsibilities of the principal
increased. Ens (1990) wrote,

In the 1930s and early 1940s D. P. Esau did very creditable work with the school
chorus and with specialized singing groups. . . . Esau was followed by Heinrich
Regehr as teacher of German and religion and as choir director. During the 1947-
48 academic year, the principal, Mr. Peters, took over the school choir, managing,
albeit with some difficulty to perform Romberg’s *Das Lied von der Glocke*. (p. 12)

During World War II, the teachers at MCI promoted the German language and culture rather than German patriotism. Because enrollment in the school was increasing, a new school was built in 1947. The old school was renovated as a residence hall for boys. In 1948, Peters left MCI to take a job at Steinbach Bible Academy before becoming principal at Springstein public school for five years (Ens, 1990). In 1954 he was “offered a position at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg” (Ens, p. 154). Peters’ leadership at MCI “was one of the last and most successful attempts to retain the German language as an integral part of the Mennonite faith and culture” (Ens, 1990, p. 156). He valued character education and placed more emphasis on conversion than his predecessors. Peters was followed at MCI by Paul Schaefer in 1948.

**Paul J. Schaefer.** Schaefer came to MCI in 1943 as a teacher. He was the last of the *Rußländer* principals who had grown up and received his education in Russia. Schaefer had a Lutheran heritage and had studied at the “German-Lutheran Gymnasium in Tarutino, Bessarabia” (Ens, 1990, p. 164). In 1918 he accepted a job in the Mennonite village of Alexandrodar where he met Margaretha Wiebe, his future wife (Ens, 1990). After the Communists took over the school in 1923, Schaefer and his family left for Canada in 1925. After coming to Manitoba in 1925, he studied at MCI in Gretna “to learn English and to pass the required courses to gain admittance into Normal School” (Ens, p. 166). Upon graduating he taught at the public school in Gnadenthal, Manitoba “for the next 15 years” (Ens, p. 166) and received “his B.A. from the University of
Manitoba in 1937” (Ens, p. 167). Thus, the village had “a two-room public school with qualified Mennonite teachers” (Hamm, 1956).

Although the village of Gnadenthal, Manitoba had been started by Old Colony Mennonites from the Chortitza settlement in south Russia in 1874-1875, they vacated the village between 1923-1925 when “the Department of Education required the use of the English language in the schools” (Hamm, 1956). New Mennonite immigrants from Russia arrived there in 1924 and “took possession of the land and buildings” (Hamm, 1956). Gnadenthal then had a General Conference Mennonite church as well as a Mennonite Brethren church.

The daily school routine in Gnadenthal under Schaefer began with a hymn and prayer (Ens, 1990).

This was followed by a half hour of German instruction, and only then would the official school day begin with the singing of the National Anthem. When the prescribed courses were finished in the afternoon all books were laid aside and Schaefer would conduct another half hour of religious instruction. In the evenings, Schaefer would often invite students and other village residents to the school for lessons in Mennonite history or German literature. Margaretha Schaefer, a talented teacher herself, taught music and singing to the older girls . . . (Ens, p. 167)

His experiences at the Lutheran Gymnasium in Tarutino had given him training in drama. Students enjoyed his classes (e.g., drama, literature) and the way “he would read and act out scenes from Shakespeare” (Ens, 1990, p. 169). Schaefer used drama to help make Mennonite history interesting to the students. Like Peters, Schaefer stressed
memory work and systematic work habits (Ens, 1990). Schaefer’s policies as an administrator, like those of Peters, supported Ewert’s vision for the school. Like Peters, Schaefer became discouraged by student behavior.

Schaefer resigned as principal “at the end of the 1966-67 school year” (Ens, 1990, p. 181) but continued to teach at MCI the following year. A celebration was held in his honor “on March 16, 1968” (Ens, p. 184) for “his forty years of teaching in Manitoba, twenty-five of which had been spent at the MCI” (p. 184). Schaefer was very moved by the large alumni choir directed by Henry Engbrecht for the event. In August, there was an alumni reunion in Schaefer’s honor. In addition to Schaefer’s accomplishments as a teacher and administrator, he “was also a scholar and author who had written a biography of H. H. Ewert and a number of textbooks for the study of Mennonite history” (Ens, 1990, p. 184). By the time Schaefer resigned in 1967, students “no longer knew any German,” and he was only “nominally teaching his classes in German, but explaining most of the lessons in English” (Ens, p. 206). This convinced Schaefer’s successor Gerhard Ens that the curriculum needed to be changed.

**Gerhard Ens.** Although a *Rußländer* by birth, Gerhard Ens was a year old when his family came to Canada. Thus, he had been completely educated in Canada. Schaefer had been his teacher for Grades 9 and 10 at the village school in Gnadenthal, Manitoba and Ens completed Grades 11 and 12 at MCI (Ens, 1990). He attended Normal School for a year before taking a teaching job in Gnadenthal in 1942 (Ens, 1990). After the war started, he was “not allowed to teach” (Ens, 1990, p. 211) because of “his conscientious objector status” (p. 211). During this time he “served a period of alternative service in a mental hospital in Portage La Prairie” (Ens, p. 211). In 1946, Ens joined Schaefer and
Peters as a teacher at MCI. He later became the principal and “completed his B.A. and B. Ed. Degrees at the University of Manitoba by doing most of the course work during summer school” (Ens, 1990, p. 211). Twenty of the 30 years he taught at MCI were with Schaefer. With the trust of the constituency, Ens was able to make the changes he thought “were necessary to keep the school viable” (Ens, p. 207) such as decreasing the time devoted to German and religion courses “from 33% to 25%” (p. 207) and expanding “the sports and music programs . . .” (p. 207).

Around the 1960s, “MCI ceased to be a teacher training institution” (Ens, 1990, p. 208). As the post war “teacher shortage eased, . . . teacher training [in Manitoba] was increased from one year to four, and . . . the responsibility for hiring teachers [in schools] was transferred to larger central boards . . .” (Ens, p. 208). In 1967, Ens’ course of action to update the curriculum was traditional enough to keep the school rooted in the principles of Mennonite education set by his predecessors. Writing about himself, Ens observed, “Like many first-generation immigrants he carried a strong attachment to the traditional precepts of Mennonite education, but having received all of his schooling in Canada he was more open to change” (1990, p. 207). He continued, “These changes included an increased use and emphasis on English, an expanded sports program, and possibly some stage productions for the students. All, he felt, were necessary to attract students to the MCI” (Ens, pp. 211-212).

Ens resigned as principal at the end of the 1975-76 school year and taught at MCI in the 1976-77 school year. Henry Engbrecht was a guest conductor at MCI for a farewell celebration for Ens in June, 1977. Kenneth (Ken) Loewen followed Ens as the first Canadian born principal in 1976 (Ens, 1990).
Kenneth Loewen. Loewen was born in Altona in 1943. His family moved to Carman, Manitoba, and he attended school there. Following Grade 8 he went to MCI for four years starting in the 1958-59 school year. He went to college at the University of Manitoba and “in 1967 began teaching history and English at the high school in Carman. He remained there for seven years until he was persuaded by Gerhard Ens to join the staff of the MCI” (Ens, 1990, p. 223) where he eventually became principal.

Loewen wanted MCI to compete with public schools while continuing to maintain its spiritual values. With Loewen as principal, MCI began to look more like the public schools with less use of German, offering courses “such as French and Computer Science” (Ens, 1990, p. 223), giving intervarsity sports more prominence, and building a new gym in 1977. Following construction of the gym, a new library named after Paul J. Schaefer was built in May of 1981. The school began receiving government grants in the 1976-77 school-year “through a shared-services agreement with the Rhineland School Division” (Ens, p. 226)—the public school district in which the town of Gretna is located. In spite of the changes to be more competitive with public schools, the school continued to incorporate Mennonite values into its curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The school experienced extensive growth and by 1978-79 there were 223 students (Ens, 1990). This was more students than the school could manage. In retrospect, the school should have capped student enrollment at a manageable level (fewer than 200) (Ens, 1990). Not all of the students accepted the conservative lifestyle that was expected in the residence halls. This was later partly responsible for a decline in students during the 1980s. Competition for students from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg and good public schools in Winkler also led to decreased enrollment at MCI.
Before Loewen left for a new job as principal at Garden Valley Collegiate in Winkler, he initiated plans for a think tank to examine MCI’s purpose (Ens, 1990). Allan Dueck accepted the position as principal at MCI on condition that the academic and residential responsibilities would be split between a principal and vice principal. Dave Regehr became vice-principal and administered the residence hall “while continuing his duties as the school’s counselor” (Ens, p. 233).

Allan Dueck and Dave Regehr. The new administrators were active in the Think Tank started by Loewen. Dr. John Neufeld of Canadian Mennonite Bible College led the meeting which was held in January 1986 at Villa Maria in St. Norbert (Ens, 1990). The group consisted of board members, staff, and spouses. They affirmed MCI’s Anabaptist-Christian values and implemented plans to only accept students willing to abide by the school’s expectations. They also recommended that “teachers with post-high-school training in Bible and Anabaptist studies” (Ens, p. 240) be given preference in the hiring process.

The Think Tank also decided that the music program should stay focused on choral music, and they dropped “the music theory classes introduced in the late 1960s” (Ens, 1990, p. 245).

The Chamber Choir was retained along with the recently introduced Ensemble. This Ensemble was a select ten-voice group doing contemporary Christian music for teenage audiences. . . . Participants in the class and specialty choirs would receive academic credit, and rehearsals were scheduled within the academic day to allow greater flexibility for evening scheduling in the residence. The Think Tank also encouraged the school to maintain its emphasis on drama by continuing
to present two major productions annually: a fall musical and a spring drama. To facilitate these programs, it was recommended that the auditorium-chapel be entirely renovated. This would involve extending the backstage area and installing raked “theatre” seating. (Ens, 1990, p. 245)

Ens noted that many of the changes from the Think Tank’s conclusions (with the exception of teacher training and emphasis on German) were a “return to first principles enunciated by H. H. Ewert, Gerhard Peters, and Paul Schaefer” (Ens, 1990, p. 237). Thus, the MCI community renewed its dedication to character education and its Mennonite heritage.

Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) adheres to the provincial curriculum mandated for the public schools in Manitoba. Although Manitoba music teachers at the secondary level are at this time primarily responsible for their own curriculum, a secondary music curriculum is presently in development (Manitoba Education, 2013). Thus, secondary music teachers have a great deal of latitude to teach music the way they want. The province also allows leeway as to which arts programs the schools provide (e.g., dance, drama, choral, band, orchestra) as long as the school is offering something. The province’s elementary music curriculum K-8 was implemented in 2011 and “is mandatory from Grades 1-8” (Manitoba Education, 2013). MCI focuses on choral music. The school also arranges private lessons (e.g., voice, piano).

The province of Manitoba uses a three-stage learning model. The first stage consists of setting the teaching objective (i.e., “of learning”). In choral music these objectives are in reference to subjects such as breath management, tone, blend, shape, and rhythm (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview). The second stage of the
Manitoba model involves giving students feedback as they are learning (i.e., “as learning”). The third stage (i.e., “for learning”) is the evaluation component of the model and focuses on the results of the final product.

MCI is a funded independent school in Gretna, Manitoba serving Grades 7-12. The town of Gretna is on the southern border of Manitoba near Neche, North Dakota and has a population of approximately 574 people (Statistics Canada, 2007). Funded independent schools are provincially accredited and receive approximately half their money from the province. The rest of MCI’s financial support comes from student tuition and private donations. Board members are chosen from a society of over 20 churches that support the school. The school has served as both a day and residential high school for over 100 years. Students who live nearby either drive themselves or make travel arrangements with the school. Grades 7-8 were added in the 2012-2013 school year; however this junior high program is currently only available for day students (Vandermeulen, 2012).

Rather than being owned by a single conference (i.e., a conference school), MCI is a society school consisting of 22 congregations “who are a formal part of the organization which owns and supports this school” (see Appendix F for Darryl Loewen interview, p. 411). MCI attracts the majority of its students from these constituency congregations. Twenty of the congregations are Mennonite Church Manitoba (the regional branch of Mennonite Church Canada), one congregation is Sommerfeld, and another is Mennonite Brethren. Most of the students who attend MCI come from these churches, and a number of the students come “because of the music program” (see
Appendix E for Rudy Krahn interview, p. 395). The school’s mission statement defines the school’s values, thus providing a context for its educational programs.

**MCI Mission**

MCI’s mission is to provide an education in an Anabaptist/Christian context and to help students develop an appreciation of their Mennonite heritage (MCI Mission Statement, n.d.). Because of MCI’s emphasis on faith and service, the school is fundamentally still fulfilling its original intent (see Appendix E for Rudy Krahn interview). Students are invited to accept Jesus as Lord and express their faith through leadership and service within their community and in the greater society.

MCI administrators have long supported music for its moral value. P. J. Schaefer, the principal in the 1960s, was a firm believer that singing was a way of engraving theology, beliefs, and thinking into a person’s mind and heart. The music program fits into the mission of the school because it can be used to perpetuate the Mennonite heritage. Because MCI seeks to nurture the students aesthetically, physically, emotionally, and socially (MCI Mission Statement, n.d.), music repertoire is chosen with these factors taken into consideration (see Appendix F for Darryl Loewen interview).

Music teachers consider the words of Philippians 4:8 when choosing repertoire because it exhorts Christians to think about whatever is true, praiseworthy, pure, lovely, and of good report.

Authentic musical experiences can come from a variety of musical sources regardless of era, style, or function; however, music should express truth, have a respectable text, have integrity, exhibit craftsmanship (see Appendix E for Rudy Krahn interview; see Appendix G for George Wiebe interview), and have “a fair amount of real
“Good music deserves to be sung and deserves to be heard regardless of its era” (see Appendix E for Rudy Krahn interview, p. 380). Regardless of whether or not listeners initially like the music, “they still sense that there is something that’s actually good” (see Appendix G for George Wiebe interview, p. 439). According to Wiebe, music “has to leave you with a sense of reality, of truth, and something that’s good—the way Paul talks about it in Philippians . . .” (see Appendix G, p. 440).

Students at MCI are exposed to aesthetic and social experiences through music as well as other fine arts. The performing arts require students to work together in a way that is presentable to the school community and the church congregations that support the school. Therefore, the music program has a strong basis in the mission of the school.

Heppner Mueller connected music to the school mission this way:

Students learning music isn’t just about making beautiful noises, but it’s about music being transformational. It’s about music being a gift from God that allows us to express ourselves in ways we wouldn’t normally be able to. And it takes us to new and exciting places and connects us to different communities, and ethnicities, and cultures. (See Appendix C, p. 323)

MCI has a tradition of fine choral singing. Because the staff and administration believe in focusing on the school’s strengths, they continue to emphasize choral education. The status of MCI’s music program is described in terms of its enrollment, scheduling, funding, facilities, and available equipment in the following section.
Music Program Status

Enrollment

Students at MCI mostly come from Manitoba. They bring with them a variety of music experiences from places such as school, church, and camps. Local students live at home whereas students from further away live as residents at the school. Heppner Mueller stated, “The majority of our students do come from the Gretna, Altona, Winkler, Morden area which is sort of a catchment area, and many of them will drive in daily” (see Appendix C for interview, p. 327). Students also come from places in Manitoba such as Boissevain and Brandon in the west, Dominion City and Steinbach in the east, and Churchill in the north.

The school offers some scholarships for students. Henry Engbrecht thinks the commitment involved with families paying tuition helped the school environment as well as the time that a lot of the students had spent studying music privately:

They were bringing discipline with them, and so you had a field of people who had done even [Royal Conservatory] Grade 5 piano. . . . They know something about what it means to bring a piece to a level of cleaning it up. . . . [They] realize that you have to work at something. To achieve anything, you have to persist. (see Appendix A, p. 281)

Students also have a variety of elementary experiences ranging from public schools to home schools. The current principal, Darryl Loewen, observed that the students now have much more varied “musical interests and opportunities, and their leisure interests and opportunities are much more diverse than they were” (see Appendix F, p. 404) in the past. Students also have a variety of musical experiences from their
home churches that they bring with them to MCI as well as from the church camps.

Gretna Elementary School served as a case study to describe the musical experiences some MCI students were getting in their elementary programs.

Some MCI students come from the local public school which is Gretna Elementary School in the Border Land School Division. Gretna Elementary School offers an education for students in Kindergarten through Grade 8; their principal Ed Klassen estimated that between 40 and 50% of their eighth graders attended MCI (personal communication, April 2008). While acknowledging that ratios vary by year, Darryl Loewen, the principal at MCI, estimated that students from the local public elementary school made up approximately 25% of their students. Because MCI students come from a diverse array of academic experiences, a description of Gretna Elementary School’s music program will serve as an example of what only some of the students experienced before coming to MCI.

Gretna Elementary School had 201 students in the 2007-2008 school year. Kindergarten music was integrated into the daily classroom curriculum routine and consisted primarily of singing. Students in Grades 1 through 6 have used the *Musicplay* series since 2005. *Musicplay* was written by Denise Gagné and published by Themes and Variations. Additional Orff contributors to the series include Robert Amchin and Judy Sills (Musicplay K-6: Overview Booklet, 2011). The Grade 6 curriculum at Gretna also included three months of guitar instruction. These grades had three 35-minute classes in a six day cycle. Grade 7 and 8 students were offered band which met every other day in 40-minute periods (Ed Klassen, personal communication, April 2008). The school had Christmas and spring concerts, and occasionally fall band concerts. Gretna Elementary
School has hosted choirs and performances by the University of Manitoba Opera Company. The students in the school have also attended performances put on by MCI in Gretna and by W. C. Miller Collegiate in Altona.

Enrollment at MCI has been stable for the last few decades (see Appendix F for Darryl Loewen interview). Since 1998, school-wide attendance has ranged from 115 to 165 students (see Appendix C for Rick Heppner Mueller interview). In the 2011-2012 school year there were 123 total students enrolled (Vandermeulen, 2012). The school added the junior high grades beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

The culture at MCI is favorable towards music participation. “It’s a prestigious thing to be in the choirs...” For lack of a better word, it’s cool to be in the choirs” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 328). Participation in Concert Choir is strongly encouraged, but it currently is not mandatory. “There’s been a little more of an opt out policy where through communication between student and director we determine whether... that person participates in choir or not” (see Appendix C, p. 320). However, enrollment in the program is still consistently high, and in the 2007-2008 school year 130 out of 145 students participated in the Concert Choir.

The auditioned ensemble, called the Chamber Choir, had roughly 40 students in the 2007-2008 school year and 50 students in the 2011-2012 school year (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview; MCI Chamber Choir, n.d.). The Chamber Choir generally consists of students from Grades 10 to 12 although it sometimes includes students from Grade 9. Although Heppner Mueller ended the All School Choir, he added a number of smaller vocal ensembles ranging from 12 to 18 students.
The size of the auditioned vocal ensemble, Resonate, fluctuates between 12 to 18 students depending on the year and what Heppner Mueller plans on performing. In 2008, Resonate was for students in Grades 10 to 12. In the 2011-2012 school year it consisted of students in Grades 11 and 12 (MCI Resonate, 2011). The Junior Vocal Ensemble, Illuminate, was created a few years ago to give students from Grades 9 and 10 small ensemble experience. Illuminate had 16 students in the 2011-2012 school year and 14 students in the 2012-2013 school year. They perform at concerts, festivals, and churches (MCI Jr. Vocal Ensemble, n.d.).

Henry Engbrecht had a mandatory All School Choir when he taught at MCI (1964-1965; 1967-1971). He also had a voluntary Concert Choir, and it had about 90 students. The Chamber Choir was an auditioned group and had about 20 students. Engbrecht’s All School Choir consisted of 200 out of 210 students. Most of the students wanted to sing, but Engbrecht would make exceptions to the policy if students were not able to successfully manage being in choir (see Appendix A for Henry Engbrecht interview). Hence, the MCI staff and administration were flexible and realistic enough to recognize that mandatory participation was not always in the best interest of the ensembles. Engbrecht’s practice of having a mandatory All School Choir lasted until the current director, Rick Heppner Mueller, replaced it with smaller auditioned ensembles.

Rudy Krahn taught at MCI from 1975 to 1986 when the school’s enrollment ranged from about 110 to 217 students. Krahn (see Appendix E) explained the fluctuation in student population:

Part of it was due to population bubbles and birth bubbles. We always noticed the attendance would start to go up if public schools were having difficulties—social
issues, discipline issues. All of a sudden our attendance would go up.

[Attendance] was a bit of a measuring device of society. (p. 395)

Krahn recalled that the size of the Chamber Choir was kept at about 35 students so that the whole group could fit onto a bus for itinerations to the constituency churches.

**Scheduling**

The music ensembles that meet at MCI during the school day are for credit. Over the last 20 years the amount of time devoted to music has increased. The majority of students live in the dorms, and their proximity to the school makes it convenient for directors to schedule extra rehearsals outside of the school day. The present director, Rick Heppner Mueller currently meets with the Concert Choir three times a week for 30-minute rehearsals. The Chamber Choir meets two to three times a week for 60-minute rehearsals. The vocal groups Resonate and Illuminate have a practice schedule that is similar to the Chamber Choir. The principal commented that other schools with auditioned ensembles such as MCI’s Chamber Choir generally have rehearsals outside of the school day (see Appendix F for Darryl Loewen interview).

MCI’s Chamber Choir and Resonate currently do five itinerations per school year singing at different churches for Sunday morning services. Itinerations currently play less of a role in the choir’s performance schedule than in former years, but they are still considered to be important because they help keep MCI connected with its constituency. Around the 1960s, the itinerations necessitated the expansion of time devoted to music in the schedule and had created the need for a fulltime choral director. Because of MCI’s reputation, the school receives more invitations to perform than it is able to satisfy. These performances help create student demand for attending the school (see Appendix E
Henry Engbrecht (1964-1965; 1967-1971) recalled doing over 20 church visits during the school year. When he took the Chamber Choir out into the community, they performed Concert Choir repertoire as well as songs by the Male Choir and the Women’s Choir. Then they decided for the first time to have the Chamber Choir perform at the Winnipeg festival (see Appendix A for Henry Engbrecht interview).

Rudy Krahn (1975-1986) recalled one year in which the choir did 15 weekends of church itinerations. Sometimes they did up to three concerts a Sunday—morning service, afternoon, and evening. “Didn’t take too long though and the churches wouldn’t come out in the afternoon, and after awhile we stopped coming out in the evening as our society changed” (see Appendix E for Rudy Krahn interview, p. 361).

Krahn, who taught at MCI from 1975-1986, had at least five choral groups: the All School Choir, the Concert Choir, a girls’ choir, a boys’ group, and the Chamber Choir. Near the end of Krahn’s time at MCI, a small vocal ensemble that was directed by someone else was introduced which performed contemporary music. With the exception of the Chamber Choir, all of the “choirs rehearsed during the day” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 396). The Chamber Choir had two 90-minute rehearsals per week in the evenings. The Chamber Choir consisted of a select group of students who performed more difficult repertoire than the All School Choir. Although the Chamber Choir was the school’s premier group in the sense that it was used for tours and itinerations, it was considered co-curricular because only the choirs that met during the academic school day were offered for credit.
Krahn did not notice any changes in the format of itinerations other than the increased use of English while he was at MCI. After the church announcements, the rest of the service was turned over to the MCI students. Generally the choir sang seven to ten pieces, students would talk (e.g., tell the children’s story), and a faculty member would give a brief meditation. On overnight weekend events, the students would either stay with host families or be billeted in the church (see Appendix E for Krahn interview).

In the late 1960s, MCI and a public school in Winnipeg were the first two schools to offer music for credit in Manitoba. Henry Engbrecht was the teacher at the time, and students had to take classes in music theory and history in order to receive the credit. “So in that sense the ensemble credit was given as part of the total credit with the academic being the more visible on paper” (see Appendix A for Henry Engbrecht interview, p. 240).

Rudy Krahn (1975-1986) also mentioned teaching classroom music in theory, but these music classes no longer currently exist at MCI. Theory classes were ended at MCI because of the increased status of choir as an academic subject and the low enrollments in theory classes (Ens, 1990). Thus, the academic aspects of music (i.e., theory, history) are currently incorporated into ensemble rehearsals in conjunction with the repertoire.

Engbrecht started a string ensemble to provide an accompaniment for choral works. It met outside of the school day twice a week for hour-long rehearsals. Engbrecht was paid for everything scheduled during the day, but anything beyond the school day he did gratis. The All School Choir and the Concert Choir met twice a week for “the same amount of time” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 240), the male choir met twice a week during the noon hour, the female choir probably met after school, and the
Chamber Choir met in the morning at 8:00. Overall, Engbrecht recalled having had free rein from the administration in terms of scheduling new ensembles.

**Funding**

MCI is a funded independent school since it is a private school that receives about half of its money from the province as long as it follows Manitoba curriculum and regulations. MCI receives most of the rest of its funding from tuition (see Table 1). It also gets help from donations (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview). Students pay a $200 admission fee plus tuition (MCI Admissions, n.d.). Because music is a prominent program at MCI, it has been given a more than adequate budget. In 2008, for example, MCI’s budget was $5000 “to spend on choral music” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 330) and other expenses such as uniforms.

**Facilities**

MCI has one of the finest performance spaces in southern Manitoba and has used its facilities to become a hub for artistic activity in the region. When the school’s donors discovered that MCI was interested in building a performance space, they agreed to support the project if it was built larger than what was actually needed. The 2004 construction of Buhler Hall has created many music and theater performance possibilities. This “performance space,” according to Loewen, “has fostered connections with artists, or musical organizations, or arts groups in our region that wouldn’t have been connected to us in the past, and I think it’s a richer experience for it’” (see Appendix F for interview, p. 414).

In addition to being MCI’s current choral director, Rick Heppner Mueller serves as the event coordinator for Buhler Hall. He is also the administrator for community
Table 1
2013-2014 MCI Fee Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee Description</th>
<th>Manitoba Residents</th>
<th>Out of Province</th>
<th>International Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of Province Fee</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$5100</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition (gr. 7-8)</td>
<td>$2500</td>
<td>$5000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition (gr. 9-12)</td>
<td>$5000</td>
<td>$5000</td>
<td>$11,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td>ca. $200</td>
<td>ca. $200</td>
<td>ca. $200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage Deposit</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Council Fee</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room and Board</td>
<td>$4500</td>
<td>$4500</td>
<td>$7000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Package</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>$700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Option for Local Students</td>
<td>$2300</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Fee (Grade 12 only)</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


programming at the Cottonwood School of the Arts which is located at Buhler Hall (Penner, 2012). Parents can register their children for arts classes through MCI. Marilyn
Houser Hamm, who had been on the MCI staff, now directs the Cottonwood Youth Chorus which started in January 2012. The goal of the chorus is to provide choral experiences to children in the community before they reach high school (Penner, 2012).

MCI has been very open about sharing its space with other people in the community. Consequently the school has become less isolated. According to Heppner Mueller, “We have about 10,000 people coming onto our campus each year” (see Appendix C for interview, p. 325) to attend events such as MCI choirs and theater productions as well as concerts by visiting performers. Public and private school choirs like to perform in Buhler Hall because, according to Heppner Mueller,

They want to perform in a music friendly facility. . . . We have sports facilities all over our province—beautiful sports facilities, and then we expect our music groups to perform in those sports facilities such as gymnasiums or arenas. And although there’s some nice churches that sing [resonate] well, there’s not enough of them. So our mission was to create that environment—either for choral music, singing, or instrumental. So as a result, schools call us to perform in this environment because it’s rare. (See Appendix C, pp. 325-326)

W. C. Miller Collegiate in Altona, the National Youth Band, Garden Valley Collegiate in Winkler, Morden Collegiate Institute, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg, Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan, and St. John’s-Ravenscourt in Winnipeg have all performed at Buhler Hall.

MCI also hosts educational events such as choral workshop days. These workshops provide performance opportunities for Manitoba school music directors and their students from the southern and central regions of Manitoba. Other types of events
include special chapel services with guest choirs, band concerts, dance recitals, festivals, and guest artists. A fundraiser concert for the South Central Cancer Resource Centre featured the pianist Janina Fialkowska. Dance recitals have included the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Satellite Program in Altona, Manitoba (Sharing their gift of Dance, 2012) and the troupe from Le Studio in Ste. Agathe, Manitoba. The vocal and choral performance portion of the Red River Valley Festival of the Arts has taken place at MCI as well.

Before Buhler Hall had been built, MCI used its gym for performances. In the late 1960s, the school used the gym for rehearsals and chapels (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview). Operetta rehearsals also took place in the gym. The smaller groups practiced in the classrooms when there were operetta rehearsals. What used to be a part of the stage is now the music office. When a new gym was built in the 1980s, the old gym was renovated and used as the music room, chapel, and as an auditorium (see Appendix E for Krahn interview). After Buhler Hall was built, the music room became the green room. The music room still doubles as the chapel most of the time, and the space is sufficient since the room accommodates the entire concert choir. MCI currently has over 1,300 titles in their choir library housed in the music room office, and they “have a lot of band repertoire as well” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 330).

Equipment

The construction of Buhler Hall necessitated many of the recent equipment purchases at MCI including a state of the art audio and recording sound system. The new hall is equipped with built-in rotating panels that serve in place of a sound shell.
Headsets and suspended microphones have been purchased for the use of the vocal jazz groups.

The school bought a nine-foot grand piano in the mid to late 1960s when Henry Engbrecht was teaching at MCI. Later when Krahn was teaching there (1975-1986), the school purchased enough seated Wenger risers for approximately 200 students in order to accommodate the All School Choir. Krahn also bought “basic recording equipment with a small mixer” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 398) to make recordings of performances for archival purposes. MCI in Gretna and W. C. Miller Collegiate in Altona have a good working relationship and they loan equipment out to each other as needed. For example, before MCI had Buhler Hall, the school used to borrow W. C. Miller Collegiate’s sound shell for concerts.

**Music Program**

Musical performances by MCI are good for public relations. The choir helps raise awareness of the school in order to attract students and patrons to help sustain the school through tuition and donations. Between concerts and itinerations, performances in Krahn’s day (1975-1986) went from September to June. He said, “It is the most consistent advertising if you will our school has” (see Appendix E for interview, p. 368). In 2008, MCI had their Fall Concert in October, two performances of their Christmas concert in December, and two performances (a morning worship service and an afternoon concert) for the *Sängerfest* in June.

In recent years performance has become a way for showing appreciation for the work the students and director have put into rehearsals. According to Loewen, “Certainly now I think it’s widely accepted that performance for the sake of good performance is a
compelling rationale for what we do” (see Appendix F for interview, p. 413). Loewen believes that rather than being prideful, performances are now considered to be “an expression of or a celebration of God-given gifts, and nurtured and practiced gifts” (see Appendix F, p. 413). Heppner Mueller provided another justification for performance stating, “Music that just lives within the rehearsal setting is then just an academic procedure, and we want to make it connect with others” (see Appendix C, p. 318). The goal of communication through music is preferable to the pursuit of excellence as an end in itself. Thus, Heppner Mueller encourages his choristers to be proud of what they do without being boastful or egotistical and instead enjoy sharing the music.

Traditionally people at MCI have thought about music-making as worship rather than as performance. For many years, events consisting of singing for audiences would have been for devotional purposes such as worship services and large events such as Sängerfeste “that brought people together under a big tent, or in a big hall, or in the gym, or the auditorium” (see Appendix F for Darryl Loewen interview, p. 412). Performance could be an acceptable activity if it was thought of as a religious event that was directed at God and the edification of the audience rather than as mere entertainment. Thus, at MCI performances have been valued as entertainment, worship, educational opportunities, and public relations (see Appendix E for Krahn interview).

**Choral Ensembles**

The choral program at MCI includes the Concert Choir which is open to all students and auditioned groups such as the Chamber Choir and vocal jazz ensembles. Therefore, the school has non-auditioned choirs as well as select choirs for those who
want to pursue excellence. It is important that there be opportunities for both types of students.

The biggest changes regarding performing ensembles during the last 25 years at MCI are the greater number of singing groups, the broader range of repertoire, and curricular requirements (see Appendix F for Loewen interview). Resonate (formerly called the MCI Vocal Ensemble) is a vocal group which performs in a variety of popular (e.g., vocal jazz) and traditional styles. The group’s name reflects Heppner Mueller’s philosophy for the group. “Our goal is to resonate with one another, and to resonate with audiences, and to resonate with God our Creator, and to tie those together” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, pp. 318-319). This is his philosophy for all of the ensembles he directs.

Heppner Mueller considers performance groups such as Rajaton from Finland to be inspiring resources for vocal jazz repertoire. Manitoba does have a jazz curriculum which covers Grades Senior 1 to 4. The jazz curriculum has increased MCI’s use of popular choral music. According to Heppner Mueller,

We’ve moved from singing just sort of a cappella to singing on a microphone system—sound system. And that’s partially [due] to [the] province of Manitoba and [the] educational curriculum for vocal jazz that requires a group to sing on a sound system. We do it for more intrinsic reasons, not just [because] the government told us [to] . . . It [vocal jazz] sounds better on a sound system, and it also exposes our students to a different way of singing . . . (see Appendix C, p. 321)
The Chamber Choir participates in the CAMS (Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools) festival which is held every two years. The CAMS festivals allow Mennonite students from high schools such as Rostern Junior College, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, and Steinbach Christian High School to sing together (Engbrecht, 2008; T. Wiebe, 2008). They are “really wonderful major events with a huge amount of energy and very well trained choirs” (Engbrecht, 2008, p. 243).

Central Manitoba Youth Choir, the regional youth choir under the Manitoba Choral Association, provides another opportunity for MCI students who successfully audition. This regional choir includes students from public and independent schools from south central Manitoba ranging from Emerson in the east to Crystal City in the west and Portage la Prairie in the north. Many Mennonite students participate in these events (see Appendix A for Henry Engbrecht interview).

Choral associations also provide ways for music teachers to connect with the broader choral community within and beyond the province. Through the years, MCI music teachers have belonged to professional organizations such as Manitoba Music Educators Association, Manitoba Choral Association, the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (ACCC, formerly known as the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors), the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), and the World Choral Symposium. MCI music teachers have also regularly attended a number of the conferences sponsored by the professional organizations. Henry Engbrecht, who taught at MCI in the 1960s to 1971, was on the committee that initiated the Manitoba Choral Association.
The Manitoba Choral Association (MCA) divided the province into seven regions: Central, Eastman, Interlake, Norman, Parkland, Westman, and Winnipeg. MCI is in the Central region and students from both public and funded-independent schools are allowed to participate in the Central Manitoba Youth Choir. MCI music director Rick Heppner Mueller is active with the MCA and has directed the Intermediate Provincial Honour Choir, the Westman Youth Choir, the Senior Provincial Honour Choir, Central Manitoba Youth Choir, and the Eastman Youth Choir (WMYC Conductors, n.d.).

ChoralFest at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg is another event MCI Choirs can attend. ChoralFest is a two-week event in which choirs from different schools perform three to five pieces for an adjudicator followed by a half hour workshop (Engbrecht, 2008). The event is non-competitive and helps students raise their level of musicality. Heppner Mueller (see Appendix C for interview) has also taken students to the Canadian Rocky Mountain Festival in Banff, Alberta. Heppner Mueller and the MCI choir have also collaborated on performances with other high schools, universities, elementary schools, institutions, and community choral groups.

George Wiebe, a student at MCI from 1943 to 1945, remembered that choral festivals used to be handled “in house” (see Appendix G). With the exception of religion classes which were taught in German, everything else was taught in English. The school was run on very strict Prussian principles (see Appendix G). With the exception of two or three songs in English, the rest of the choral singing at that time was in German. The choirs sang “with great enthusiasm and a good command of the German language” (see Appendix G for Wiebe interview, p. 433). According to Wiebe, the choirs did not sing with the same level of finesse as they do now.

103
When Wiebe and his fellow students were ready for high school, they were excited to sing in the choir, at church related festivals, and at directors’ workshops:

And then when they got to a school like Gretna or Steinbach . . . they wanted to [and] they were ready to sing. It was an honor then to be in a choir that sang better than their church choir at home . . . So in that respect we had it very good here [at CMBC] because students came here generally very, very well motivated to sing. (See Appendix G for Wiebe interview, p. 438)

Wiebe observed that MCI was now “more open to do things together with other choirs” (see Appendix G, p. 441) such as ChoralFest. Wiebe attributed this development in part to Henry Engbrecht’s (mid-1960s to 1971) work at MCI. “I think Henry Engbrecht has been quite instrumental in moving it in that direction because he was the director of the Manitoba Choral Federation for many years and worked on that committee . . . as well” (see Appendix G for Wiebe interview, pp. 441-442).

**Repertoire**

MCI’s range of music has expanded to more diverse styles including world and contemporary (art, popular, and Christian) music. Engbrecht attributes the decrease of classical repertoire at MCI and schools like it to the popularity of world musics with students and directors. Music from Africa “was the next natural step from the American Black Spiritual” (see Appendix A, p. 249). Traditionally, MCI’s repertoire emphasized sacred and classical music such as hymns, gospel music, and the oratorios of Haydn, Handel, and Mendelssohn.

Heppner Mueller balances traditional music with music from different time periods and places. Thus, he varies repertoire both chronologically and geographically.
At Christmas the choir sings traditional favorites such as the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah* and “Der Friedensführst” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview). Heppner Mueller uses themes to integrate classical, contemporary, and secular music into church services and concerts.

In the 2007-2008 school year, Heppner Mueller’s theme for the choral repertoire was *Can You Hear?* The theme was based on one of the song titles dealing with injustices to children. The song “Can You Hear” does not have a sacred text, but it does emphasize the need for social justice. Social justice issues are important to many Mennonites who consider seeking their remedy to be an aspect of living “out the kingdom of God here on earth” (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 337). Another song performed under this theme was Crosby, Stills, and Nash’s “Find the Cost of Freedom” which is a song about the futility of war. Heppner Mueller tied it to another song that addresses “how God can work through all of that—through the despair and through the hardships of the world” (see Appendix D, p. 338). He also included the spiritual “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” (which unlike the previous two songs is about deliverance), René Clausen’s “All That Hath Life and Breath Praise Ye thee Lord,” some hymns, and a benedictory song.

MCI choral directors predominantly choose repertoire because of its substance; however, audience appeal is also taken into consideration. Some music performed at MCI may not be perceived as reflecting the school’s mission (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview). Heppner Mueller’s view, however, is that music and drama (e.g., *Les Misérables*) can depict harsh realities in the broader context of God’s love and forgiveness:
There’s the goodness and hope of God, but there’s also the broken nature of humanity. We don’t want to be in denial about those things and cover them up, but want to acknowledge their presence—but also in a context that provides hope and redemption for all. (See Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 318)

Music, therefore, can encourage personal growth. Heppner Mueller (see Appendix D) is principally looking for ways to use music to communicate faith and hope to students whose listening preferences range from country to rap.

**Global repertoire.** For MCI, multiculturalism is a means of recognizing the school’s uniqueness while acknowledging the world around them. According to Heppner Mueller, “We need to recognize the diversity of this world, and also recognize the uniqueness of where we’ve come from” (see Appendix C, p. 334). This repertoire is useful for connecting students with choral singing in an enjoyable yet meaningful way. Houser Hamm mentioned the importance of Christian musicians such as John Bell who have been active transcribing global church music for western culture (see Appendix B) because it is well suited for teaching students to sing harmony. She described the music as homophonic, repetitive, rhythmic, and easy to identify with (see Appendix B for Houser Hamm interview).

Multicultural as well as traditional music can reflect MCI ideals such as commitment to peace, recognizing the importance of sacred music from other Christian traditions, and choosing songs consistent with Mennonite doctrine. According to Heppner Mueller, MCI should not limit its groups to performing a single musical style: “So in terms of what we do musically within the church, we need to acknowledge our past, our history, but at the same time we need to acknowledge what is going on around
“The faith can never change, but the way you express it has to” (see Appendix C, p. 334). For example, South African freedom songs are well-received and useful for getting high school students to sing out and project their voices since they like the rhythmic upbeat music. Also, audiences are more likely to receive the music if the content of the songs are related to traditional Mennonite values (e.g., commitment to pacifism) (see Appendix D).

Henry Engbrecht (see Appendix A) suggested that the ubiquitous interest in African music in the last 20 years has derived from its high profile at professional development meetings of choral organizations. Teachers and students enjoy performing the music with abandon without having to be advanced vocalists. African and global music often invites movement whereas in the past MCI students, directors, and parents would not have expected or used movement as part of the performance. Engbrecht cautioned that although world music—African in particular—is exciting and innovative, it is overdone.

You would get groups performing [new contemporary and African/Evangelical pieces] at those huge conventions with great panache and enthusiasm. . . . Of course everybody takes a copy home. They make their own orders. They rehearse that music, and suddenly it just spreads like seeds in a wind storm. (See Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 249)

The repetitious and homophonic nature of some global music provides accessible and enjoyable repertoire for engaging students in part singing. The desire for variety at MCI prevents emphasizing one type of music. Loewen commended Heppner Mueller and others for being able to perform a diversity of music.
Students at schools such as MCI have been introduced to multicultural music through hymnody. For example, ethnomusicologist Mary Oyer from Goshen College encouraged the inclusion of global repertoire in *The Mennonite Hymnal* of 1969, a product of the (Old) Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. Hymnologist and choral conductor Marilyn Houser Hamm believes that the inclusion of folksongs from Europe, Asia, Africa, and more global music “into the Mennonite repertoire” (see Appendix B, p. 292) has an effect on music education in the school that gives it a character that is not found “in many other places” (see Appendix B, p. 292).

**Religious repertoire.** The singing in MCI chapel services is similar to the congregational singing in the students’ home churches. During chapel services, students generally hear a devotional and sing a hymn or a praise and worship chorus. As congregations began incorporating praise and worship music into their services, Rudy Krahn (1975-1986) noticed that students were coming to MCI with a narrower singing range. According to Krahn, “Some congregations are still more traditional and classic, some have gone right over, and everything in between” (see Appendix E, p. 374). Henry Engbrecht reported that many congregations became polarized by the more evangelical churches’ use of the worship team and “choral directors who are striving for improving the singing in their church and four-part singing and hymn singing” (see Appendix A). Engbrecht thought there was a missed opportunity to incorporate the best of the praise and worship music with the hymns and choir singing.

Henry Engbrecht recalled that when he was an MCI student (1955-1958) they did the same hymns in school as they sang in church. The MCI choirs never sang in chapel services, but they sang the hymns in choral programs. On Fridays, Engbrecht
remembered principal and teacher P. J. Schaefer would give them an extra 15 minutes in chapel for singing hymns from the *Gesangbuch*. Engbrecht can still sing many of these hymns from memory, and he considers it a great treasure. Schaefer was no longer principal when Engbrecht came to work at MCI and the tradition of extra singing time on Friday had already stopped. Nevertheless, chapel singing connected students to congregational singing so they were “more able to participate” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 241) when singing the hymns in their home congregations. When it was Engbrecht’s turn to lead chapel, he would often do hymn singing and talk about the hymns.

**Popular and new music.** MCI’s principal Darryl Loewen (see Appendix F) said that the performing of contemporary repertoire 45 years ago would have been unthinkable. However, the new choral music allows students to be involved in a broader range of experience. Using a variety of music helps Heppner Mueller create rapport with the students for when he wants to perform more challenging music. Heppner Mueller hopes that by including a variety of musical types students will broaden their musical tastes. The principal Darryl Loewen supports the use of a variety of repertoire at MCI and believes compelling music that is both edifying and grounded in truth has a sacred quality regardless of genre.

If a style of music is undesirable to an individual, as a matter of taste, I won’t quarrel much. If the music has lyrics . . . which degrade the human spirit, or the human experience, or the divine, that’s its own problem, and it’s not the problem of the music. . . . If the music is compelling, I want to listen to it, sing it, [and] play it . . . (See Appendix F for Loewen interview, p. 406)
Loewen credited the variety of music Heppner Mueller programs for keeping the
students’ interest and cooperation in choral singing: “If there are enough performances to
compel their rehearsal, it ends up being a fun experience” (see Appendix F, p. 416).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Engbrecht did not incorporate jazz, pop, and show choirs
even though they were spreading through the United States and Canada. Instead, he
added some pop choir repertoire to MCI’s madrigal group (see Appendix A for
Engbrecht interview). For MCI this meant making “joyous singing from the spirit of it”
(see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 278). Engbrecht said that he continued the
same program that had existed before him for another four years although he did
challenge the choirs by choosing more advanced repertoire.

Choreography. In addition to appealing repertoire, Heppner Mueller uses
choreography to engage choir students. He does only one or two songs with
choreography per year. Some people found it “a bit showy” when he first started doing
it. He responded that choreography was not “intended to be a spectacle” (see Appendix
D for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 341) but rather another way “to engage the
audience.”

Heppner Mueller enjoys choreography because it makes a more meaningful
experience than simply singing the song. For example, Heppner Mueller’s
choreographer, Jeanette Hoeppner from Winkler, researched Samoan movements to
create culturally authentic movements to accompany MCI’s performance of “Minoi,
Minoi.” The choir performed “Minoi, Minoi” during the afternoon concert portion of the
2008 Sängerfest. Heppner Mueller believed the song was better received with
choreography:
The “Minoi, Minoi”—music like that, it’s just important for me to get the students moving and having fun. And if they’re enjoying a song, then it’s easier for me to say, “Okay, now we’re going to work on ‘Liebe, die du mich zum Bilde’ even though you can’t speak the language, and it’s hard for you to pronounce . . .” (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 345)

The movement and rhythmic content of contemporary (both popular and art) and world music provides a contrast to the traditional literature also performed by the students.

Heppner Mueller takes into consideration choir members’ preferences without pandering to individual tastes. For example, in 2007, Heppner Mueller hired Jeanette Hoeppner to do choreography for “You’re the One that I Want” from the musical Grease for a performance by the Chamber Choir. According to Heppner Mueller,

Grease is the sort of musical that I wouldn’t do at MCI. The themes in there I don’t think resonate with what we stand for as a school, but yet it’s still a fun show and students have been asking me to do it for years and I thought this was a healthy compromise—let’s do one song. (see Appendix D, p. 343)

Some Mennonites have historically been reserved when it comes to moving to music. Thus, the use of choreography has been a more recent development at MCI. The use and acceptance of choreography is a change that has coincided with more integration of global and contemporary repertoire into MCI’s program since the time Engbrecht and Krahn were teachers there (1960s-1980s).

Instead of using movement, Engbrecht made performances more interesting by positioning singers in unique places such as around the congregation or right across the front of the performance area. When he was directing the Mennonite youth choirs of the
Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization (before teaching at MCI), Engbrecht found that moving away from the traditional stance of performing on risers was a great way to captivate audiences. Krahn (1975-1986) did not use choreography at MCI either because most of their performances were for church. Krahn’s preference was to keep the focus on music as an aural art. He acknowledged that music could be performed well with choreography, but he believed that it distracted from the music. Krahn suspected the current use of choreography at MCI has come about because society has become very visually oriented, and choreography may help make the music more enjoyable. Heppner Mueller has established the occasional use of choreography at MCI, and the students as well as the audiences seem to enjoy the energy, expression, and creativity that it adds to the music.

**Audiences and repertoire.** Music teachers at MCI have always had to be careful about how audiences perceive performances. Rudy Krahn (see Appendix E) stressed that schools such as MCI need the parents’ good will so they will send their children to school there and financially support the school. In general, audiences at MCI programs have broadened the types of music they are willing to consider suitable. It is possible that some of the parents attended MCI and as a result broadened their appreciation for different types of music in the last 20 years (see Appendix H for Timothy Wiebe interview).

There are older MCI supporters who want more German hymns or exclusively German hymns in MCI’s programs. Heppner Mueller, however, thinks that is unrealistic. Instead, he exposes the students to those hymns but avoids doing too many of them in order not to overwhelm and alienate his students.
The MCI choirs usually sing two German hymns per school year, and one of those is always sung at Christmas. Occasionally they also perform a piece in German from more classically oriented repertoire. For example, in the 2007-2008 school year they did “Verleih uns Frieden” by Mendelssohn, and at Christmas time they did “Leise rieselt der Schnee” by Eduard Ebel. For one of their fundraising banquets they did the hymn “Liebe, die du mich zum Bilde” (text by Johann Scheffler) (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview).

Heppner Mueller has also received requests from adults for Bach, but he often substitutes Baroque and Renaissance era music that is technically and vocally better suited for high school singers. He has done some Bach but chooses the literature carefully because it “is very demanding and it sits very high for the men” (see Appendix D, p. 340). Heppner Mueller will instead have the group perform the motets of Buxtehude, Giuseppe Pitoni, and Hans Leo Hassler. Although Heppner Mueller performs traditional masterworks, he also wants to stay current and do high-quality music being written by contemporary composers. He usually does a song each year by one of his favorite composers of new music, Mia Makaroff from Finland, who is often performed by the vocal group Rajaton.

Heppner Mueller wants students to develop an appreciation of the music from the students’ Mennonite heritage as well as expose them to the diversity that exists in other traditions. This places traditional Mennonite repertoire in a broader context. The traditional music includes hymns from the Gesangbuch or Kernlieder. Heppner Mueller defines Kernlieder as “traditional Mennonite congregational music” (see Appendix C, p. 316).
Then I would put in some music we would broadly categorize it as classical, but perhaps something from Renaissance, or the Baroque era, Classical, Romantic. . . 
. . . And then you know, a good gospel spiritual, some ethnic music—I love African music that gets students moving. . . . And you know contemporary pieces that can be so varied and diverse in nature . . . but it’s mainly sacred music. And we do try to do some secular works as well, some folk songs, and that sort of thing. (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 316)

Sängerfeste. Sängerfeste among Mennonites were often the culminating activity of the choral festival and workshop tradition. They consisted of massed choirs and were often held as part of a Sunday worship event (e.g., Easter). MCI Sängerfeste are essentially the same as in the past except they are now in English. The current format for Sängerfeste at MCI consists of a worship service in the morning and a concert in the afternoon. The worship service includes a combination of choral singing and congregational singing. MCI’s Sängerfest includes guest choirs such as Henry Engbrecht’s Faith and Life Choir in 2008. Rick Heppner Mueller’s choirs have performed gospel (e.g., “Have a Little Talk with Jesus,” “As I Went Down to the River to Pray,” and “Elijah Rock”), world (e.g., “Minoi, Minoi”), and vocal jazz (e.g., Mia Makaroff’s “You Can’t Stop Me”), hymns, and Mendelssohn’s “Verleih’ uns Frieden” to name a few. Marilyn Houser Hamm’s Junior Vocal Ensemble has performed works such as the traditional Dutch hymn “What is this Place” for the morning worship service and works such as Dan Fogelberg’s “Longer” and Anders Edenroth’s² Latin American styled song “Chili Con Carne” for the afternoon concert (MCI Sängerfest, 2008).

² Anders Edenroth is a member of the Swedish vocal jazz ensemble The Real Group.
Although the event was exclusively in German when Engbrecht was a student (1955-1958), when he became a teacher at MCI he used pieces in English that he had learned at Canadian Mennonite Bible College such as Handel choruses, “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring,” and “Ave Verum.” It was also at a Sängerfest that Engbrecht performed Romberg’s cantata Das Lied von der Glocke with the MCI choir. Programs from the 1980s showed that students sometimes present readings (e.g., poems, scripture), and on occasion these readings were in French or German (MCI Sängerfest, 1987; 1988).

Before Henry Engbrecht became the choral director, MCI choirs had sung songs typically done by church choirs but performed them better (see Appendix G for George Wiebe interview). The Kernlieder repertoire was an important part of what Engbrecht did at MCI. He recalled,

And I guess because I had a very strong connection with that from . . . my student days and youth in the church choir and so on I just kept it up—kept using it. And even when we extended our repertoire into other areas, that was still always a part of the program. Of course part of that was pure psychology. I mean you always wanted to make a connection with what people knew or [were] familiar with in your audience or congregation . . . when you did a concert. (see Appendix A, p. 258)

Thus, Engbrecht emphasized Kernlieder both because it was part of their heritage, and because it helped the parents of students as well as local congregations connect with MCI.

Another example of societal change was that the last edition of the Gesangbuch came out in 1955 and the predominantly English Mennonite Hymnal came out in 1969.
English began coming into the church choirs in the 1950s, and was already acceptable to use at MCI (Engbrecht, 2008). Rudy Krahn (1975-1986) noticed in the early 1980s that MCI students were no longer able to read Gothic script. Krahn knew from this change that the students were no longer singing from the German hymnals in their home congregations.

**Instrumental Ensembles**

Even though choral ensembles have been the priority at MCI, the school has also had a variety of instrumental ensembles from time to time. There currently is no concert band at MCI. Because MCI is primarily a residential school, there is no feeder program to support instrumental music. Another reason is that the instrumental programs at MCI have traditionally relied on the personal interests of the particular teachers and students involved. Carianne Peters (MCI Staff, 2011) has been employed by MCI since 2011 as the art teacher and director of the Worship Band which plays at the chapel services. Students in Grade 10 are eligible to sign up to take Worship Band, but they may have to audition depending on the number of interested students. Students in Worship Band use instruments such as guitar, bass, and keyboards (MCI Courses, n.d.).

The 2005 catalogue indicated that at that time instrumental offerings included “ensembles such as flute ensemble, brass quartet and string ensemble” (MCI, 2005, p. 6). According to the 2002 catalogue, MCI offered Concert Band, Jazz Band, and “private lessons in piano, organ and voice . . .” (MCI, 2002, p. 5) in addition to the choirs. Students taking private lessons could earn “credits by completing the requirements of the Toronto Conservatory of Music or Conservatory Canada” (p. 5). Jazz Band was open to people who had the skill and the interest (MCI, 2002).
Rick Heppner Mueller taught concert band along with choir from 1998 to 2003. After 2003, he only taught the choir. The band ceased for a year before “Marilyn Houser Hamm came on staff and started . . . a Grade 9-10 band” (see Appendix C for Heppner Mueller interview, pp. 321-322). The Concert Band grew to around 30 students and was offered for students in Grades 9-12.

At the 2008 Sängerfest, Houser Hamm’s band performed Eric Osterling’s arrangement of “Lasst Uns Erfreuen” for the prelude. Other pieces they played were James Curnow’s arrangement of “Be Thou My Vision,” Osterling’s arrangement of “Rock-A-My-Soul,” Mark Williams’ arrangement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Capricio Espagnol*, and Johnnie Vinson’s medley arrangement of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Phantom of the Opera*. The Concert Band was discontinued after Marilyn Houser Hamm left the MCI staff in 2011 to start the choral outreach program at the newly instituted Cottonwood School of the Arts located at MCI’s Buhler Hall.

History teacher Timothy (Tim) Wiebe (see Appendix H) thought that the use of instruments at MCI went back at least 50 or 60 years and probably longer. He did not think the school leadership ever had a problem including instrumental instruction and performance. As early as 1914, H. H. Ewert’s sister-in-law Emilie Ewert probably taught the music electives which consisted of piano and organ lessons (Ens, 1990). There was also an instrumental ensemble at MCI around the World War I era “which consisted of two violins, a guitar, mandolin, and ukulele” (Ens, 1990, p. 88).

Henry Engbrecht started a string orchestra in the late 1960s using students who had already taken lessons. The string orchestra may have played “some very accessible suites” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 278) once or twice, but otherwise it
did not have its own concerts. Engbrecht thought they did some Bach, Telemann, and remembered doing a Buxtehude Cantata with the choir. He added, “And that of course gave color to the Buxtehude cantata which could (especially with high school students) . . . be boring” (see Appendix A, p. 278). The use of string ensembles at MCI has been periodic; however, private study in violin is currently offered in conjunction with Cottonwood School of the Arts at MCI’s Buhler Hall (Penner, 2012).

Alfred Dahl started a band at MCI in the early 1970s. He was Rudy Krahn’s choral director at Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan and was Krahn’s immediate predecessor at MCI. When Krahn was teaching at MCI (1975-1986), he found it difficult to do justice to both the band and choir programs and noticed that the directors who came after him also experienced difficulties adequately sustaining both programs. He noted, “Other conductors came in with a vastly superior band experience, and you could tell the choral level deteriorated” (see Appendix E, p. 382). Krahn’s strength was choral music, and after his second year he was allowed to discontinue the band program to keep the choir program strong. Darryl Loewen also recalled as a student in the 1980s there was not a band.

Ray McClelland directed the band from 1983 to 1986 and had 12 students in the 1983-1984 school year (MCI, 1984) and 15 students in the 1984-1985 school year (MCI, 1985). For the prelude at the 1985 Sängerfest the band performed hymns such as Johann Michael Haydn’s “O Worship the King” arranged by Forsblad and Livingston, Bach’s “The Spirit Rejoices” arranged by Philip Gordon, and George Elvey’s “Crown Him with Many Crowns” arranged by Stevens (MCI Sängerfest, 1985). A small ensemble
consisting of flute, clarinet, two trumpets, and a baritone/trumpet player helped
accompany singing at the 1985 Christmas concert (MCI Christmas, 1985).

Glenn Klassen taught Band and choir fall semester in 1988 and organized a small 16-
piece orchestra to accompany a “Gloria” by G. Carcani for the Christmas Concert. David
Matthies directed band and choir from the 1989 spring semester through the 1989-1990
school year. Matthies organized a 27-piece orchestra complete with a harpsichord from
the Southern Manitoba Choral Society for MCI’s 1989 Christmas Concert which was a
performance of the first part of Handel’s Messiah and concluded with the “Hallelujah
Chorus” (MCI Christmas, 1989). Both orchestras were comprised of MCI students,
faculty, and people from the community.

Musical Theater

Musicals at MCI help provide musical balance in the repertoire and broaden the
experiences of the students and community (see Appendix E for Krahn interview). MCI
has been doing musicals for over 40 years. The construction of Buhler Hall in 2004
increased the possibilities for the technical and performance aspects of what the school
can accomplish in musicals. Timothy Wiebe observed, “I think production values have
certainly gone up I would say in the last seven-eight years that I’ve been here” (see
included Les Misérables (Spring, 2007), Singin’ in the Rain (Spring, 2008), Anne and
Gilbert (Spring, 2009), Oliver Twist (Fall, 2009), The Sound of Music (Spring, 2010), and
Guys and Dolls (Spring, 2011), their 42nd show was Pirates of Penzance (Spring 2012).
As an audience member George Wiebe (see Appendix G) recalled MCI doing Gilbert and Sullivan musicals and *On the Town*.

There were no musicals when Henry Engbrecht was a student (1955-1958); however, musicals in general were late in coming to Manitoba (see Appendix A). He clarifies, “They’d always done drama, but of course operettas are different . . . because it’s light music and meant for light subjects” (see Appendix A, p. 277). The first musicals at MCI consisted of “some scaled down operettas that had been written by somebody for high school use . . .” (see Appendix A, p. 276) that Engbrecht had “happened to come across . . .” (p. 276). MCI’s first production was when Engbrecht staged the operetta *Barbarina* in 1967 (MCI Music Theatre, n.d.). The first MCI performance that resembled a musical was when Engbrecht returned in the 1967-1968 school year and prepared excerpts from the opera *The Magic Flute*.

The next year they performed a toned down version of *Fledermaus*. Engbrecht and the music teachers who followed often modified things by taking out swear words or making slight changes that made “no difference to the drama” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 277). Engbrecht continued to do a musical production every year after the operetta *Fledermaus*.

In addition to the first to do musicals at MCI, Engbrecht was also the first MCI teacher to get costumes from Mallabar in Winnipeg. Engbrecht recalled that costumes were always an issue and how the characters (especially the girls) should be dressed. When Krahn became the music teacher, MCI performed “everything from *Oklahoma* to *Fiddler on the Roof*” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 374). Their stage at the time was only 18 to 20 feet wide.
MCI commissioned Esther Wiebe to write a musical for the school’s 100th anniversary celebration in July 1990. As a result, Esther and her son Timothy Wiebe co-wrote the musical *Crossroads* which depicted changes occurring in Mennonite communities. William Thiessen was the stage director, Henry Engbrecht directed the music, and Rudy Krahn was the technical director (MCI, 1990). Esther Wiebe had to listen to rock music for several weeks to learn about the style for some of the songs she wanted written for the musical. When she started writing and playing it, her husband George said, “Esther, this isn’t you! It can’t be . . .” (see Appendix G, p. 455). She refused to let him hear any more until it was performed in Gretna. George remembered, “She managed to do that so the first time I really heard that music was when I went to hear it, and here it was the rock music we had played. It was very well done too” (see Appendix G for interview, p. 455).

Timothy Wiebe (see Appendix H) recalled another heritage-related musical called *The Blowing and the Bending* with lyrics by James Juhnke and music by J. Harold Moyer. The subject of this musical had to do with military conscription during “World War I and Mennonite participation or non-participation” (see Appendix H for T. Wiebe interview, p. 466) in places such as Kansas and Oklahoma. After their last performance at MCI they were invited to perform it in Minneapolis at the Triennial Mennonite Conference. Krahn had to rewrite it so that the cast and the five piece orchestra could fit on the bus. Juhnke and Moyer came to the Minneapolis performance and talked to the students backstage afterwards. Juhnke and Moyer told the MCI students that they had intended the musical for an adult cast and how the students’ performance that night proved them wrong. Krahn remembered,
But the two protagonists got so into their roles that they weren’t acting; they were literally hating each other’s guts on stage, and you could feel it. I would get that prickly sensation in the back of the neck; they weren’t acting. So at that debriefing after we couldn’t find those two guys (nobody could find them for over an hour), they had gone in the middle of the night [to] some grubby duff section of Minneapolis (went to a coffee shop), and they talked each other down. (see Appendix E, p. 376)

Krahn also remembered doing musicals such as *Anne of Green Gables*, and *Cinderella*. Like Engbrecht, Krahn was careful to consider how the audience might react; however, there were still some criticisms. Krahn recalled a pastor talking to him after *Anne of Green Gables* who was upset about the scene where the girls mistook the wine for Raspberry cordial preserves and depicted drunkenness on stage. Krahn also mentioned a pastor who was disappointed that in the scene with Tevya’s dream in *Fiddler on the Roof* that the married couple consisted of “two teenagers in bed on stage” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 379).

*Cinderella* was a unique memory for Krahn because the two step sisters were “perfect foils for each other” (see Appendix E, p. 377). The two were friends and one was six feet tall and the other five feet. Krahn recalled,

They came up with the idea of using hairspray getting ready for the ball. And so the tall one hair sprayed the short one all over and she got so stiff they had to bring in a hand cart and wheel her off. (see Appendix E, pp. 377-378)

They also performed Menotti’s opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* which was originally written for the NBC television network.
Camps

Church camps are opportunities for young people to participate in informal music-making. There are also workshop retreats to help worship leaders learn how to use worship resources. Many MCI students participate in the Mennonite Church Manitoba sponsored Camps with Meaning which typically include praise and worship music as part of their activities. Some of the staff gets together each year to write music to go with the Bible sessions (Music at Camps with Meaning, 2008). The staff tends to borrow from a variety of popular musical styles including praise and worship, folk, folk rock, world music, alternative rock, and hip-hop. Some songs they sing include harmony resulting from sustaining the ends of echoing phrases, harmony resulting from ostinatos, and parallel thirds (Camps with Meaning Summer Video 2011, 2008). There are also some choral settings.

Some music is performed a cappella, but many songs include instruments such as guitar, djembe, and sometimes electric guitar and drum kit (Music at Camps with Meaning, 2008). Sometimes the worship team takes the same song and performs it in different styles (e.g., acoustic versions and amplified versions with electric guitars and drum kit). Camps with Meaning also offers retreats for church, school, and music groups. They currently have three locations: Camp Assiniboia in Headingley, Camp Koinonia in Boissevain, and Camp Moose Lake in Sprague (Camps with Meaning About Us, 2008).

Retreats as well as camps expose students to different types of music. Marilyn Houser Hamm has been involved with retreats for adults who are specifically interested in developing music leadership skills. Irma Fast Dueck and Houser Hamm founded such
a program at Shekinah camp near Waldheim, Saskatchewan. The workshops are primarily used to train musicians, worship leaders and pastors to understand and use new church resources (see Appendix B for Houser Hamm interview). For example, Houser Hamm and the hymnal committee’s worship resources included Orff arrangements for accompaniments.

The Shekinah music retreat was modeled after Laurelville—the Music and Worship Leader Retreat held at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania. Houser Hamm (see Appendix B) works on the leadership team for Laurelville along with Kenneth Nafziger and Marlene Kropf. Houser Hamm’s Shekinah retreat has been successful, but it now coincides with Canadian Mennonite University’s Refreshing Winds seminar on worship. Marilyn Houser Hamm’s mentors have included Mary Oyer, Kenneth Nafziger, conductor David Falk at Goshen College and Alice Parker. Houser Hamm’s choral conducting philosophy is to work with the choir in such a way that “minimal gestures will create a maximum kind of effect,” (see Appendix B for Houser Hamm interview, p. 310).

**Music Teachers**

Mennonite Collegiate Institute seeks to hire music teachers who are confessionally Anabaptist (i.e., Christians who support the practice of voluntary adult baptism), who will perpetuate their musical heritage, who have strengths in choral singing, and who can engage students. The shared expectations between the religious heritage of the school and the teachers create a mutually favorable working environment. As Henry Engbrecht said, “Oh the freedom I had was amazing—maybe because I was
still in many ways so closely tied to the traditions of the school” (see Appendix A, p. 285).

The school emphasizes singing, and the expectation has grown that the music director will put on a musical every year. The job requires someone who can work with a variety of vocal ensembles, be able to manage tours, and have knowledge of managing stage productions, sets, lighting, and sound systems. The school also looks “for people with a range of musical interests, a range of musical skill as players” (see Appendix F for Loewen interview, p. 404), and for people with charisma—for people who bring life to the program, engage students, and make music fun. MCI music teachers sometimes have multiple degrees and graduate degrees in addition to their teaching credentials. Other common characteristics include having “an appreciation for the profile of music in Mennonite heritage, an interest in classical forms of music . . . skill as players of multiple instruments, and people of strong commitment to the church” (see Appendix F for Loewen interview, p. 404). The following summary of conductors at MCI is not inclusive of all of them, and dates are supplied as available.

**Rick Heppner Mueller.** Heppner Mueller has been the music teacher at MCI since 1998. He is inspired by choral conductors throughout Canada. John Trepp in Vancouver, British Columbia has influenced Heppner Mueller’s approach to tone, blend, and shape in choral singing. Heppner Mueller draws upon Scott Leithead (of Edmonton, Alberta who conducts the Kokopelli choir) and Elroy Friesen (choral conductor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg) for teaching and choral repertoire ideas.

Leithead and Friesen have similar philosophies of choir directing (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview). Leithead is an innovative conductor (e.g., creative
performance presentation) and Kokopelli’s mandate is to perform new and world choral music. According to Heppner Mueller,

He [Leithead] . . . believes in the power of music. He believes in the power of working together and building people up. So I would be from a school of thought now that would be we are not just building singers but we are building human beings or we’re building community—we’re doing all these other things. And if those things are happening alongside good music making, that’s when a choir really is effective. (see Appendix D, p. 346)

Other conductors who have influenced Heppner Mueller are his friend and colleague Vic Pankratz, Henry Engbrecht, Rudy Schellenberg, and Ed Hildebrand (who taught at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School).

Heppner Mueller graduated from MCI’s sister school Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg. Both MCI and Westgate are associated with the “General Conference, now Mennonite Church Canada body of churches” (see Appendix C, p. 313). Pankratz, one of George Wiebe’s former students at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC, now Canadian Mennonite University or CMU), was Heppner Mueller’s choir teacher at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate. Heppner Mueller earned his theology degree at CMBC before earning his Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Education degrees at the University of Manitoba. Heppner Mueller studied with Wiebe at CMBC (now CMU) and with Engbrecht who was the choral director at University of Manitoba.

**Ian Loeppky.** Ian Loeppky taught at MCI from 1995 to 1998. He left MCI to pursue graduate work, and has taught at the University of North Alabama since 2003. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he conducts the choir at Trinity Episcopal
Church in Florence, Alabama (Dr. Ian Loeppky, 2012). In 2009, he interviewed Marilyn Houser Hamm, who was then teaching at MCI, for an article he wrote in the *Choral Journal* on the history and future of Mennonite hymnody (Loeppky, 2009).

**James Janzen, David Matthies, and Robert (Bob) Wiebe.** Janzen taught music at MCI from 1990 to 1995 and left to teach at Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta. He had a strong instrumental background and could play a number of woodwind and brass instruments well. Janzen preferred to program classical music (see Appendix F for Loewen interview; see Appendix H for T. Wiebe interview). Matthies taught at MCI from the spring semester of 1989 through the 1989-1990 school year (Matthies, n.d.; MCI, 1989). Glenn Klassen taught band and choir in the fall semester of 1988 (MCI, 1988). Robert (Bob) Wiebe taught at MCI from 1986 to 1988 and earned his music education degree from Brandon University, Master’s of Music Education from the University of Western Ontario, and Master’s of Divinity from the University of Winnipeg (B. Wiebe, n.d.).

**Rudy Krahn.** Krahn taught music at MCI from 1975 to 1986. He chose repertoire that was personally rewarding, met the needs of the constituency, and reflected the mission of the school. Former student (1981-1985) and current principal Darryl Loewen said Krahn was compelled to focus on creating “worshipful and participatory musical experiences” (see Appendix F, p. 409) rather than emphasizing music competitions and achievement oriented festivals.

Krahn talked about music in terms of expression of emotion beyond the spoken word. When choosing music, he paid attention to its significance in terms of communicating values through the text. Krahn stated, “The spoken word serves to
express human emotion up to a certain level, and then the music takes over and takes it the rest of the way” (see Appendix E, p. 382). Or as his friend Marilyn Houser Hamm describes it, “Music releases the text” (G. Ens, 2008).

About 90% of the music Krahn’s groups performed at MCI was sacred music. His selections included shorter choral pieces such as anthems by Esther Wiebe prepared “for use in churches and sacred concerts” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 360). Krahn thought that MCI was one of the first schools to perform Esther Wiebe’s music. Her first compositions were hymn adaptations, but she later wrote her own music (e.g., hymns, musicals). Krahn thought Esther Wiebe’s music worked well with the All School Choir and the Concert Choir “because it was a little more contemporary” (see Appendix E, p. 365).

Krahn described the repertoire he chose as “‘small C’ classic and religious” (see Appendix E, p. 360) ranging from Renaissance to modern. His favorite repertoire was from the Romantic Era and included Rachmaninoff, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and late Beethoven.

It depended a little of course on the abilities of some of the students. What we were able to cash in on was that the churches our students came from were still singing: they sang in harmony, they could sing unaccompanied, and they still had church choirs. By the time I left you could notice that some churches were getting out of that particular scenario—getting more into a more contemporary what we used to call off-the-wall music (they would project the lyrics on the wall with no music). Harmony is implied. It got harder and harder to be able to do
some of the really intense traditional repertoire. (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 363)

By the 1980s, music and language changes in congregations meant that German music using Gothic script had to be reprinted so that students could read it. Krahn said, “And whereas when we started we could probably perform a whole concert in German, by the time I left there [MCI] we would include one or two numbers for interest’s sake—nostalgia if you will” (see Appendix E, p. 363).

Krahn performed smaller oratorios and cantatas with the Concert Choir which consisted of about “85% of the students at the school at the time” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 361). Dramas included operas and musicals such as *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *The Music Man*. Krahn was very conscious of the repertoire he chose, and he enjoyed performing unusual combinations of sets of two or three pieces together based on subject matter rather than style or era such as “The Cat Came Back,” “Ein Hennlein Weiß,” and “The A-Flat Cricket and the B-Flat Frog.” Another novelty song he did was a speech piece called “Geographical Fugue” by Ernst Toch. One of Krahn’s favorite concert experiences at MCI was performing Théodore Dubois’s *Seven Last Words of Christ* with the Concert Choir and organ accompaniment by one of the students.

Krahn and his predecessors enjoyed stressing classic choral repertoire. He believed it would be difficult to try to do the same kind of repertoire now because the easy commercial availability of music has taken away the impetus to perform difficult music (see Appendix E). Today, according to Krahn, the commercialization of music has affected culture in a way that has made music teaching more challenging.
Krahn graduated from high school at Rosthern Junior College (RJC) in 1964. Rosthern Junior College was a daughter school of MCI and Krahn found as a student and as a teacher that both schools had high-level music programs. Krahn “got his music degree from Brandon University” (see Appendix H for T. Wiebe interview, p. 468). Krahn also earned an education degree and a Baccalaureate in Special Education and studied for one year at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC). After graduating from college, Krahn taught music for two years at Vincent Massey High School in Brandon before being “invited to come to MCI” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 390). Krahn found that having attended RJC before coming to work at MCI had given him both experience and understanding of touring, suitable repertoire, and appropriate stage productions. Krahn went on to teach social studies and dramatic arts at W. C. Miller Collegiate in Altona (W. C. Miller Staff List, 2010).

**Henry Engbrecht.** Henry Engbrecht taught at MCI the 1964-1965 school year “under a sharing agreement with Elim Bible School” (Ens, 1990, p. 212) and from 1967-1971 after returning to Manitoba from Southern Methodist University. Paul Schaefer was the principal at the time, and the school was looking for someone to “keep the choir tradition going” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 252). Schaefer also found in Engbrecht a musician who had a “passion for the school and what it stood for” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 255).

Before Engbrecht, MCI music teachers had had to conduct the choir as well as teach other subjects such as German, history, and religion. There were only seven people on staff at the time, and yet the music position was nearly fulltime. Engbrecht’s position at MCI became fulltime his second year after he asked and received permission to teach
private voice lessons when not teaching music classes (Grades 10, 11, and 12) or choir. Engbrecht stated, “Somewhere instinctively I had a sense about supply and demand—if you supply something it becomes a demand” (see Appendix A, p. 254). In addition to Engbrecht, a violin teacher from Winnipeg gave lessons at MCI, and Ben Kehler from Winkler taught guitar lessons.

Henry Engbrecht raised the school’s expectation of the level of professional training for MCI music teachers. When Engbrecht left “to build a choral program in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division in Winnipeg” (Jonas, 2001, p. 269), the MCI community supported the hiring of another fulltime music teacher. MCI has had a fulltime music position ever since. In 1978, Engbrecht went on to “a long and illustrious career” (see Appendix F for Loewen interview, p. 409; Ens, 1990) at the University of Manitoba.

When Engbrecht was teaching at MCI, it was still common to perform large-scale cantatas. His biggest gamble was to program Andreas Romberg’s cantata *Das Lied von der Glocke* and R. Murray Schafer’s *Threnody* in the same concert (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview). Engbrecht knew Romberg’s cantata—which compares the human life with the casting of a bell—would be well received, but Schafer’s cantata on the bombing of Nagasaki was an avant-garde work for choir, orchestra, and tape recording which Engbrecht’s audience probably would not accept without explanation and the proper context.

Engbrecht created a context for *Die Glocke* in terms of the shaping of the Christian faith, and the *Threnody* was presented in terms of Mennonites’ commitment to pacifism. Engbrecht decided to take Benjamin Horch’s suggestion (someone who had
himself offended his Mennonite CFAM radio audience with avant-garde music
(Letkemann, 2007)) by doing English composer Martin Shaw’s “Oh Brother Man, Fold
to thy Heart thy Brother” after the Threnody. Thus, Engbrecht was careful to place the
performance of Schafer’s Threnody between two pieces that would be more accessible to
his audience. The gamble proved to be a success. A high point for Engbrecht was the
performance of the three pieces at the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg and the
subsequent rave review in the Winnipeg Free Press (Henry Engbrecht, personal
communication, 2013).

Some of Engbrecht’s other memorable concert experiences included performing
Bach’s Cantata 50 for double chorus and some songs by Telemann. Engbrecht also
enjoyed performing pieces such as “The Heavens Are Telling” from Haydn’s The
Creation. His other favorites included Handel’s choruses from Messiah and “Swell the
Full Chorus” from Solomon. Engbrecht recalled,

Handel was great to do because basses could shout a B very, very nicely like in
the “Hallelujah Chorus” and once you got it out of them it was a great satisfaction
on their part to create this big sound (for them big), and it wasn’t that hard, and
it’s so vocal—that’s what makes Handel’s music so attractive. (see Appendix A
for Engbrecht interview, p. 262)

Engbrecht programmed sacred music followed by secular music for MCI’s social
occasions such as banquets. He and the students enjoyed performing the standard
madrigals such as “All Ye Who Music Love” and “Ein Hennlein Weiß” (see Appendix A
for Engbrecht interview). His choir also performed some Mozart anthems.
Engbrecht was a teacher at MCI during years of large enrollment. He observed that singing together broke down barriers between different types of students and that having a strong choral program correlated with less vandalism in the school and residence halls. Engbrecht recalled,

Whether I really qualified I don’t know, but I sure had the passion. And I developed the leadership; it was scary because suddenly you’re standing in front of a school choir of 200 kids and you know there needed to be some growth in discipline, and it’s an ongoing thing anyway, but I managed. . . . Something special grew out of it because it [music] was given the focus in the timetable. (see Appendix A, pp. 255-256)

During his time as an MCI teacher, Engbrecht occasionally combined his church choir in Altona with the MCI Chamber Choir, and more recently in 2008 he conducted his Faith and Life Choir at the MCI Sängerfest. In his early years he also directed songfests for the Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization. Engbrecht recalled joining the church choir at age 15 when he was allowed to transition from Sunday school to attending church services. He later traveled to different districts to lead songfests. Engbrecht met many people and learned to manage large music groups. These were great professional development experiences for Engbrecht before he came back to teach at MCI.

Engbrecht was a high school graduate of MCI (1958) and went to college at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. As an MCI student, Engbrecht remembered singing the “Hallelujah Chorus” at the end of every Christmas program and how frightening it was because their rehearsals “weren’t rehearsed as much as that you kept singing the
song through and making the same scary mistakes” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht
interview, p. 252). Engbrecht commented,

But it was an event, and it’s like one student said one time when hearing a
recording of such a performance: He said, “Boy, it sure wasn’t very good the way
we sang it, but we were sure excited about it.” And I think that was key you
know. It wasn’t always important how well it was done but that people got
inspired by it . . . I think that was really key. (see Appendix A, p. 252)

He attended CMBC and Southern Methodist University before returning to teach
at MCI and later at the University of Manitoba. While at CMBC, Engbrecht earned his
Sacred Music Diploma and afterwards went on to Brandon, Manitoba to get certified as a
teacher. Upon graduation, Engbrecht taught in Brandon a year before taking a job at
Elim Bible Institute in Altona for two years. Engbrecht then finished a B.A. in music at
Bethel College in Newton, Kansas and earned his Master’s in Choral Conducting at
Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas where he studied under Lloyd Pfautsch.
Before Engbrecht came to MCI, C. P. Zacharias (known as Neil Zacharias) taught music
at MCI from 1948 to 1961 (Ens, 1990).

**Cornelius P. Zacharias.** During the majority of the time Schaefer was principal,
Cornelius P. Zacharias was the choral director. In 1948, Zacharias “joined MCI’s
teaching staff as music master and English teacher” (Ens, 1990, p. 171). He had been an
MCI student in the 1930s. He then finished his “teacher training at the Winnipeg Normal
School and became a Mennonite village school teacher” (Ens, p. 171). Like other village
teachers during that time, he taught “German and Bible story after school hours, led the
local community choir, taught Sunday School and became a part of each community in which he taught” (Ens, p. 171).

Zacharias began teaching at MCI in 1948 as “the school’s music director and choir leader” (Ens, 1990, p. 12). Sometimes he had more than 150 students in the choir. Even though not all of the students were there willingly, His fine musical talent and his many years of choir work had prepared him well for this work. The MCI Concert Choir soon became known for its excellence.

Mr. Zacharias’ excellent taste for music as well as his understanding of our people resulted in many invitations for the choir. He ventured forth with a number of cantatas which were very well received. “King David,” “Zion,” “To Bethlehem,” and Romberg’s “Das Lied von der Glocke,” were some of the larger pieces his choirs mastered. (Ens, 1990, p. 171).

The beginning of choir tours at MCI date from about this time.

When Zacharias arrived at MCI, it “was suffering from a downturn in enrollment due largely to the construction of the MBCI [Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute] in Winnipeg and the erection of a number of good [public] high schools in Mennonite communities in rural Manitoba” (Ens, 1990, p. 176). Zacharias and the school arranged for the choir to begin visiting communities “to forge closer ties to its member churches and to attract new students” (1990, p. 176). After World War II there were better roads and the choir was able to visit member churches. Ens noted that “after 1950 these school tours became regular features of school life” (1990, p. 177). Besides the tours, in 1957 the MCI choir also “began presenting a radio program every second Monday evening” (Ens, 1990, p. 176) on CFAM in Altona to help promote the school. The format for the
radio program was similar to the church tours which “consisted of musical selections and presentations around a selected theme” (Ens, p. 176). MCI provided an 18-voice choir for the radio program and “taping occurred after four p.m. on school days” (p. 176). Zacharias remained at MCI until 1961 while P. J. Schaefer was still the principal.

Summary

Choral music and theater are prominent features of MCI’s music program. MCI focuses on vocal music because of its singing tradition and because of difficulties cultivating the same level of musicianship in instrumental music without a feeder program. Teachers and administrators at the school wish to preserve and expand the diversity of expression in their singing tradition by doing the best music they can find.

MCI has been influential in the promotion of choral singing in Manitoba. A number of students at MCI have pursued music as a profession (see Appendix F for Loewen interview). Examples include former MCI students George Wiebe and Henry Engbrecht who both had long careers teaching college choirs and choral conducting in Manitoba. Other MCI graduates are presently teaching music in schools such as Garden Valley Collegiate in Winkler and Steinbach Regional Secondary School.

Although there is increasingly less choral singing in the churches and community, MCI continues to promote choral singing in school as well as in other settings. Students get excited when they learn the harmony parts to hymns for the Sängerfest at MCI and later find they are able to sing harmony parts to the same hymn in their home churches (see Appendix B for Houser Hamm interview). MCI has “been very fortunate in getting people who are self-motivated and very interested in doing the new thing—the fresh
thing some of which doesn’t always work, but then you move on to the next.” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 289).

Rick Heppner Mueller, the present choral director, is enthusiastic about the future of singing at MCI. He has this vision for the program:

I want to take the kids . . . to a point where they can be more transparent through music making and experience more of who they are and share more of who they are with others. And if that happens, then I think the music making here will have a really long life. [As] soon as the music making becomes product oriented and it becomes about us trying to be the best, then I think that will be to our demise. But I think it’s so well connected to what we do as a school with our other programs and in the mission that I feel that singing will continue to be vibrant here. (see Appendix C, pp. 331-332)
CHAPTER IV

STEINBACH CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

Steinbach Christian High School (SCHS) and Steinbach Bible College (SBC) share a campus and together they are called Steinbach Christian Schools. SCHS (see Figure 4) currently has Grades 5-12. SCHS is a funded-independent institution which means the school receives approximately half of its funds from the provincial government in exchange for meeting the Manitoba curriculum and accreditation requirements. SCHS is fully accredited (SCHS, 2008).

The high school curriculum was introduced in 1946 (Penner, 1959), and the school changed its name in 1947 to Steinbach Bible Academy to reflect this change. The first attempts at a high school program with classes began in 1948 (Hildebrand, 1997). The high school program helped some of the Bible students to finish their high school education, pursue higher learning at the college, and to allow students to pursue occupations such as teaching (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview; Hildebrand, 1997). Originally, the same music teacher served the high school and Bible school students. The high school program has operated continuously since 1953 (Penner, 1959). From the 1950s to the 1960s the school was known as Steinbach Bible Institute. Yearbook photos show that there were Grade 11 students in the SBI Chorale and so the music program had some integration between the two departments. The name was changed to Steinbach Bible College in 1977 and the high school operated as a department of the Bible College.
The high school department was named SCHS in 1991 (Hildebrand, 1997). SCHS has continued to add younger grade levels over the years. Grade 9 was added in the 1990s, Grade 7 in 2001, and Grade 8 in 2002 (Kristel Peters, personal communication, 2013). Grades 5 and 6 were added in 2010 (James Fast, personal communication, 2013).

**SCHS’s Origins and History**

Steinbach Christian High School had its origin in Steinbach Bible College. The first attempt at starting a Bible school was in 1931 by members of the Mennonite Brethren as well as by groups such as the *Bruderthalern Gemeinde* (Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, now Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches), and the *Kleine
Gemeinde (now the Evangelical Mennonite Conference) (Hildebrand, 1997). Mennonite Brethren (MB) minister Reverend Jacob W. Reimer and Mennonite Alliance minister Reverend Isaac N. Ediger (Hildebrand, 1997; Penner, 1959) began instruction along with Henry Fast of the Bruderthalier Gemeinde (Evangelical Mennonite Brethren or EMB) during the months of November through February. Because of low enrollment (five EMB students and eight MB students) the original school did not continue. Reimer then began evening Bible expositions four times a week for five dollars a month. Students were allowed to participate even if they could not pay the tuition, and the costs were offset by freewill offerings.

By 1933 there was a shortage of space, so the location was switched to the MB church. In 1935, the United Christian Endeavor Society’s Bible School Committee, who were mostly Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, invited the community to come to Bible classes. Day classes were established in 1936 which is considered to be the beginning of SBC (Hildebrand, 1997).

In the 1936-1937 school year the MB Church served as a centrally located school, but by the 1938-1939 school year the sanctuary had to be divided by a curtain to create two classrooms, and the baby room was used as a third classroom (Hildebrand, 1997). By 1939 there were also Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthaler on the board (Friesen, 2007; Hildebrand, 1997).

In 1939, a new school was built on a location between the MB and EMB churches, and the choir sang two songs at the November 26 dedication ceremony (Hildebrand, 1997). Hildebrand wrote, “People were impressed with its three large, bright classrooms, teachers’ room, and 10-foot corridor. The classrooms could
accommodate from 60-75 students” (1997, p. 31). The building exterior was completed the following summer. The basement was used as an auditorium for daily chapel services, school functions, Christmas programs, fellowship meetings as well as public gatherings (Hildebrand, 1997).

In December 14, 1937, the school became a member of the Evangelical Teacher Training Association (ETTA) which had a three-year curriculum. There was a first-year Certificate Program for lay leadership, a second-year Advanced Certificate Program, and a third-year Higher Education Program (Hildebrand, 1997). Certificates were offered after successful completion of each year and a diploma was offered to those who completed all three years (Hildebrand). Although the Bible remained central to the curriculum, it “expanded to include a significant number of courses in related and practical fields of study, such as teaching, preaching, music, counseling and a variety of people related ministries” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 124).

With the addition of the high school department in 1947, the school changed its name from *Die Steinbach Bibelschule* to Steinbach Bible Academy. Although the high school and Bible School programs had been coordinated in the beginning, they gradually became independent (Friesen, 2007). Because some of the students were older by the time they decided or had the opportunity to pursue more than an elementary education, the high school allowed “young adults to complete their high school education” (Hildebrand, p. 124). High school classes could be taken “either before or after their Bible school training” (Hildebrand, p. 124). As a high school education became more popular, adult demand for a Christian high school education waned while the demand from young people increased (Hildebrand, 1997).
Grade 12 was added in 1948, and a collegiate department with Grades 9 and 10 was added in 1949. In the Bible school there were 24 day students and 10 evening students, and in the collegiate department there were 17 students. Since 1936, students as young as 14 years old had been admitted to the Bible school, so there was quite a range of ages among the students.

Government policy, as well as constituency needs, helped bring in a high school division in 1947. The Public Schools Act required Manitoba children to attend public school till age fourteen. In addition, families qualified for family allowance only if their children were in school. This motivated many young people to finish high school before joining the work force. (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 42)

Moreover, young Mennonite people who wanted to go into occupations such as teaching or nursing needed to have high school standing (Hildebrand, 1997). Students often got baptized and joined the church their senior year of high school (Hildebrand, 1997). The increased number of people with high school education meant that merely having an “elementary school education was not enough anymore” (Hildebrand, p. 43). In 1953 the name of the school was changed to Steinbach Bible Institute “to be consistent with other similar schools. . .” (Hildebrand, 1997, p.71).

In the 1960s there was a mix of students. Some had finished high school and others had not. A Level I curriculum was developed for students “who had not completed high school” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 76). The Level II curriculum was for post-secondary students. In 1970 the ETTA program was discontinued. In 1975, the faculty made a proposal “to the board that the Bible Institute be upgraded to college status”
(Hildebrand, 1997, p. 77). In 1977, the junior college program was briefly expanded to include four-year programs such as “the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) and the Bachelor of Church Music (BCM)” (Hildebrand, p. 78). Thus, Steinbach Bible Institute became Steinbach Bible College.

**Bible schools.** The purpose of the Bible school from the 1930s on was to provide young people with knowledge of Scripture, skills for serving in church, development of Christian character, and the preparation to teach Sunday school (Hildebrand, 1997). While initially distrusted by Manitoba Mennonites, Sunday schools became accepted in places where Mennonites had lost control of their private elementary schools (Regehr, 1996) in the 1920s. Higher enrollments in Bible schools such as SBC correlated with demand for trained Sunday school teachers and religious workers, times of turmoil (e.g., apprehension preceding World War II), and potential students feeling called to attend Bible school (Hildebrand, 1997). In Steinbach, enrollment tripled from 9 students in the 1936-1937 school year to 27 students in the following school year. Among Mennonites, Bible schools filled additional functions such as serving as the only education some children received after elementary school before getting married. Bible schools also made up for the small amount of Bible and German language instruction in elementary school. They also provided training in choral conducting, and prepared students for lay ministry (Friesen, 2007).

In general, the Bible schools prepared well-educated laity who were knowledgeable about the Christian faith and Mennonite heritage. This type of education was particularly encouraged in Mennonite communities, because, before acceptance of a paid pastorate, pastors and choral directors were non-paid positions filled by laity within
the church who were elected. Thus, it was important that members of the congregation be able to serve if called upon.

**John Baerg.** The Bible School Society called Rev. John Baerg, an MB graduate of Winkler Bible School, and John A. Guenther to be teachers (Hildebrand, 1997). Baerg served as the chief administrator from 1936 to 1944. All of the administrators since the beginning of the school have also been ordained ministers (Hildebrand). Baerg, like other Mennonite Brethren in the Steinbach region, was a *Russländer*. He was a 1935 graduate of Winkler Bible School and taught in German. Guenther was a graduate of BIOLA (Bible Institute of Los Angeles) and taught in English. “Although German was the main language used by the majority of the people in Steinbach, the first constitution of the school specified that courses would be offered in English as well as in German” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 18). After the second year, Jacob N. Wittenberg (MB) was added in 1938 as a third faculty member and taught in German.

Rev. H. P. Fast (EMB) was added part time the following year and taught in English. Hence, one teacher taught in English and the others taught in German. This arrangement lasted until 1944 when the board reversed the arrangement so that one teacher taught in German and the rest of the teachers taught in English “to accommodate the wishes of first year students and facilitate the school’s mission efforts” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 73). Fast was head of the United Christian Endeavor Society and “attracted many young people from various area churches, giving the school a distinctly interdenominational flavor” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 48).

With Baerg as president, the school was modeled after the Winkler Bible Institute (Hildebrand, 1997). Baerg thought there was a relationship between language and faith.
For this reason over half of the classes were taught in High German. Hildebrand described perceptions of students’ experiences there: “Students of that era contend that they were given a solid education. They cite particularly Baerg’s instruction in Theology, Wittenberg’s teaching in Bible Geography, and Fast’s leadership in Music” (1997, p. 49).

**Theology.** The school’s Statement of Faith served as a guide for teachers. The statement reflected the school’s interdenominational foundation and commitment to the doctrine of non-resistance. The school had a seven-member board of directors that represented the following Steinbach churches: MB, EMB, *Kleine Gemeinde* (Evangelical Mennonite Conference or EMC), and Bergthaler. The Mennonite Brethren in the Steinbach region resembled the EMB with the exception that the MBs recognized immersion as the only valid form of baptism. Their members were the “culturally and educationally progressive” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 11) *Rußländer*. The EMBs had shared their church with them until the MBs organized a congregation of their own in 1927 (Hildebrand).

The EMB church was strongly affected by the evangelical movement (Redekop, 1998). Thus, EMB pastors used extemporaneous preaching rather than written sermons, and they were among the first “to use the English language in its services” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 7). The EMB church had been started in Steinbach by ministers from Mountain Lake, Minnesota in the late 1890s. The EMB church accepted choral music from the start. The EMB stressed “new birth and a changed life, as requirements for baptism” (Hildebrand, p. 6). Young people from the *Kleine Gemeinde* were attracted to this church by the “frequent revival campaigns with good speakers, their lively singing, church choir,
and more free ways in general” (Hildebrand, p. 6). As a result, the Kleine Gemeinde adopted some of the EMB methods for retention of members. Travis Reimer stated in his catechism curriculum that the EMB church “became known as the ‘singing church’ because people sang with real gusto, with a fervor that emanated from a vital Christian experience” (quoted in Harder, 1970, p. 48)\(^3\).

The Kleine Gemeinde had traditionally been very reserved in their music practices. A statement from the 1899 ministerial conference in Blumenort, Manitoba exemplified the kind of effect Klaas Reimer’s theology had on Kleine Gemeinde music activities:

\[\ldots\] We believe that Sunday school as well as singing practice, particularly the four-part harmony practice, will do us more harm than good. They will lead us away from the simplicity in Christ. 2 Cor. 11:13, 1 Tim. 4:8, Amos 5:23. We do not, therefore, allow our members or their children to attend Sunday schools as they are presently conducted, neither the above mentioned singing practices. Since the available curriculum does not agree with our confession, it will lead us astray by portraying a show of holiness in that both God and lustful nature is served. This is serving two masters. Matt. 6:24. (Fast, 1987, p. 126)

Kleine Gemeinde ministers believed that “Sunday school and singing practice . . . would mar the thinking of their young people and would ultimately lead them astray” (Fast, 1987, p. 127). The Kleine Gemeinde had been losing members to other churches, and their distrust of outside influences was not unwarranted. In the 1880s, the Kleine

---

\(^3\) Harder’s source: Travis Reimer (n.d.). History of Steinbach EMB Church. Mimeographed Catechetical Lesson.


*Gemeinde* in Manitoba had experienced a bitter schism after the evangelistic meetings of Johannes Holdeman (Epp, 1974).

During World War I, more young people joined the *Kleine Gemeinde* church in order to avoid the draft. Consequently, the membership became more open to innovations (Hildebrand, 1997). By the 1920s, automobiles were acceptable and by 1926 their church had a Sunday school. After Sunday schools became acceptable, “choir practice and Young People’s meetings” (Hildebrand, p. 5) followed.

**Choral music.** Beginning in the 1920s when *Sängerfeste* and youth groups (*Jugenfreund*) first got started in Steinbach, musicians from among the *Rußländer* started gathering people together for songfests in the 1930s and 1940s. These events attracted crowds of hundreds of people from different areas who gathered “in a large tent or building” (see Appendix O for Sawatzky interview) to sing their favorite hymns. Between the 1950s and 1960s song festivals were held annually in the Steinbach area (Warkentin, 1971). *Sängerfeste* were directed by popular choir leaders such as K. H. Neufeld and were important for popularizing choirs in the Steinbach region. Thus, attitudes towards choral music in the Steinbach region began to change in the 1930s (Hildebrand, 1997).

There were *Rußländer* in the Steinbach area using *Ziffern* (Loewen, 2004), but traditional music notation was taught at *Die Steinbach Bibelschule* (as SBC was originally called) since its origin. The school had a practical view of music and believed that music was a tool for evangelism. From 1936 to 1964, music instruction was “offered in the regular classrooms” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 82). There was a choir the second year of the school’s operation (15 females, 13 males), and they sang at events including “the
Hildebrand described the formation of the school’s choir:

John A. Guenther, a colleague of Principal Baerg, started the first school choir and taught notation in the fall of 1937. For some unknown reason, Rev. Guenther could not continue with the choir. John G. Baerg then took on the role of conductor for the remainder of that school year. Rev. H. P. Fast, also musically inclined, assisted. However, Peter Martens, a musically gifted student, was later employed to direct the group. The choir, as well as the various singing groups, was much appreciated in ministries offered to area churches. (1997, p. 80)

In 1941 music became part of the curriculum. K. H. Neufeld came “for a one-month module in 1944 to instruct music and conduct the school choir” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 80). Choral music became popular after World War II. “From 1941-52 all students were required to take music courses. These included Notation, Rudiments of Music, Conducting and Choir. Some students deeply appreciated this opportunity, while others disliked it” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81). From 1945 to 1947 and in the 1951-1952 school year, “Archie Penner taught the music course and conducted the school choir” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 80). Volunteer student groups developed, and by 1959 “the faculty began forming singing groups, with students selected by audition” (Hildebrand, p. 80).

**B. D. Reimer.** John G. Baerg (MB) was succeeded by Ben D. Reimer (*Kleine Gemeinde*) who remained president from 1945 to 1964 (Hildebrand, 1997). There were a number of differences between Baerg and Reimer. Baerg was *Rußländer*, Mennonite Brethren, and emphasized Sunday school training. Reimer was *Kanadier, Kleine Gemeinde*, and emphasized missions. Reimer was a 1937 graduate of Winnipeg Bible
Institute (non-denominational affiliation) (Hildebrand, 1997). He stressed “the assurance of salvation and the Christian responsibility for world evangelism” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 51). MB participation declined after Baerg left since “improved road conditions made it easier for MB students to attend the Bible school in Winkler” (Hildebrand, p. 50). Whereas the MBs began going to Winkler Bible School, the EMBs began going to Grace Bible Institute in Omaha Nebraska.

It was during Reimer’s tenure that the high school division was added to the program in 1947. There was an increase in enrollment from 1952 to 1961 as well as an increase in music electives. In 1953, a new constitution and school board was organized to replace the society that had started the school (Hildebrand, 1997). A new campus and school were built in 1955, and a new dormitory was added in 1961. By the 1954-1955 school year, the enrollment had reached 89 registered students (Hildebrand, 1997). In 1955, land was purchased for a new school (22 and a half acres north of the transformer station along PTH #12). The board wanted a site that could accommodate 120-240 students. “. . . The spring and summer of 1955 brought into being a fine-looking, modern, redbrick building with large classrooms and improved facilities” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 33). The building was dedicated January 8, 1956. By the early 1960s, enrollment approached 200 students.

Increased enrollment required a broader support base, and a desire for church accountability led to closer relationships with the churches. In 1960 the EMC offered to take over the school, however, plans in 1961 were in place to keep Steinbach Bible Institute interdenominational among Mennonite groups (Hildebrand, 1997). To better meet the needs of the students, the Dean of Students raised the question in 1964 of
building a gym-auditorium. By 1969 the plan had been to build “a separate high school building with a library” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 37). The proposed building “was to be modeled after the multi-flexibility complex of the Red River [High] School in Grand Forks, North Dakota” (Hildebrand, 1997, pp. 37-38). The plans were rejected in early 1972 and only a gymnasium was built. Ben Hoeppner was given the credit for the idea of connecting “the gym and existing building . . . with a concourse” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 38). In the 1970s there was also talk of renovating the music facilities that had been remodeled from “an old garage building near the dormitory” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 39).

The establishment of the music department in 1959 “allowed students to graduate from the institution with a major in sacred music” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81). In 1962, Henry Hiebert along with Ben Eidse and Ben Hoeppner, restructured the music curriculum tailored to a college program” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 83). Mandatory choir participation helped develop the SBC choral tradition, and major concerts included Christmas and graduation. “The first Music Major students entered the program in 1962 and nine students graduated three years later” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81). They believed that music was “a vital part of SBI training” (Hildebrand, p. 82) and was important to world evangelism because it reflected “a philosophy of life as well as a system of theology” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 82). Hiebert became the first fulltime SBI music instructor (Hildebrand, 1997).

**Harvey Plett.** One of the primary purposes of the school initially had been to train Sunday School teachers. However, as high school and college education became more common, Steinbach Christian Schools had to be become more competitive in order to attract students. Dr. Harvey G. Plett was president of the school from 1966-1982, and
he stressed academic credibility (Hildebrand, 1997). It was during his tenure that SBI became SBC. Plett was himself an SBI graduate with an ETTA diploma and high school matriculation in 1956 (Hildebrand, 1997). While some Mennonite groups in the region (e.g., Holdeman) view higher education with suspicion, Plett did not see his pursuit of higher education as being in conflict with EMC beliefs. Plett believed higher education could help students apply the Word to the world and meet the academic needs of young people in modern times (Hildebrand, 1997). Plett pushed the school in the direction of getting accredited with the American Association of Bible Colleges (AABC) to help keep the school relevant and competitive in terms of attracting students.

**Ben Eidse.** Ben Eidse, a 1950 SBI graduate, was SBC president from 1983 to 1992 and continued the accreditation process. Eidse had received his B.A. from Goshen in 1959 and his Master’s in New Testament from Wheaton College in 1960 (Hildebrand, 1997). As part of the accreditation process, Eidse implemented institutional evaluation procedures (Hildebrand, 1997). Eidse believed accreditation could “improve the caliber of work” (Hildebrand, p. 59) at SBI, whereas others thought that accreditation would force the school into a mold. By 1987 the school had reached candidate status, and by 1991 the school had received accreditation (Hildebrand, 1997; Friesen, 2007). Because the province of Manitoba (as well as Saskatchewan) limits the ability to award degrees to public institutions, the University of Manitoba (U of M) examined the AABC standards and extended “credit transfer privileges for U of M approved courses to AABC schools” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 79).

In order to become accredited, separate college and high school facilities were needed. A 1988 renovation allowed for a high school dormitory that was separate from
the college dormitory. Another school improvement project was a new library which was also built in 1988. In the mid-1980s, administrators working on accreditation for the college began the process of separating the high school and the college thus giving them each a distinctive identity. The funding was kept separate because the high school was partially funded by the province (Hildebrand, 1997). In 1991, the high school department was named Steinbach Christian High School. At the end of the 1995-96 school year, the campus residence program for high school students was terminated.

During Eidse’s time as president (1983-1992), he encouraged the use of contemporary Christian music at SBC. Eidse got the idea of incorporating contemporary Christian music into youth events such as the Youth Alive conference from his experience developing “indigenous forms of worship in Zaire” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 60).

**Stan Plett and Abe G. Bergen.** Stan Plett became president in 1993, and reemphasized the school’s Anabaptist heritage. Plett had been a student at SBI in the early 1960s and taught in “the high school and Bible departments in the late 60s” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 61). He became dean of SBC in 1991. He wanted to develop a closer partnership between the churches and the college to foster a greater sense of school ownership by the supporting churches. Plett also believed the Anabaptist orientation of the school would save it “from being seen as mainstream evangelical on the one hand or exclusively denominational on the other” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 61). According to Bender (1944) of Goshen College, the three main aspects of Anabaptism are 1) an emphasis on Christianity as discipleship, 2) voluntary church membership, and 3) Biblical pacifism.
Abe G. Bergen was SBC’s president from 2001 to 2006 (James Fast, personal communication, 2013). Bergen was “a graduate of Briercrest College and Providence Seminary” (Abe G. Bergen, 2013). He served as an EMC pastor for 15 years. During Bergen’s tenure at SBC, the schools undertook the construction of new offices and classrooms. He is currently the Director of Development for Canadian Mennonite University (Abe G. Bergen, 2013).

Rob Reimer. Rob Reimer became president of Steinbach Bible College in 2007. He had received a diploma from Winkler Bible Institute in 1983, a B.A. from the University of Winnipeg in 1993, and an M.Div. from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in 1996 (SBC Administration, n.d.). His previous work experience included working as a pastor and as director of Winkler Bible Camp Association.

The SCHS Mission

The main purpose of SCHS is to provide students an education with a Christian perspective that develops them as a total person. That means that students who attend this school should develop intellectually (i.e., academically), spiritually (i.e., in their commitment to Christ, Bible study, Anabaptist heritage), physically (i.e., athletic programs), socially, and emotionally (i.e., integration of beliefs and values in healthy relationships among other Christians and in the community) (SCHS Our Mission, 2013). Teachers at SCHS must be committed Evangelical Christians.

The administration encourages the performance of Christian music, however, the music teachers are primarily interested in performing quality music regardless of whether it is sacred or secular (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview; see Appendix J for Friesen interview; see Appendix L for Peters interview). Former SBC administrator
Harvey Plett said that what constitutes Christian music education is a consideration of how “music contributes to [the] spiritual welfare of a person” (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Plett suggested that the general criterion for choosing music should be based on how well the theology of a song harmonizes with Biblical theology in the Evangelical-Anabaptist tradition.

**Music Program Status**

The SCHS music program is independent from the college program, but private lessons are available to all students who wish to purchase them through the college’s conservatory. Students can get credit for private instrumental lessons if they meet “the requirements of the Royal Conservatory of Toronto, or Western Board of Music” (SCHS, 2007, p. 40). Additionally, the college and high school choirs occasionally sing together for concerts (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) recalled sharing Christmas concerts with the Bible College. Schellenberg and the music teachers before him had to direct both the high school and college choirs. Sometimes these concerts have been joint concerts which also included Steinbach Regional Secondary School (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). The information that follows describes the status of SCHS’s music program.

**Enrollment**

SCHS had 235 students in Grades 5-12 in the 2010-2011 school year (Steinbach Christian Builds Bridges, n.d.). The Grade 6 and 7 Band had approximately 15 students in the 2012-2013 school year, and the Grade 9-12 Band had approximately 40 students (SCHS Music Gallery, 2013). Choir is mandatory for students in Grades 5-9 (Fast, personal communication, 2013; see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). About
90% of the students from Grades 10-12 participate in choir so the choral rehearsal space (which was built for about 50 people) is often crowded (Fast, personal communication, 2013; see Appendix L for Peters interview).

During Henry Hiebert’s tenure as choral director at SBI (1959-1965), the college choir was mandatory and also included the high school students in Grades 10 and 11. Grade 12 was part of the college at that time. Hiebert started the auditioned A Cappella Choir in 1959 and that ensemble had about 30 students. The A Cappella Choir (which had around 40 students) became the Steinbach Bible Institute (SBI) Chorale and later the SBC Chorale. They traveled and performed many concerts. Hiebert had 36 auditioned singers in the 1961-1962 Chorale. Patricia Friesen was a choir student who accompanied the group on piano, and she later became a piano teacher at the school. The purpose of the Chorale was to proclaim the message of salvation and to challenge “some of the listeners to also enroll in the Bible School” (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview).

There was no Grade 9 when Rudy Schellenberg taught music at SCHS (1978-1993) when there were between 100 and 120 students in Grades 10-12. Choir was completely voluntary at that time, and there was about 90% participation. Schellenberg’s former SBC student Elroy Friesen made choir mandatory for Grades 9 and 10 when he taught at SCHS (1995-2000).

Friesen used the mandatory choir requirement to keep the boys involved. When Friesen left, almost 100% of the students in the upper grades at SCHS were participating in choir. When Elroy Friesen became the director at SCHS, there was only one choir Grades 9-12. He split the group into the following choirs: Grade 9 Choir, Grade 10 Choir, and the Grades 11 and 12 Choir. By requiring the students to participate in the
grade-level choirs, Friesen was able to improve the quality of the pool of students he had to choose from for the Chamber Choir. By the time Friesen left, the Chamber Choir had become “a very high end group” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 531).

Kristel Peters student taught under Friesen and continued the mandatory choir requirement when she became the music teacher (2000-2005). The strategy of having mandatory choir was successful in keeping the choir program strong. James Fast, who has been the music teacher since 2008, still uses this strategy. The turnout of men participating in choir at SCHS has generally been good (Kristel Peters, personal communication, 2013) and overall participation in choir continues to be stable (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Another factor that benefits SCHS enrollment in music classes is that students have fewer course options from which to choose when compared to Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS) (see Appendix L for Peters interview).

**Scheduling**

Currently, the choirs have two hours of rehearsal time every week during the school day (James Fast, personal communication, 2013). The Chamber Choir meets twice a week for about an hour after school. Each band meets twice a week within the time table (i.e., during the regular school day schedule) for credit (SCHS Timetable, 2012). The Praise Band meets twice a week before school for about 50 minutes per rehearsal. Lunchtime is sometimes used for band sectionals or to help singers (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand).

Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) commented that the amount of rehearsal time was more than adequate. Among many Manitoba schools that tend to have rehearsals at
lunchtime, it is unique that SCHS has choirs for class credit in the schedule (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Steinbach Regional Secondary School’s Chamber Choir is also currently offered for credit (see Appendix L for Peters interview; personal communication, 2013). After Friesen was music teacher, Kristel Peters (2000-2005) taught Jazz Band before school at 8:00 for an hour three times a week. Chamber Choir was also outside the school day and met for a little over an hour twice a week. Because Chamber Choir was offered for credit, Peters encouraged her students to inform their employers that their school day went to 5:15. Scheduling the rehearsals outside the regular day was not very satisfactory because of the conflict it created with other activities such as sports practices.

**Funding**

SCHS’s financial support comes from tuition money, the province, and donations. Steinbach Christian High School shares the same school board with Steinbach Bible College. The board uses a formula to determine the allocation between the high school and the college for undesignated donations. In spite of having some financial connection, SCHS and SBC must have separate budgets because about half of the high school’s money comes from the province.

Students must pay to attend the school. There is a one-time application fee of $50 for new SCHS students ($120 for out-of-province students), and tuition for the 2013-2014 school year is $3975 (approximately $12,000 for tuition if the student is from out-of-province). There is an additional charge of $6000 per year for room and board for out-of-province students (SCHS School Information Handbook, 2013). If a family has more than one child attending SCHS, the second child’s tuition is reduced by 20%, and a third
child’s tuition by 30%. After the third child, tuition is free for any additional children in a family attending SCHS (SCHS School Information Handbook, 2013). Early payment incentives, financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries are also available. Parents have the option of paying approximately $30 for school medical insurance. Students can purchase meal tickets for school lunch.

Extra fees, which vary from year to year, include costs for field trips and music tours. Students can sign up for 12 or 16 lessons per semester through the SBC music conservatory. Students taking 24 lessons per year finish in April whereas students taking 32 lessons per year finish in June. Thirty-minute lessons cost $20.50 each ($246 per semester for 12 lessons or $328 per semester for 16 lessons). Longer lessons are also available for extra charge (SBC Conservatory, 2013; SBC Conservatory Policies and Fees 2013-2014, 2013).

In general, music teachers have been satisfied with the funding they have received for the music program. Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) set up a system in which SCHS financed the music program according to a formula based on the number of students and the number of pieces that were going to be performed for that year (see Appendix L for Peters interview). The administration augmented the regular music budget for larger purchases (see Appendix L). The music program also received money from instrument rentals to some of the band students.

In 1995, Elroy Friesen had a $10,000 music budget which was to be used for the purchase of music and expenses such as getting pianos tuned. Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) noted that he could buy as much as he wanted if he could give a good explanation for the music he was purchasing (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). However,
the first fulltime director for SBC back in the 1960s, Henry Hiebert, commented that he
did not have much money to work with and good naturedly said he had “had to grovel”
(see Appendix K for Hiebert interview, p. 577). To compensate for the lack of choral
music, Hiebert at times wrote out arrangements of music. Music composed by students
was also performed on occasion.

Facilities

SBC and SCHS share music facilities such as the choral rehearsal room, five
practice rooms (James Fast, personal communication, 2013), and offices. There is a
middle school room (Grades 5 to 8) for general music, and the choirs have class in the
choral rehearsal room. Band rehearsals are held on the chapel stage so the students
constantly have to “set up and take down” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 543).

The music library “is integrated into the regular library” (see Appendix N for H.
Plett interview, p. 650). SCHS has a large music library that has been developed over the
last 40 years (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). It includes some avant-garde
music, religious music of varying quality, traditional choral literature, and some
contemporary music (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). The Manitoba Choral
Association (MCA) in Winnipeg also has a 2,500 title library that teachers who are
members of this organization can access. Music directors from other schools are also
generally willing to lend SCHS music (see Appendix L for Peters interview).

In 2008, air conditioning was added to the SCHS/SBC choral rehearsal room.
The SCHS room is nice (e.g., good acoustics) but narrow and results in the conductor’s
back being too close to the wall. The room is crowded when the larger choirs rehearse
(see Appendix J for Friesen interview; see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview).
Even though the present rehearsal room is not ideal, Henry Hiebert (1959-1965) had to teach voice lessons in a closet under the stairs when he first started at SBI. There was a need for new facilities when student enrollment increased in the late 1950s and because the music program was expanded in 1959. During the summer after Hiebert’s first year of teaching at SBI, he renovated a building that was a kind of garage to be used as a choral rehearsal space. It also contained some practice rooms (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview). Hiebert taught in this building for the remainder of his time at SBI.

The gymnasium was added to the school in 1972, and the current music facilities were built in 1977 during Harvey Plett’s time as administrator (Hildebrand, 1997). After Lee Roy Bartel took the job in 1975, he and Dennis Friesen, a draftsman at C. T. Loewen & Sons in Steinbach, made a plan for the new music facility. According to Hildebrand,

The new plan called for a music building adjacent to the gymnasium including a 365-seat chapel with stage and balcony, several practice rooms, a music library and listening room, and a choral rehearsal room behind the chapel stage. The interior was designed by C. T. Loewen & Sons and an acoustic engineer from a California firm planned the chapel acoustics. (1997, p. 40)

With great acoustics and a cost of $310,543, reactions to the new facility were mixed. Some people thought the structure was symbolic of new energy while others considered it “a temple to the goddess Diana” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 40).

The chapel served as a “drama and high school band rehearsal room” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 41) as well as a recital hall. Thus, the facility was ready when SBI began offering college-level courses for its “4-year Church Music degree” (Hildebrand,
The music facility was dedicated on February 19, 1978, and a concert series was initiated to help celebrate its completion.

Presently, concerts are held in various locations such as the gymnasium, chapel, and off-campus at a church (Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church). The SCHS chapel has excellent acoustics, but it does not seat very many people. Therefore, the gymnasium and churches are often used for larger concerts. The Christmas concert is usually held at Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church which has seating for about 900 people (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). The Spring Concert which currently has an attendance of approximately 600 people is usually held in the gym (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview).

Because the churches in Manitoba often have the most room for audience seating and the best acoustical conditions for music performances, Steinbach’s public high school, Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS), also relies on churches as a performance venue (see Appendix L for Peters interview). Some of the disadvantages of performing in churches include scheduling problems and the need to transport instruments and stands. The SCHS bus, vans, and trucks are used for transport. The students ride the bus to get to the performance venue (James Fast, personal communication, 2013).

**Equipment**

The music programs at SCHS and SBC share their resources. Steinbach Christian Schools own several baby grand pianos (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) remembered that it was during his tenure that the school purchased Wenger choral risers. Schellenberg does not remember that the school had
risers before he got there (personal communication, 2013). He also began the fund for
the purchase of a grand piano. This was accomplished two years after he left (see
Appendix P for Schellenberg interview).

Most of the SCHS band students purchase their own instruments and a few of
them rent instruments from the school. According to current music teacher James Fast,
SCHS now has plenty of music stands and standard percussion instruments such as
chimes and a xylophone (personal communication, 2013). In contrast, two of Friesen’s
frustrations when teaching band at SCHS (1995-2000) were the lack of percussion
instruments and the need for more music stands. The school purchased some used
timpani while Friesen was there.

**Music Program**

SCHS has a secondary choral and instrumental program and SBC has a
conservatory that includes choral music and private lessons in piano, voice, and guitar
(SBC Conservatory, 2013). SCHS currently has seven choirs and four bands. There is an
adjunct staff of five applied teachers in the college and SCHS students can register for
Lessons can be scheduled during or outside of the school day (Rudy Schellenberg,
personal communication, 2013).

**Performances**

The impetus for the music program at SCHS is performance (i.e., concerts and
church deputations). The Christmas and Spring Concerts are the two formal concerts at
SCHS. The choir and band also perform at graduation. Deputations are similar to
miniature mission trips that the Chamber Choir takes to perform at the churches of SCHS
students. It is the school’s way of thanking the community and parents for supporting SCHS. The purpose of the deputations is to show the community what is happening at the school and build community support (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Three goals for performing in churches are to (1) serve and edify the community, (2) generate interest among potential students, and (3) showcase the SCHS students’ talent (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). Because they draw students from a wider area, the college does more deputations than the high school. With a few exceptions, SCHS students are local. Therefore, the high school deputations are usually to local churches. Deputations are thought of as service opportunities. James Fast currently does two to three deputations per year (personal communication, 2013). Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) estimated that SCHS did three to six deputations per year; however, he did deputations every other Sunday with the college. He was out once or twice with the SCHS choir per semester. The worship team would also go out and visit churches. Churches also invited SCHS and SBC to perform at services (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview).

SCHS probably modeled their deputation on those of SBC. SBC’s Chorale began giving deputations in 1959. In 1960, Ben Reimer approached the board to get approval to rent a bus to use the choir for a deputation (i.e., have the choir serve as a representative on behalf of the school to minister the gospel) (Hildebrand, 1997). Thus, Henry Hiebert took the A Cappella Choir on its very first tour in the spring of 1961 after graduation. Henry Zacharias drove the charter bus from Thiessen Bus Lines. Locations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan included “Portage La Prairie, Saskatoon, Waldheim, Chortitz, Herbert, Swift Current, Butler, Winnipeg, and Altona” (The Star, 1961, unpaged). Audiences received the group favorably, and Ben D. Reimer took the Bible school choir the
following year (Hildebrand, 1997). Other music groups accompanied staff such as “Ben Friesen, Ben D. Reimer, and Archie Penner” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 101) on summer tours.

Tours were also a practical means for raising awareness of the school for the recruitment of students. In contrast to choirs, smaller groups apparently had more success to meet these needs. By 1963 there were nine small performing groups consisting of “Duets, trios, quartets and mixed ensembles of various sizes” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 83). These groups would go on weekend outings to places such as Flin Flon (Manitoba), Swift Current (Saskatchewan), Endeavor (Saskatchewan), and Red Lake (Ontario) (Hildebrand, 1997). The Steinbach Bible Institute Chorale also visited churches in Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota (Hildebrand, 1997; The Star, 1961).

Choosing music repertoire was a challenge because there had to be a balance among educational value, difficulty level, and acceptability among the congregations they were visiting.

SCHS performs at festivals, the local rest home, the Safeway grocery store, and in churches (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). The school’s performances at the credit union are broadcast on the 1250 AM radio station (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). The choir also performs at an open house at SCHS for potential students. Excellent concerts get the community and administration excited about the music program. High-quality concerts help SCHS music teachers to get funding, permission to do more things (e.g., repertoire, performing, tours), and secure more rehearsal time (see Appendix J for Friesen interview).

**Curriculum.** For SCHS music teachers, the specifics of their individual curriculum depend upon their teaching styles, philosophy, and the school’s expectations.
The pervading philosophy at SCHS and in Manitoba is that music is a performing art, and that music education is effected through the rehearsal and performance process (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). SCHS teachers also emphasize the showing of respect for music from different cultures, lifelong participation in music, knowledge of music fundamentals, and the connection of ensemble members and audience through music (see Appendix L for Peters interview).

The school’s performance goals and the guidelines of professional organizations (e.g., choral associations) rather than a provincial music curriculum are the primary influences on the music program. Music programs at the secondary level in Manitoba are performance-based. Although Manitoba has a recently updated K-8 general music curriculum, Manitoba’s high school music curriculum is still being revised. Fast and Hildebrand (see Appendix I) thought the existing Manitoba music curriculum dated back to 1983. They considered the curriculum to be a resource guide rather than the determinant for what was taught in music class.

Johanna Hildebrand (2006-2008) advocated incorporating theory and history as it pertained to the repertoire, but she did not try to follow the Manitoba curriculum (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Schellenberg (see Appendix P) was never shown or asked to follow a certain curriculum. SCHS teachers tend to include more music fundamentals (e.g., theory, sight singing) with the non-auditioned groups than with the auditioned groups. The focus in Chamber Choir is on sight singing and performance.

Fast has the students work on identifying and singing scale degrees to improve sight singing. He teaches choral music by rote and has the students follow the printed music so they can connect what they hear (rhythm, pitch, and nuance) with the notational
patterns in the music. Elroy Friesen and Kristel Peters (who student taught with Friesen at SCHS) used Nancy Telfer’s books for teaching sight singing. According to Friesen, Telfer’s approach works with students from Grade 3 to adult. Telfer’s methodology stresses music scale degrees 1, 3, and 5 (tonic, mediant, and dominant). The technique of tuning the interval of a fifth with the choirs was used to help the students with pitch awareness (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Friesen mentioned that his best sight singers tended to be the piano students. This may have been because the Royal Conservatory curriculum that many students in private lessons use includes the acquisition of ear training skills. For students who have only choir rehearsals for the development of their sight singing skills, Friesen had them use numbers as a way to participate without first having to learn solfège syllables.

There is a provincial jazz curriculum that was distributed in 1998 (Manitoba Music, n.d.). In vocal music, this curriculum broadens the scope of what students in a vocal jazz ensemble should be able to do (e.g., singing with microphones, singing in small groups, vocal percussion). Johanna Hildebrand (2006-2008) tried increasing students’ awareness of vocal jazz by playing recordings of ensembles such as The Real Group from Sweden and Rajaton from Finland. However, the music teachers were later told that what the music students listened to in class had to be Christian (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Kristel Peters (2000-2005) commented that SCHS was supportive of her efforts to meet curriculum requirements.

**Music Major.** At SBC, Ben Heppner, Ben Eids, and Henry Hiebert started a music major in 1960. Henry Hiebert (1959-1965) had intended that the college program would train choral directors. As it turned out, the program was short lived because the
The program was considered to be too expensive and there were not enough students to continue supporting the degree (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). The program was terminated shortly after Hiebert left. Hiebert had envisioned that the college would maintain the music degree program (which consisted of both academic and applied music offerings) (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview). The administration, however, favored offering applied music as a means of fulfilling the school’s mission as a Bible school. In their view, ensembles such as choirs and small singing groups were part of the school’s ministry. Another problem was that it would also have required a partnership with a public university because independent schools in the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are limited in their ability to grant academic degrees.

Harvey Plett came to work at the school in 1962 at the time when Henry Hiebert was the music teacher. In 1966, Plett became SBC’s president and served in that capacity for about 15 years. Plett described himself as being supportive of the music program. The current music facilities were built during his presidency. According to Plett, there were a number of talented music teachers while he was there (e.g., Henry Hiebert, Rudy Schellenberg, Lee Roy Bartel, Bill Derksen, Doreen Klassen, and private teachers such as Ruth Oommen, Shirley Ardies, and Leora Loewen) (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Plett (see Appendix N) observed that the college and the high school used to share staff and the entities were very close until about the late 1980s.

Although the high school was still operating as part of the college at that time, the two schools were in the process of becoming more autonomous (Hildebrand, 1997). For example, Rudy Schellenberg taught choir at both the college and at the high school until around 1987 when another teacher was hired to direct the high school. Classes such as
music history offered at SBC were meant for the college students, but high school students could take them as options. Students during Schellenberg’s time (1978-1993) could also take music theory from the college music department. Those classes no longer exist.

**Choral Ensembles**

At SCHS, there is a focus on the choral program (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand). James Fast conducts five choirs: Grade 5-7 Choir, Grade 8 Choir, Grade 9-10 Choir, Grade 11-12 Choir, and Chamber Choir (SCHS Timetable, 2012). All of the choirs are offered for credit. Non-auditioned choirs are important at SCHS so that everyone can get experience making music. There are also auditioned groups to challenge the more proficient students (see Appendix J for Friesen interview; see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). A select group allows “bright musicians . . . a chance to make music at a very high level” (see Appendix J, p. 534).

**Tours and festivals.** The Chamber Choir is the main auditioned group at SCHS, and it is the ensemble that tours. To help ease fundraising demands, the director tends to alternate between having big and small tours (see Appendix L for Peters interview). One of the school’s fundraising strategies includes doing dessert concerts (see Appendix J for Friesen interview; Fast, 2013). The SCHS Chamber Choir usually attends a festival of some kind when they go on their yearly tour. In 2013, the Chamber Choir went to the Heritage Festival in Chicago. The Heritage Festival, a competitive international festival that music groups pay to attend, is held at different locations around the world (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview; see Appendix L for Peters interview). The Kiwanis Music Festival is also a competitive festival and is held in urban centers (e.g.,
Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton) throughout Canada (Kiwanis Music Festival, 2012). In 2007, the choir attended the Heritage Festival in Vancouver and the Kiwanis Music Festival (see Appendix I). Other tour destinations for the SCHS Chamber Choir have included Calgary, Saskatoon, and Ottawa, as well as the Heritage Festival in Vancouver, the Kiwanis Festival, and the Canadian Rocky Mountain Festival in Banff, Alberta, (see Appendix I; see Appendix L).

During the month of November, the Chamber Choir usually performs at ChoralFest in Winnipeg (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Choirs performing at this festival can get recommended for nationals (i.e., ChoralFest Canada) (MCA ChoralFest, 2012). There is also a local music festival in Steinbach that has fostered a healthy rivalry between SCHS and the SRSS (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). SCHS also occasionally performs at the Winnipeg Music Festival.

One year, Kristel Peters (2000-2005) took the Chamber Choir on tour to Edmonton to perform at a festival in the Winspear Centre. On their way to Edmonton, the Chamber Choir performed at churches and schools (both public and private). In 2005, Peters took the 35 students in the Chamber Choir to the Heritage Music Festival in New York and won gold. En route, Peters and the choir gave concerts at schools in Mennonite communities.

Friesen (1995-2000) thought that he was the first director to take the Chamber Choir on large tours. He toured with the choir to places such as Minneapolis and Toronto. Under his direction, the choir got “triple gold at the national competition” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 511). Friesen even took the choir to England.
During Henry Hiebert’s tenure as choral director (1959-1965) when the high school Steinbach Bible Institute consisted of Grades 10-11 and Grade 12 counted as the first year of the college program, Hiebert took the Chamber Choir on tour every year in April (Henry Hiebert, personal communication, 2013). Hiebert remembered renting buses from Thiessen Bus Lines and traveling to Saskatchewan, Alberta, Montana, and North Dakota. The Chamber Choir visited towns such as “Portage La Prairie, Brandon, Flin Flon, Swan River, Mafeking, Benito, Canora, Kamsack, Sturgis, Virden, [and] MacGregor” (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview, p. 578). He also toured in a small group during summer break every year and sang first tenor with the college’s Male Quartet.

The 1961 edition of Steinbach Bible Institute’s The Star yearbook recounted the amusing story of some boys on the A Cappella Choir tour who missed the bus and had to hitchhike. Hiebert commented that the boys tried to get even when the border patrol at Emerson asked, “Any liquor?” The boys rushed up to the front of the bus and told the border patrol, “We’re loaded.” The border patrol decided to search their luggage, and the bus did not leave the border until 2:00 A.M.

Festivals. The directors at SCHS have “opportunities to mix with other choirs and other programs” (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview, p. 618). For example, the Chamber Choir attends the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools (CAMS) Festival (see Appendix L for Peters interview). The CAMS Music Festival, which began in the 1980s (Music Festival, 2002), is an opportunity for Mennonite schools to get together and have massed choir and band performances. These festivals are held every three years (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview), and SCHS is represented by their Chamber
Choir. Fast took the choir to the 2011 CAMS Festival which was held at North Kildonan MB Church in Winnipeg from April 7-10 (CAMS Music Festival, 2011). Kristel Peters took the choir to British Columbia in 2002 when Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford hosted the festival in Vancouver. Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) took choirs to the CAMS festivals as well.

These experiences are similar to Sängerfeste (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). Although not affiliated with SCHS, there are still Sängerfeste every year at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach that consist of “hymn sings by a local popular choir leader” (see Appendix O for Sawatzky interview, pp. 654-655) during Steinbach’s Pioneer Days. SCHS is also involved with the Association of Christian Schools International which organizes the ACSI Musicale festival (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). However, they have not gone for the last seven years (James Fast, personal communication, 2013).

The CAMS Festival brings SCHS students into contact with other Mennonites from across Canada while the regional Manitoba Honour Choir brings SCHS students into contact with students from public and independent schools throughout Manitoba. The Provincial Honour Choirs are organized by the Manitoba Choral Association. Steinbach is in the EastMan division of the Manitoba Choral Association. Students from schools in this region can audition to be a member of the Eastman Youth Choir. The students attend rehearsals for two weekends and then do a short tour (see Appendix L for Peters interview). The Eastman Youth Choir also performs a sunrise Easter service every year. Schellenberg and other SCHS teachers occasionally lead the choir at these events.
Mennonite directors typically choose much of the same literature at these events as non-Mennonite directors (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview).

**Choral repertoire.** The music teachers at SCHS believe it is important to do a variety of music ranging from classics (e.g., art music, musicals) to crowd pleasers (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Parents and students have a sense of ownership in private schools and “the choral repertoire needs to match that” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 679). Although most of the music performed at concerts is sacred, secular music that is not too worldly or sentimental (e.g., some types of love songs) is acceptable as well.

Most of the choral repertoire at SCHS consists of Negro spirituals, gospel songs, classical pieces, and contemporary. African music selections with ties to the peace movement and social justice issues are particularly popular with students and audiences. James Fast and his predecessor Johanna Hildebrand also mentioned doing traditional hymn arrangements by Alice Parker, Beatles arrangements, African, gospel, spirituals, and a little vocal jazz (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). James Fast said that because concerts can have an impact on audiences’ perception of the school, he chooses some music that aims for the heart (see Appendix I) (i.e., has emotional appeal).

Both James Fast and Johanna Hildebrand expressed the need for starting with lighter music with students before attempting more serious music. Hildebrand commented that fun music (e.g., Disney tunes, gospel, African) gets the students’ attention. Hildebrand and Fast suggested that it was easier to attempt more sophisticated literature after they had been able to develop rapport with the students. Hildebrand noted that rapport with the audience was also required in order for them to accept performances
of avant-garde choral music by composers such as Eric Whitacre. Both directors said that the SCHS parents generally preferred lighter concerts (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview).

Current principal Emery Plett (see Appendix M) noted that there had been criticism from the school’s constituency that some conductors had performed too much classical and Latin (i.e., Roman Catholic) music or too much contemporary music. The choice of music was mostly left to the director (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). Hildebrand and Fast agreed that although conductors could not please everybody, they could generally placate parents by visiting with them.

James Fast occasionally uses choreography, and it is an accepted aspect of music making at SCHS (James Fast, personal communication, 2013). He was sure that previous SCHS directors had used choreography as well. Johanna Hildebrand and James Fast expressed the importance of sharing traditional Mennonite music such as Alice Parker hymns with the students and audiences (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Both Fast and Hildebrand felt that they had freedom to choose the music for programs. Sometimes Hildebrand chose music that sounded African such as Karl Jenkins Adiemus that could be perceived by the audience and administration to be religious, but was simply enjoyable to listen to and perform. Her biggest concern was to expose the students to high-quality performances. Kristel Peters (2000-2005) included some Mennonite music on the SCHS Chamber Choir 2000-2001 school year CD entitled Witness such as Bill Derksen’s setting of Psalm 133 and Alice Parker’s “Lily of the Valley.” She also liked music by Karl Jenkins and repertoire performed by the Kokopelli choir such as Joel Forth’s arrangement of “After the War.”
African repertoire started becoming popular in the mid-1980s (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Kristel Peters’ 2001 recording includes traditional African music such as “Ipharadisi” and “Nomali.” She also included Haitian music (Emile Desamours’ Easter choral work “Alélouya”) and a traditional Polish Christmas carol (“Lulajże Jezuniu” arranged by Tadeusz Biernacki). Friesen’s CD Songs of Celebration included African works such as “Singabahambayo” (Henry Leck), “Betelehemu” (Wendell Whalum), and “Asikha Thali” (Mike Brewer). The CD also included Polynesian music such as “Minoi, Minoi” (Christopher Marshall) and Jewish music such as Sid Robinovitch’s “Mi Y’malel.” Also of interest is that Biernacki and Robinovitch are Manitoba composers.

Former SBC administrator Harvey Plett (see Appendix N) said that there are no standard songs related to the school’s Anabaptist/Evangelical musical heritage that the audience expects to hear at concerts. However, the audience would not be surprised to hear familiar Mennonite hymns performed at SCHS such as “Wehrlos und verlassen” (“In the Rifted Rock I’m Resting”) (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Handel’s music and in particular the “Hallelujah Chorus” from the Messiah is also popular (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Other SBC concerts have included performances of Mendelssohn’s Elijah. Haydn’s The Creation has been performed and pieces such as “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring” were common at SCHS at one time as well as hymns and Volkslieder spirituals (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview).

If music teachers were not certain the music would be acceptable, they would ask the administration. Music at SCHS, especially if the text is religious, needs to align with Scripture. For example, some music teachers found Bobby McFerrin’s “The Lord is My
Shepherd” to be an aesthetically pleasing piece of music, but they never performed it because the song alters the Biblical text by referring to God as a woman (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview; Kristel Peters interview).

The teachers and administration at SCHS take seriously their mission to express Biblical truth in all that they do. Thus, even if a text is culturally acceptable, performance of a work that deviates from the Evangelical-Anabaptist tradition is not always advisable. For example, Kristel Peters (2000-2005) received criticism for performing “Ave Maria” because it was a prayer to the Virgin Mary (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Thus, while music teachers may be interested in expanding students’ exposure to different kinds of music, this may on occasion be perceived as inconsistent with the school’s mission of dedication to the Evangelical-Anabaptist tradition. However, music with texts from the Latin Mass, if used in moderation appear, to be acceptable performance literature (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview).

The most challenging repertoire Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) chose included works such as Schubert’s Psalm 23, R. Murray Schafer’s “Epitaph for Moonlight,” and motets such as William Byrd’s “Ave verum corpus” with the Chamber Choir. Schellenberg also remembered doing folksong arrangements such as Aaron Copland’s “Ching a Ring Chaw.” Sometimes Steinbach Christian Schools (SCS) collaborated with Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS) to perform works such as Schubert’s Mass in G and the Saint Cecilia Mass by Charles Gounod (Rudy Schellenberg, personal communication, 2013). People from the community provided the orchestral accompaniment.
Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1994) recalled that he was not expected to perform any German repertoire. Perhaps this was because the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) had changed to English between the 1950s and 1960s (Fast & Smith, 2012). This was before the General Conference Mennonites did. Rudy Schellenberg used his knowledge of the conferences affiliated with SCHS (e.g., EMC, EMMC) to help guide his selection of music: “I knew where I could push and where I shouldn’t push too hard” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 678). Schellenberg looked for music that intrigued and challenged performers and listeners. Because his predecessor Gary Froese had developed a strong choir, Schellenberg was able to perform masterworks from the time he became director. Schellenberg joked that he had never been called to the principal’s office over his choice of repertoire.

Schellenberg chose hymn arrangements in English by composers such as former SBC teacher Bill Derksen. Schellenberg commented that those works helped him and the students connect “with the supporting congregations” (see Appendix P, p. 680) and promoted their heritage of singing hymns. Schellenberg also performed some of Esther Wiebe’s music and sacred folksongs (Volkslieder spirituals) such as “Gott ist die Liebe” (“For God so Loved Us”), “Nun Danket alle Gott” (“Now Thank We All Our God”), and “Was Kann es Schön’res Geben” (tune used for number 517 in the Mennonite Hymnal for “The Year is Swiftly Waning” (Hymnary: Was Kann es Schön’res Geben, n.d.)).

Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) built a huge program, and had memorable performance experiences at SCHS (see Appendix L for Peters interview). Friesen increased the number of choirs, the amount of rehearsal time, the number of tours, and updated the
choirs’ stage presentation and appearance. The students were first dressed for concerts in “traditional white and black” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 531) when he started. Then he moved to “total black and dressy black” (see Appendix J, p. 531). Although, Friesen said they had dressed a little differently for every concert, there were always guidelines to which they adhered (e.g., full length skirts, at least three-quarter’s length sleeve). Friesen commented that Canadian choirs (or at least choirs in Manitoba) generally do not dress in robes as do choirs in the United States.

Friesen became the music teacher at SCHS in the middle of the school year, and he initially chose pieces that could be put together in a short amount of time such as African and contemporary music. For the SCHS open house, he chose the African song “Singabahambayo” and added percussion. The students wore “solid bright colored tops and jeans” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). After Friesen had become established with the students, he expanded the variety of repertoire that the school performed. In the SCHS Songs of Celebration CD conducted by Friesen, there were works by Felix Mendelssohn, Moses Hogan, Henry Leck, and Paul Christiansen to name a few. Friesen (see Appendix J) also mentioned performing works by Sid Robinovitch and René Clausen.

Elroy Friesen’s (1995-2000) major criterion for choosing music was the merit of the text regardless if the music was sacred or secular. He chose music such as René Clausen’s “All That Hath Life and Breath Praise Ye the Lord!” and Barbara Baker’s arrangement of Charles Albert Tindley’s “The Storm is Passing Over” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Friesen found that most of the high-quality repertoire for high school students is sacred (e.g., gospel music, music from the slavery tradition, psalm
settings, and the *Kyrie* text). He was equally comfortable with non-Christian texts (e.g., Jewish) if they communicated truth. Friesen’s goal was to provide students with a meaningful musical experience.

**Instrumental Ensembles**

The band program helps round out the music education at SCHS. Approximately 24% to 28% of the students currently participate in band (James Fast, personal communication, 2013). The purpose of the band program at SCHS has at times been a topic of discussion among the music teachers and administration (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Johanna Hildebrand (2006-2008) observed that SCHS hired choral people to lead the music program, and that instrumental music was not necessarily the passion of the music teachers (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Fast and Hildebrand also suggested that the social aspects of choir made it a more popular choice for SCHS students than band. In support of instrumental music, James Fast commented that the band program promoted music literacy and provided ensemble experience for students who might struggle with the vocal and aural skills necessary to be in a choir (see Appendix I).

SCHS has a Grade 7 Band, Grade 8 Band, and Grades 9-12 Band (SCHS Timetable, 2012). James Fast is experimenting with including the Sixth Graders with the Seventh Grade Band (personal communication, 2013). In addition to the Christmas and Spring concerts, the band performs at the Optimist Festival (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). When SCHS had a jazz band they performed at the Brandon Jazz Festival (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). The bands perform typical band repertoire ranging from serious music to humorous medley arrangements of classical
Music teachers have found that they have to be careful with the choice of band repertoire for Christmas concerts. For example, parents had criticized the teacher who had taught before Johanna Hildebrand for performing “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” because it was a secular Christmas song. The music teacher’s rationale was that the band arrangement of the secular Christmas song was at an appropriate level for the Grade 7 Band to perform and that it fit in with a Christmas theme. Likewise, Hildebrand performed “Jingle Bells” with the Grade 7 Band (this was the beginning band before Grades 5 and 6 were added) because it uses only five notes. The addition of the younger grades to the SCHS program provided opportunities for directors to recruit and support beginning instrumentalists with consistent instruction as they entered middle school and high school (see Appendix J for Friesen interview).

The SCHS band program goes back to the late 1970s (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Schellenberg (see Appendix P) thought that Lee Roy Bartel (now a faculty member at the University of Toronto) was responsible for starting that band. Ken Austen, the third trumpeter of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, taught band the last few years Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1993) was the choral teacher.

Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) divided the band according to grades. Grades 9-10 and Grades 11-12 were each given their own band which allowed the older students to work on more advanced repertoire. Many of the students at SCHS during this time were just starting their instrumental study in Grade 9 (see Appendix J for Friesen interview).
Some of these students had been home schooled through Grade 8 and had not had previous instrumental study. Others had not had much instrumental experience at their previous schools. Kristel Peters (2000-2005) taught band for two or three years of her five years at SCHS.

Praise Band. Praise Band is a contemporary group with instruments such as guitars, keyboard, and drums that leads the singing and provides accompaniment for chapel services. The Praise Band is an auditioned group, however, it is not offered for credit (SCHS School Information Handbook, 2013).

Much of the music performed in chapel at SCHS is praise and worship music with guitar and drums. The praise and worship music is led by the Praise Band during chapel services. Church Copyright License or CCLI allows its members to copy or project the lyrics to over 200,000 songs (CCLI, 2013). Most of the students at SCHS are more familiar with this type of music than they are with traditional hymns. Most of the music that SCHS students do in chapel is by ear (see Appendix L for Peters interview), and there is very little SATB literature in their worship music.

Many of Kristel Peters’ favorite hymns from her General Conference background were completely unfamiliar to her students at SCHS who were mostly Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC). Peters taught her choir students popular General Conference hymns such as the basic version of “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” as well as the version found in Lowell Mason’s 1822 Boston Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music (known as hymn number 606 in the 1969 Mennonite Hymnal). Only about two or three of the SCHS choir students had sung those before.
Elroy Friesen (1995-2000) observed that the students tended to learn some of their contemporary music at Bible camps and from CDs. Contemporary praise and worship music is published by Maranatha! Music, Vineyard Music (publisher of Brian Doerksen’s songs), the Australian-based Hillsong Music, and Integrity’s Hosanna! Music, (see Appendix J for Friesen interview; Loewen & Nolt, 2010). When Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1994) first came to SBC there were hymn sings for chapel primarily accompanied by keyboard and guitar. By the time he left, there was more variety: “praise and worship tradition, folk music, and four-part singing from the hymnal” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 668). When Schellenberg came to SCHS the hymnal being used was the Worship and Service Hymnal by Hope (1957). SCHS tried bringing in the 1992 Hymnal: A Worship Book by the Mennonite Church Canada and USA and the Church of the Brethren, but the students were already more interested in doing praise and worship music so Schellenberg thought the hymnals were sold. Schellenberg commented that when it came to praise and worship music the students thought they had the musical expertise rather than the music teacher.

Musical Theater

The tradition at SCHS is to do a musical every other year. According to the SCHS (2007) handbook, “Students may audition for on-stage parts, or become involved in technical, make-up, and sets and painting” (p. 11). James Fast is planning on performing Gilbert and Sullivan’s Pirates of Penzance in February, 2014 (SCHS Musical, 2013). SCHS typically performs popular shows such as My Fair Lady, Anne of Green Gables, Annie, Charlie Brown, Where’s Charley, and The Mikado (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview; see Appendix J for Friesen interview; see Appendix L
for Peters interview). Sometimes the script is modified so that it is acceptable (e.g., removal of vulgarity, drunkenness, racist dialogue).

When Kristel Peters (2000-2005) was asked why the school did not perform sacred musicals, she responded that the musicals she knew that had sacred topics (e.g., *Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar*) would be less acceptable than standard secular musicals (see Appendix L for Peters interview) because they sometimes convey ideas not found in a literal recounting of the Bible story (see *Third Way Café: Jesus Christ, Superstar?*, 2013). She also mentioned that audiences in Steinbach have an affinity for the musicals of Gilbert and Sullivan. When Rudy Schellenberg (1978-1994) was the teacher, his teaching responsibilities at SBC had not allowed him time to do musicals with the high school as they do now (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview).

**Music Teachers**

The SBC music program requires a choir director, and the SCHS music program requires someone who can teach both band and choir Grades 5-12. The music teacher has to manage the school instruments, performance and practice spaces, tours, and concerts (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). Currently, five applied teachers offer private lessons to both SBC and SCHS students (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). The school has a tradition of having a good choir and band. Music teachers hired at SCHS tend to have choir as their major performance strength (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview) and preferably have previous experience working with groups (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview).

Working at SCHS is thought of as a kind of mission, and the pay is lower than teaching at a public school (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). In past years when
the school had fewer grades, the music teacher often had to teach other subjects (e.g., Geography) in addition to choir and band (see Appendix J). The SCHS statement of faith is based on Mennonite-Anabaptist principles, and the teachers must be committed to an Evangelical-Anabaptist faith (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview).

Administrators favor candidates who have this heritage, training, and perspective (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview). The administration expects a director to be able to choose sacred and secular repertoire that conveys “the message of faith through music” (see Appendix M for E. Plett interview, p. 614). In addition to having the appropriate professional qualifications, teachers have to abide by the SCHS statement of faith (see Appendix M). SCHS teachers identify themselves as Mennonite or committed Evangelical Christians (see Appendix J for Friesen interview).

Music directors at SCHS typically belong to professional organizations such as the American Choral Directors Association and the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (ACCC, formerly known as the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors). At the provincial level, SCHS teachers are active in the Manitoba Choral Association and its regional branch in the Steinbach area known as the EastMan Choral Association (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). Elroy Friesen (1995-2000), is also a member of the International Federation for Choral Music.

James Fast. The current director James Fast has been the fulltime band and choir teacher at SCHS since the 2008-2009 school year. He began teaching at SCHS as a long term substitute music teacher 2007-2008 school year. Fast attended Steinbach Bible College for high school from 1978 to 1980 and had Rudy Schellenberg as his choir teacher. As an SBC student, Fast attributed some of their success in music reading and
part singing to the practice they had had singing hymns during daily chapel. The school had just Grades 10 through 12 at the time.

Fast graduated from SBC with a Bachelor of Church Music in 1983. In 1987, he graduated with a Bachelor of Music and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Manitoba. Following graduation, Fast spent a year at the University of Toronto Opera School. He spent another three years in Toronto working as an opera and oratorio singer (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview) and returned with his family to Manitoba in 1992.

**Johanna Hildebrand.** Johanna Hildebrand was the music teacher at SCHS from 2006-2008. James Fast was hired as a long term music substitute for Hildebrand during the 2007-2008 school year when she became ill. In spite of her illness, Hildebrand was able to organize the choir tour for Fast and to come back and conduct the bands in the spring semester of 2008.

Hildebrand graduated from MCI in 1999 and studied at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and the University of Manitoba (U of M) for the next seven years. She graduated with a minor in Mennonite History and a major in Choral Conducting from CMU and got her Bachelor’s in Education at the U of M. Hildebrand was an experienced choral conductor when she came to SCHS. Previously, her mother Millie had given voice lessons at SCHS for a number of years. Hildebrand has been conducting community choirs with her parents, Millie and Ed Hildebrand, since she was 16 years old. She has also taught violin lessons for a number of years (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview).
**Kristel Peters.** Kristel Peters taught at SCHS from 2000-2005. When she began teaching at SCHS, there were only Grades 9-12. In her second year, the school added Grade 7 (Fall 2001), and when those students became eighth graders in the 2002-2003 school year the school had expanded to Grades 7 through 12 (Kristel Peters, personal communication, 2013). Peters left SCHS to become the choir teacher at Steinbach Regional Secondary School after Ed Hildebrand retired (see Appendix J for Friesen interview).

Peters attended MCI in Gretna for three years and graduated in 1994. She considered it to be a privilege to have had James Janzen as her choir teacher at MCI (personal communication, 2013). Janzen taught solfège from Kodály books for sight reading. Peters, who had already learned to sight-read from piano and voice lessons, found the switch to solfège frustrating. She noted, however, that the experience was helpful in terms of preparation for her study at the university (see Appendix L for Peters interview). Her early voice teacher was her mother who taught her ear training so that she could successfully pass the Royal Conservatory exams. After MCI, Peters studied choral conducting with Henry Engbrecht and graduated from the University of Manitoba in the spring of 2000 with a Bachelor of Music and a Bachelor of Education (Kristel Peters, personal communication, 2013). She did her student teaching with Elroy Friesen at SCHS.

Besides teaching music fundamentals and the technical aspects of music, Peters tried to cultivate a respect for music from different cultures and styles in her students. She wanted her students to connect emotionally with music and encouraged them to
continue to participate in music “for the rest of their life” (see Appendix L for Peters interview, p. 598).

**Elroy Friesen.** Prior to Peters, Elroy Friesen taught at SCHS for five and a half years. He began in February 1995 immediately after finishing his student teaching and remained at SCHS through the 1999-2000 school year. Friesen said that part of the reason he had been hired was that he had an education degree. When Friesen first came to SCHS, he taught geography, choir, and band. As he took on more music responsibilities at the college, somebody else was hired to teach geography and band. Friesen tried to make rehearsals enjoyable. For example, he would give an engaging version of music history in rehearsals. He also taught choir and band students basic music theory and terminology.

Some of the SBC voice teachers who were at SCHS during Friesen’s tenure were Sheila Ardies, Ruth Oommen, and Millie Hildebrand who “had come back from two years of teaching in Romania” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 515). During Friesen’s third or fourth year teaching at SCHS, he also began substitute teaching at Linden Christian School in Winnipeg which is affiliated with Grant Memorial Baptist Church.

While he was at SCHS, Millie Hildebrand helped Friesen get his first non-school conducting experience by directing the Eastman Junior High Honour Choir. This choir consisted of students from the EastMan region in Grades 7 through 9. The ensemble started rehearsing in the morning and put on a concert in the evening (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). After this event, he went on to be a guest conductor at other Manitoba regional youth choirs, workshops, festivals, and is now a guest conductor
throughout Canada. Friesen later founded the Prairie Voices Choir when he moved to Winnipeg to become the music teacher at Linden Christian School.

**Prairie Voices.** In the year 2000, Friesen resigned from SCHS and started working fulltime at Linden Christian School. Once he was living in Winnipeg, Friesen started his own choir called Prairie Voices for singers who were looking for an opportunity to sing. The group consisted of former SCHS students and other singers between the ages of 18 and 25.

Kristel Peters became the assistant director of the group in the 2003-2004 season when they recorded the CD album *Immortal*. The following year Peters became the fulltime director for Prairie Voices in addition to teaching at SCHS while Friesen went to the University of Illinois for two years of doctoral studies. Ultimately she directed Prairie Voices for six seasons (Prairie Voices Choir Bio, n.d.) from 2004-2010 (Kristel Peters, personal communication, 2013). During that time the group recorded the albums *Awakenings* and *Autumn*. The current Prairie Voices director is Vic Pankratz of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate (Prairie Voices Artistic Staff, n.d.).

**Friesen’s Education.** Elroy Friesen attended Fort Garry School Division during his elementary years. His early school music teachers included Brenda Harvey, Cindy Raxter, and Marian Enns (for strings). He also studied piano with Lydia Wiebe. In Grade 5 or 6 he took cello lessons from Lydia’s son Thomas Wiebe. Friesen attended Vincent Massey Collegiate for high school which did not offer choir until his last year. Willow Wade-Budzak was his choir teacher (see Appendix J for Friesen interview; VMC Teaching Faculty, 2012).
Friesen said that with a few exceptions he had not had good choir experiences growing up. Friesen then attended SBC for two years (1998-1990) and had Rudy Schellenberg as his choir director his first year and Jake Klassen his second year. Other SBC music teachers at that time included Doreen Klassen, Warren Hart, and Terry Grieger (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). In 1990, Friesen transferred to the University of Manitoba as a voice major. He studied piano with Sydney Young McGinnis and voice with Mel Braun (see Appendix J). During his first year he sang with the University Singers directed by Henry Engbrecht. The major work they performed that year was Stravinsky’s *Les Noces*. The experience of performing twentieth century music inspired Friesen to pursue secondary choral music as his major performance area. Instrumental music was his minor performance area.

Friesen dropped out of Engbrecht’s University Singers because he was hired to perform with the 16-member choir for Hymn Sing, the half hour Sunday evening CBC TV series that ran from 1965 to 1995 (Hymn Sing Details, 2013; Hymn Sing Episode Guide, 2013). In 1995, he received his Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Education from the University of Manitoba. During this time Friesen had continued to perform with Engbrecht’s community choir. Friesen finished his doctorate in 2010 (Elroy Friesen, n.d.) at the University of Illinois while continuing to direct the choir at the University of Manitoba.

**Rudy Schellenberg.** Rudy Schellenberg taught choir at SCHS and SBC from 1978 to 1993. Although he did not have an education degree, Schellenberg taught the high school choirs for about seven years on a “dispensation from the department of education” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 666). He estimated that 25%
of his time was spent with the three choirs at the high school, and the rest of his time was
spent teaching choir, church music, history, and other subjects as necessary at SBC
(Schellenberg, 2008). The high school choirs included the Concert Choir (with about 80-
90 students), the Chamber Choir (with about 20-24 students), and occasionally a
Women’s Choir. The major events for the choirs included tours, church visits, and
concerts.

Schellenberg earned his Bachelor of Church Music degree at Mennonite Brethren
Bible College in Winnipeg where he focused on piano and voice (see Appendix P for
Schellenberg interview). He then completed a Bachelor of Music at the University of
Wilfrid Laurier in Waterloo, Ontario which is a public university that was founded as and
continues to serve as a Lutheran seminary. Like other Mennonite musicians from
western Canada at the time, Schellenberg went on to study at the Detmold music
conservatory in Germany (Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie). He studied “conducting,
piano, harpsichord, and voice” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 665) in
Detmold. Schellenberg returned to teach at SBC “with the equivalent of a Master’s in
Music” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 665). He finished his Master’s in
Conducting in 1988 at the University of Cincinnati. He also did doctoral work in
Cincinnati before returning to Manitoba in 1989. At that time, he had completed his
coursework and recital for the DMA, but not the dissertation. In 1993, he left SBC to
teach and conduct choirs at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg.

The Mennonite Brethren choral tradition (e.g., Kernlieder, gospel songs) was a
formative influence on Schellenberg’s musical development. The choral sound he
obtained from his groups was influenced by the non-vibrato traditions of the English and
the northern German choral schools, the contrasting warmth and color of the Robert
Shaw sound, and the African tradition. His study in Detmold, Germany also influenced
his choice of repertoire. For example, it was in Germany that Schellenberg had in-depth
exposure to performing the choral works of composers such as Brahms, Schubert, and
more contemporary composers such as Distler (see Appendix P for Schellenberg
interview). Currently, he is active with the Mennonite Festival Chorus, Winnipeg
Singers, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and Steinbach Mennonite Church (Rudy
Schellenberg, 2013).

**Bill Derksen.** Bill Derksen was the SBC music teacher from 1967-1973 (Hiebert,
2008; Hildebrand, 1997). Derksen was in the first group of students to graduate from
Steinbach Bible Institute with a degree in music. He is currently Professor Emeritus of
Music Studies at Providence University College (formerly Winnipeg Bible College) in
Otterburne, Manitoba (Providence Faculty, 2013) near Steinbach.

**Henry Hiebert.** Henry Hiebert, who had a background in administration as well
as music, worked at Steinbach Bible Institute (SBI) in different capacities at different
times. He taught music at SBI from 1959-1965 (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview)
and worked to develop a music degree program for the school. The high school at the
time consisted of Grades 10-12. Hiebert taught voice, elementary music theory, music
history, hymnology, conducting, and choir. Hiebert also arranged teachers for students to
take private music lessons in voice, piano, and strings. He used Gehrkens’s *Essentials in
Conducting* for teaching conducting. He transformed the A Cappella Choir into the
 auditioned Chorale. A year after Hiebert left, the new administration changed the three-
year college program he had helped to create into a two-year Bible school. Hiebert
returned to the school while his children were students at SBC and worked in public relations from 1979 to 1983 when Lee Roy Bartel and Rudy Schellenberg were the music teachers.

The constituency supporting Steinbach Bible Institute was conservative in their view of music (Hiebert, 2008). Henry Hiebert encouraged musical growth within this environment. Hiebert’s philosophy of music was printed in *The 1961 Star* yearbook where he encouraged readers to examine their music tradition as to whether or not it was based on scripture or tradition. He made the case that since the Reformation there were two dominant philosophies of music among Protestants which could be traced either to Martin Luther or John Calvin. Hiebert described Luther as favoring “highly cultured part singing and musical instruments in church services” whereas John Calvin condemned “all part singing and use of musical instruments in the church” (Hiebert, 1961, unpaged). Hiebert emphasized that both views were primarily historical rather than scriptural. Hiebert concluded, “It behooves us to investigate our own philosophies of music and see whether they are based merely on tradition or whether they are grounded in the Holy Scriptures” (1961, unpaged).

Under Hiebert’s direction, the school had its largest Chorale to that point with 37 singers in the 1963-1964 school year. As a fulltime music instructor, he was able to be available for music students and to represent “the music department at faculty meetings” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81). In addition to music at the school, SBC students could join choral groups in the Steinbach community such as George Dugard’s Sacred Music Society “and community choirs directed by Henry Hiebert and Bill Derksen” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 83).
Hiebert had gone to college at SBI where he studied voice and piano. Hiebert graduated from SBI in 1954 (Hildebrand, 1997) and was attending Goshen College in Indiana (where he studied conducting) when he was offered the music position at SBC in 1959. Hiebert (see Appendix K) played and taught guitar as well as wrote his own cowboy songs. He also played the banjo, accordion, mouth organ, and orchestral instruments. He had studied violin with Mel Horch (Benjamin Horch’s brother) of the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra while teaching at SBC (Henry Hiebert, personal communication, 2013).

In 1965, Hiebert took a sabbatical from teaching at SBI and went back to Goshen to continue his undergraduate Music and Secondary Education studies. He also studied English and Psychology at the same time. Hiebert graduated from Goshen College in 1966 with a B.A. in English (Maple Leaf, 1966) and also met the requirements for a teaching certificate (Henry Hiebert, personal communication, 2013). He went on to teach orchestra and the choirs at Garden Valley Collegiate in Winkler while taking graduate music classes at the University of Manitoba. Hiebert also became the assistant superintendent for the Frontier School Division in Dauphin, Manitoba. In 1983, Hiebert and his family moved to Edmonton, Alberta where he was the administrator at a private school. In the 1980s, Hiebert worked on his doctorate in education, but never finished his dissertation on the Canadian Charter of Rights.

Hiebert attended summer school for two summers at the University of Minnesota where he had Robert Shaw as a teacher. Hiebert remembered studying the musical interpretation of Handel’s Messiah with Shaw. Later, Hiebert was on a committee that invited Shaw to bring “his chorale and small orchestra” (see Appendix K for Hiebert
interview, p. 554) to Indiana. Shaw stressed the importance of working up to a final climax in large scale works without climaxing in between. This technique allowed large scale music works to keep flowing rather than giving the impression of separate pieces performed one after the other. Another idea Hiebert got from Shaw was that conducting had to be “more than just beating time” (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview, p. 554). Hiebert believed that music was vital to life and that life would be miserable without music. Hiebert tried to pass these experiences on to his students.

Hiebert was also active in the community. He was the first to perform Handel’s *Messiah* in Steinbach with local musicians. He used his church choir, the school choruses, and rented an organ for the accompaniment. After the concert, the church decided they wanted to keep it, and that was the beginning of the use of instruments in EMC churches in the Steinbach region. Hiebert performed the work again in 1965 at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School gymnasium, and Mel Horch resurrected the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra one last time to play for this event.

**Hiebert and instruments in church.** Although instruments are now acceptable for Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC) services, it was not the case until the late 1960s when the last EMC churches added piano and organ in Blumenort, a neighboring town to Steinbach. The EMC also did not have a history of choral singing since instruments and choral singing in church were thought to be worldly. Henry Hiebert had a Bergthaler background and grew up playing musical instruments. He first introduced a pump organ into an EMC church when he became involved with its choir.

Congregations gradually started accepting instruments after that, and a few years later a piano covered with a blanket was brought into the church in Steinbach for a
wedding (to the dismay of some of the members of other churches in the area). Hiebert felt as if the attitude in both Steinbach and in Goshen was that music was entertainment and that musicians do not know much (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview). Hiebert’s philosophy of music printed in the 1961 *The Star* (1961) yearbook challenged readers to consider whether their views on music were based on the Bible or the traditions of men.

**George Dugard and Archie Penner.** Penner worked at SBI from 1945 to 1964. In 1952, Dugard (1952-1959) became the main voice teacher and choral director (Hildebrand, 1997). Dugard and his students were inspired by Robert Shaw’s choral work. Dugard started the Sacred Music Society which was made up of voice students from SBI and Winnipeg Bible Institute (now Providence University College and Theological Seminary located in Otterburne, Manitoba). Hiebert was in his second year of study when Dugard came, and Hiebert became the president of the music society. The quality of their music making influenced many students including Hiebert, who had intended to become a missionary, to study music seriously (see Appendix K for Hiebert interview).

Dugard had considered that hymns could be tremendous pieces of music and that art music such as oratorios should be accessible to everyone (see Appendix K). Therefore, based on this philosophy, Dugard advocated that conductors and singers give the performance of hymns as much integrity and attention to detail as they would a piece of art music such as Handel’s *Messiah*. “Dugard had his ARCT diploma in vocal music and had a reputation both in Winnipeg and Steinbach as ‘an outstanding singer and conductor’” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81). In addition to his duties at the Steinbach Bible
Academy, Dugard had “some fifty vocal students in Winnipeg, Steinbach, and Altona, and directed a choir in Winnipeg” (Hildebrand, 1997, p. 81).

**Students**

Students at Steinbach Christian High School are generally from the town of Steinbach or from the surrounding communities such as Blumenort, Vita, New Bothwell, and Niverville (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). The students have a variety of musical and educational backgrounds ranging from home schooling to attendance at their local public schools. The students do not come from any particular set of feeder schools. Instead, families who go to certain churches in these communities tend to send their children to SCHS. These are “healthy churches with huge youth groups” (see Appendix J for Friesen interview, p. 527). These families are interested in sending their children to a school that has a spiritual emphasis (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview).

SCHS is a conservative school and the students tend to come from congregations that sing praise and worship music (i.e., contemporary worship) (see Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview; see Appendix L for Peters interview). Harvey Plett (see Appendix N) said that although the students mostly consider themselves to be Mennonite, the music teachers perceive the students as being more Evangelical or Pentecostal (i.e., charismatic) in their theological outlook (see Appendix I Fast & Hildebrand interview). This is exemplified by their music and worship style preferences. According to Harvey Plett (see Appendix N), however, in practice there is no difference between a genuine Evangelical Christian and a genuine Mennonite/Anabaptist.

In addition to students with Mennonite backgrounds (e.g., Evangelical Mennonite Conference), there are some SCHS students who attend the Evangelical Free Church,
Southland Community Church (Independent), and charismatic churches (see Appendix N for H. Plett interview). Many of those students have ethnic Mennonite family names. A number of the students who go to SCHS have to work on the family farm to help pay their tuition, and that work ethic carries over into their schoolwork (see Appendix J for Friesen interview). The students tend to demonstrate good character and value the opportunity to attend SCHS.

When Rudy Schellenberg taught at SBC (1978-1993), 98% of the students were Mennonite with German-Russian backgrounds who lived within a 10-mile radius (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). Schellenberg remembered having good students with musical backgrounds. He recalled that students came from Blumenort, Kleefeld, and Steinbach. At that time there were also some high school students who lived in residence. The school also had a small percentage of foreign students from Korea.

**Elementary Music**

Before attending SCHS, most of the students had either attended one of the local public elementary schools or had been home schooled. The public elementary schools in the neighboring towns as well as public schools within Steinbach are part of the Hanover School Division. The elementary music teachers follow the *Kindergarten to Grade Eight Music: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (Manitoba Curriculum, 2011).

The SCHS students’ eclectic backgrounds have resulted in a group of students with diverse skills. For example, students from Millie Hildebrand’s program in Mitchell were excellent vocalists (see Appendix L for Peters interview), and Cameron Friesen’s Blumenort students were “phenomenal” (see Appendix L, p. 603) band students.
Descriptions of the elementary music programs in the town of Blumenort and the Woodlawn School in Steinbach follow.

The public school in the town of Blumenort has about 440 students and serves grades K-9. About 15% of students from the Blumenort School attend SCHS. In the 1990s, about 40% of the Blumenort students attended SCHS (Ed Neufeld, personal communication, 2008). Students who do not go to SCHS usually attend Steinbach Regional Secondary School. No estimate was given as to how many students from Woodlawn School attend SCHS.

Blumenort School has students K-9, and their students either attend Steinbach Regional Secondary School or Steinbach Christian High School. Blumenort School has a music teacher for Grades K-6 and another music teacher for Grades 7-9. Grades K-6 have 40-minute music classes every other day as well as a voluntary elementary choir (Ed Neufeld, personal communication, 2008). The K-6 teacher teaches “drumming, recorder, music appreciation, some music theory, and vocal” (Neufeld, personal communication, 2008). Blumenort School has no choir for students in Grades 7-9. Instead, these students can take either Art or Band. The band meets every day for 40 minutes and the director uses the Essential Elements series for teaching instrumental skills. There is no official band curriculum, and the director is free to choose materials that fit the needs of the students (Neufeld, personal communication, 2008). In addition to concerts at the Blumenort School, the band also goes on tours, and students participate in festivals as well as perform solos at festivals. Students can also audition and participate in the regional Honour Band. Outside of school, students often participate in church performances (Neufeld, personal communication, 2008).
Woodlawn School has over 600 students in grades K-6 and is one of three public elementary schools in Steinbach. According to Lori Reimer (the K-3 music teacher), music classes operate on a six-day cycle. Grades 1-6 meet three times per cycle while Kindergarten meets twice per cycle. K-3 activities include singing, Orff instruments, and movement (Lori Reimer, personal communication, 2008). Students in Grades 4-6 are taught recorder, ukulele, and Orff. Both K-3 and Grades 4-6 also have theme-based units (e.g., jazz, opera). Elementary performances include Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Christmas, Spring Concert, and Spring Tea, and various other performances including plays (Lori Reimer, personal communication, 2008). Sometimes grades will have class performances if they cannot fit a big concert into the time table. Depending on the school calendar, Woodlawn music students sometimes attend the local music festival (Lori Reimer, personal communication, 2008).

**Church**

The students who attend SCHS come from churches that accept singing in harmony, but some churches within the Steinbach region still practice the old unison singing tradition (e.g., Sommerfelder, Old Colony Mennonites, and those of the Old Colony who left for Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s) (see Appendix O for Sawatzky interview). Students from these conservative Mennonite backgrounds, if they go to high school at all (to pursue jobs requiring degrees such as nursing), would likely choose public schools rather than SCHS.

At SCHS, James Fast said that he thought the students of 30 years ago could sing harmony and read notes better than the students he was now teaching. He suspected that it was because SCHS used to have daily chapel that included hymn singing (see
Appendix I for Fast & Hildebrand interview). Hildebrand observed that while she had grown up learning hymns, most of the students who attend SCHS come from churches that sing more praise and worship music projected on a screen than hymns.

The students may have other skills that they have developed from their singing of praise and worship music (e.g., spontaneity, improvisation, a pop sound), but some of the students do not know the basic repertoire such as Christmas carols very well. Hildebrand observed that the pop sound and rote learning skills students gained from singing praise and worship music transfer to styles such as vocal jazz but that it does not adequately prepare students for doing something challenging such as Alice Parker’s “Hark, I hear the Harps Eternal” (see Appendix I for Fast and Hildebrand interview). The SCHS students who need basic instruction in choral singing present the same challenges to teachers as students in the public schools.

A current trend music teachers are discovering is that with the influx of contemporary praise and worship music into church services, many of the young men are now singing tenor (see Appendix L for Peters interview; Millie Hildebrand, personal communication, 2012). As a result, choral directors are having trouble finding basses. Rudy Schellenberg’s students could already sing harmony when he began teaching at SCHS in 1978. Although students no longer have the choral skills from church that they used to have when they come to SCHS, Schellenberg thinks that choirs “are as good or better as they were then” (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview, p. 688).

**Camps**

Students at SCHS often attend Bible camps such as “Red Rock Bible Camp, Camp Arnes, Bird River Bible Camp, Winkler Bible Camp, and Camp Cedarwood”
(James Fast, personal communication, 2013). The standard musical influence at summer camps is praise and worship music accompanied by a band (e.g., guitar, drums, keyboard, vocalists). Students like doing songs from camp at SCHS and they sometimes write out choral parts (see Appendix L for Peters interview). The camps have influenced teachers as well. Elroy Friesen attributed his experiences working with youth at camp to his emphasis on being a choral conductor who is able to capture students’ attention.

**Impact of the Music Program**

Some students from SCHS have followed musical careers. Some of these students are the current directors of choirs in schools, churches, and in the communities (see Appendix P for Schellenberg interview). The churches that support SCHS tend to use praise and worship music rather than choral music in their services. Schellenberg expects that in the future musical skills from high school choir will be used more in small groups and bands such as in praise and worship music rather than in church choirs. Similarly, Friesen thought the skills students got in worship team instruction were directly beneficial to the SCHS church communities (e.g., experience with vocal production).

The music program at SCHS has had a number of music leaders who have raised the expectations of what can be done with high school students. The expansion to Grades 5-12 may strengthen the band program in years to come. The music program currently benefits from stable leadership, a supportive administration, and a supportive community.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this study was to describe the music programs of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) and Steinbach Christian High School (SCHS) as well as to compare and contrast the music programs of the two Mennonite schools with their respective local public schools and with each other. A secondary purpose was to examine if any of the differences between the programs in the two Mennonite schools could be attributed to ethnic differences between the constituencies of the two schools.

The data for the study came from a number of sources. The researcher visited the schools, conducted interviews, observed rehearsals, attended concerts, and visited museums as well as archives. For the oral history component of the study, the researcher developed a list of questions which were used for the interviews with administrators, teachers, and people knowledgeable about the schools. These questions were designed to elicit information about the status and philosophy of the music education programs at MCI and SCHS, music education practices and facilities at the two schools, the association between the music education practices and Mennonite ideals at the two schools, and a description of the students and their communities. MCI and SCHS were chosen for the study because of their historical differences, their identification as Mennonite schools (i.e., CAMS membership), and their status as partially funded institutions.
Conclusions

The following were the hypotheses for the study.

**Hypothesis I**

*The instrumental program at MCI will be more important than at SCHS.*

This hypothesis was rejected. Although MCI has had a number of string and band ensembles in the past, they currently have chosen to focus on their vocal and theater programs and have dropped their band program. MCI teachers have said that it has been difficult to maintain instrumental ensembles because of the size of the vocal program, the teachers’ lack of control over the balance of instruments, their inability to consistently start beginning instrumentalists before students come to MCI, and because the quality of the instrumental program varies depending upon the students’ and teachers’ level of interest in the program. MCI does, however, offer private lessons (e.g., piano, violin).

In contrast, SCHS continues to invest in its band program because it helps round out the students’ musical experiences even though SCHS, like MCI, tends to hire music teachers who specialize in vocal music. A justification for offering band as part of the curriculum is that it provides an outlet for students who do not necessarily like to sing. The current SCHS music teacher also values the band program because learning to play music instruments promotes music literacy. SCHS students can also take instrumental lessons (e.g., piano, guitar) from the SBC conservatory.

**Hypothesis II**

*SCHS will have a more traditional view of performance than MCI.*

SCHS could have a more traditional view of performance (i.e., music focused on worship rather than aesthetics) than MCI even though MCI appears to perform more
traditional music. However, people at MCI tend to view appreciation of anything that is edifying and well-done as being worshipful—including secular music. Thus, MCI infuses worship into the daily activities (which is a traditional Mennonite practice).

Hence, based on each school’s understanding of what they are doing, both groups could be considered to have the traditional view of performance as a worshipful activity.

**Hypothesis III**

*Choral singing will be equally important in both schools.*

Both schools have strong choral programs with the necessary funding to purchase music and equipment. Both schools offered credit for their choirs before the practice was instituted in other provincial schools. The choirs help showcase the quality and nature of the education at the two schools, and this has been an excellent motivation for the cultivation of strong music programs. It is interesting to note that MCI describes its church visits as itinerations whereas SBC and SCHS call their visits deputations.

MCI’s designation of church visits as itinerations harkens back to when H. H. Ewert used to travel around the community to promote support for MCI and the public schools in Mennonite communities. The implication of the term *itineration* is that the choir travels a circuit of churches in the same fashion as an itinerant preacher. Conversely, the use of the term *deputation* at SBC and SCHS implies that the performing group visiting a church is a representative of the school. MCI students who have gone on to teach music at SCHS expressed the opinion that SCHS had more of a service orientation to their visits. In practice, however, itinerations and deputations appear to be identical.
Hypothesis IV

*MCI students will perform more hymns, and SCHS students will perform more praise and worship music.*

This may be true, but contemporary Christian music is impacting both schools. Both MCI and SCHS have praise and worship bands which include instrumentalists and vocalists. These ensembles (which are contemporary in style) accompany singing during chapel time. MCI students’ churches have historically had a hymn tradition whereas SCHS students’ churches have had more of a contemporary Christian music tradition. MCI students have tended to be more familiar with the hymns performed at school than SCHS students who have typically found the hymns sung in their choir at SCHS to be novel. Both MCI and SCHS students attend camps that use contemporary praise and worship music.

Hypothesis V

*MCI and SCHS will both emphasize choral music more than instrumental music.*

Choral singing is more prevalent in Manitoba public schools than other ensembles (Waldie, 1992) in general, but choral singing is especially important at MCI and SCHS. The fact that both MCI and SCHS tend to deliberately hire choral specialists supports this. Choirs are important because they represent their respective schools at numerous performances at churches. Music teachers at both schools have indicated in their interviews that they have always stressed the importance of finding music with a high-quality text. Some teachers such as Rudy Krahn and Marilyn Houser Hamm in particular spoke about the power of the sung word and others such as Henry Engbrecht and Henry Hiebert referred to the power of music.
Hypothesis VI

There will be a higher rate of participation in music among the Mennonite schools than the public Manitoba schools.

MCI and SCHS do have a higher percentage of their students in choir compared to the local public schools. However, the regional schools have strong music programs as well, and it would be unrealistic to expect a school such as the Steinbach Regional Secondary School with 1200 students to have an all-school choir. Nevertheless, the high percentage of participation in choral music at MCI and SCHS is impressive from a music advocacy standpoint. It suggests that these people believe that music is indeed for everyone. Thus, the cultural climate of these two Mennonite schools is important for the success of the music programs. For example, music participation is encouraged at the institutional level at both MCI and SCHS, and it is assumed that students at both schools will be in choir. It is not inconsequential that music has definite purpose and value at the two schools (i.e., worship, itinerations and deputations), and that the goal of music for enjoyment is fused with the ideal of music as worship.

Hypothesis VII

The MCI music program will emphasize their Mennonite identity to a greater extent than the music program at SCHS.

This appears to be true, however, the reality is that both schools have different ideas as to how they express their religious heritage. MCI choral directors have been deliberate in continuing to perform traditional Mennonite music. The programming of their repertoire has expanded, however, to include a variety of music. Conversely, although SCHS performances may include recognizably Mennonite hymns, the audience
does not necessarily expect to hear them as they do at MCI. This is possibly because the churches that support SCHS have more of a praise and worship than a hymn tradition. However, traditional music does help SCHS connect with supporting congregations just as it does at MCI.

In general, MCI and SCHS perform similar repertoire. Differences in the music literature performed at the two schools seem to largely be due to the choices of the individual directors and the anticipated audience reaction at performances. Although both schools perform music other than sacred, at the institutional level MCI seems to be more open to other kinds of music as long as it can be tied to the mission of the school. For example, songs that reflect traditional Mennonite themes such as peace or songs that bring attention to problems in the world may be performed by the ensembles. The emphasis at SCHS, at least from the administration’s perspective, appears to be the selection of songs for evangelizing (e.g., gospel music). Songs for evangelizing could be considered to be SCHS’s expression of their Mennonite heritage. Nevertheless, gospel music is traditional repertoire for many Mennonites, and both schools perform it. Likewise, music directors who have Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Church Canada backgrounds mentioned integrating chorales and *Kernlieder* into their repertoire regardless of whether they were teaching at MCI or SCHS.

**Discussion**

**Music Teachers**

The music teachers at MCI and SCHS have similar educational backgrounds. A number of them have studied at both private and public universities. Many of the teachers have spent time at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and at the University
of Manitoba (U of M). Some of the music teachers attended MCI, SCHS, and/or SBC. Others have attended MCI’s sister schools such as Rosthern Junior College and Westgate Mennonite Collegiate. Many of the teachers are or have been members of the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (ACCC), American Choral Directors Association, and the Manitoba Choral Association.

Both CMU and the U of M currently have former SCHS/SBC music teachers as their choral directors (Rudy Schellenberg and Elroy Friesen). CMU has had a former MCI student (George Wiebe) and the U of M has had a former MCI music teacher (Henry Engbrecht) as choral directors. Interestingly, many of the University choral directors have had some common musical experiences such as attending workshops with Robert Shaw and the Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie in Detmold, Germany.

Musical Artists and Choral Education

Robert Shaw. A number of MCI and SCHS teachers have sung in choirs directed by Robert Shaw. George Wiebe’s acquaintance with Robert Shaw led to a productive musical relationship with the Mennonite Festival Chorus beginning in 1985 and eventually with Mennonite singers throughout Canada (see Appendix G for G. Wiebe interview; see Appendix H for T. Wiebe interview). In 1954, Wiebe accepted a teaching position at Canadian Mennonite Bible College on the condition that he would have opportunities to continue his education. Elvera Voth (who at one time had taught in Freeman, South Dakota) acquainted Wiebe with the name Robert Shaw. In the summers of 1955 and 1956, Wiebe attended six-week workshops in San Diego with Shaw and Julius Herford. Wiebe later earned his Master’s in Choral Music and Sacred Music in 1962 from the University of Southern California. He studied with Dr. Charles Hirt who
was known and admired among a number of Mennonite musicians (George Wiebe, personal communication, 2013).

In the summer of 1983, Wiebe again had the opportunity to take workshops with Shaw at Westminster Choir College in Princeton. George’s wife Esther was also there attending arranging workshops with Alice Parker. Shaw recognized George from the workshops in San Diego and found out that Wiebe was from Winnipeg. Shaw had heard about Mennonite choral singing in Manitoba from Howard Swan. Shaw and Wiebe visited and the result was that Shaw came to Winnipeg to conduct Brahms’ *Requiem* with the Mennonite Festival Chorus in 1985.

In 1989 (Warren, 2002), Robert Shaw was asked to be one of the conductors at the World Federation of Choirs that was being held in Toronto, Ontario (George Wiebe, personal communication, 2013). Shaw said he would do it if he could choose both the choir and the work. Shaw wanted to perform Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* with the Mennonite Festival Chorus. Shaw called George Wiebe to tell him about the event. George Wiebe and his colleague William Baerg auditioned Mennonite singers from across Canada with excerpts from “Et Vitam Venturi.” The event itself was a life-changing aesthetic experience for many of the participants (see Appendix G for G. Wiebe interview; see Appendix H for T. Wiebe interview).

Other teachers and musicians who have been influenced by Shaw include George Dugard, Henry Hiebert, Rudy Krahn, Marilyn Houser Hamm, and Henry Engbrecht. Krahn studied with Shaw at Westminster Choir College and both Hiebert and Engbrecht studied with Shaw at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Engbrecht then
decided that he would always choose the highest quality repertoire regardless of style because that music has the power to change people (see Appendix A).

Engbrecht valued these experiences because he was able to observe different styles of rehearsals and the process. Engbrecht adopted some of Shaw’s rehearsal techniques such as count singing and simply “sitting on a chord until it was tuned” (see Appendix A, p. 283). For example, if a choir were singing a chord for four beats (the length of a whole note), the singers would sing the pitch using the counting subdivision (1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &) instead of singing the actual word (Blocker, 2004). This technique helps with rhythmic security and intonation because the singer has to accurately reiterate the pitch that was supposed to be held.

Heppner Mueller also used some Robert Shaw techniques such as count singing with standard repertoire and recalled how Shaw was “a stickler for rhythm” (see Appendix D for Heppner Mueller interview, p. 346). Heppner Mueller stated, “I do a lot of metronome work, a lot of count singing and finding ways to get things to settle rhythmically, and that in turn fixes a lot of . . . harmonic and tuning issues” (see Appendix D, p. 346). Krahn recalled that he had used Shaw’s ear-training exercise of dividing and singing “a whole tone in 12 equal steps” (see Appendix E for Krahn interview, p. 359).

**Helmuth Rilling.** Bach expert Helmuth Rilling was invited to come to Winnipeg on two occasions to conduct the Church Music Seminar Chorus. On the first occasion he conducted Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and on the second Haydn’s *Creation* (see Appendix G for G. Wiebe interview). Rudy Krahn (see Appendix E for Krahn interview) fondly remembered singing for Rilling at these events. Henry Engbrecht studied with Rilling
“for three summers at Oregon” (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 265) where Engbrecht gained confidence conducting Bach. In 1987, Rilling even used Engbrecht’s University of Manitoba choir as the resident choir for the conducting workshops at the Bach Academy in Stuttgart, Germany. Engbrecht recalled,

And he [Rilling] put us all at ease about how to do Bach because when you consider the text, and how you express the text with the music, and you make it clear (transparent) which means that you don’t sing it like a blast then the music starts to make sense on its own. (see Appendix A for Engbrecht interview, p. 265)

Kurt Thomas. During a sabbatical (1964-1965), George Wiebe studied at the *Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie* in Detmold, Germany and became well trained in the Kurt Thomas school of conducting. Wiebe’s former colleague William Baerg and the current choral director at CMU, Rudy Schellenberg, have all studied in Detmold, and the Kurt Thomas school of conducting has been the core of their choral teaching at CMU in Winnipeg. Thomas was a student of Karl Straube and like Johann Sebastian Bach became cantor at St. Thomas’s in Leipzig (Mann & Reese, 1971). Thomas’s belief was that choral directors need to have a combination of natural ability (i.e., disposition) and acquired skills (e.g., vocal training, conducting technique). Thomas firmly believed that the conductor was solely responsible for the quality of a choir (Thomas, 1971). The experiences of Wiebe, Baerg, and Schellenberg in Detmold, Germany cultivated an appreciation for German repertoire by composers such as Brahms, Schubert, and Distler.

While in Germany, Wiebe sang with the *Westfälische Kantorei* under its founder and director Dr. Wilhelm Ehmann. Wiebe was also entrusted with the English translation
of Ehmann’s book *Choral Directing*. Wiebe described Ehmann as being the Robert Shaw of Germany. During Wiebe’s next sabbatical, he earned his doctorate at Indiana University in Bloomington where he studied with Julius Herford and did his dissertation on Heinrich Shütz’s *Musikalische Exequien*.

**Implications**

The researcher assumed at the beginning of this study that the part-singing tradition of Manitoba Mennonites would provide MCI and SCHS students with an advantage when learning choral music in school. Although there is choral activity in the Steinbach community and among churches in MCI’s constituency, previous choir participation and four-part singing experience are now less prevalent among students who attend MCI and SCHS than in past years. Until about the 1980s, choir teachers at MCI and SCHS typically taught students who had had part-singing and some German language experience when they came to high school choir.

The use of new hymnals as well as praise and worship music has changed the skill sets that Mennonite students have when entering high school. For example, use of non-German hymnals seems to be correlated with students no longer being able to read text written in Gothic script. Another consideration for the music teachers is the types of music students are listening to outside of school. Teachers at MCI and SCHS have been able to promote choral singing through adapting to these changing circumstances.

Popular styles of Christian music that offer alternatives to praise and worship repertoire are gospel music and African American spirituals. Some Mennonites identify with African American spirituals because of their own historical struggles. From this music, conductors appear to progress towards programming more African and other
world music. Directors who program world music do so not only because students generally find it enjoyable, but because choral arrangements of this music (which is traditionally transmitted aurally) are also useful for the teaching of part-singing. Part-singing has to be taught at MCI and SCHS just as directors in public schools have to teach part-singing. Even though the choral directors at MCI and SCHS can no longer assume that students have learned part-singing skills in church, they describe the values and character that the students bring with them to rehearsals as invaluable assets.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The researcher has two suggestions concerning the methodology for this type of study. The first is to give participants a copy of the questionnaire prior to beginning the interview in order to give the interviewees time to think about their answers. The second is to be more specific with some questions (e.g., “What years did you teach at the school” rather than “How long were you at the school”).

A possible topic for further study could be Heinrich Franz, the Prussian Mennonite teacher who taught in Russia using *Ziffern*. The researcher also suggests that it would be interesting to investigate the similarities and differences of the urban and more rural schools that belong to the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools. A study could also be done to examine the music programs of provincial schools in communities with high populations of Mennonites to examine how the status and repertoire of their music programs compare to private Mennonite schools.
References


214


assimilation process of a religious minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites (pp. 110-132). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press.


227


231


232


Appendix A

Henry Engbrecht Interview

Henry Engbrecht, LL.D., 7 July 2008 at University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

Troy: Tell me about your educational background?

Henry: My first nine years were in a one room country school at Boissevain, Manitoba. That’s just within 15 miles or 16 miles of the North Dakota and Manitoba border. My grade nine I took by correspondence. I had to go to school every day, but I had to read up on the material I was learning and my teacher just guided me through that. For grades 10, 11, and 12, I went to the MCI, to Mennonite Collegiate Institute, and in there also I stayed home a year.

There were six members of my family and all of us had a chance to go to the school and it was extra cost; therefore, somebody had to stay home and assist dad. After graduating from MCI, I went on to CMBC, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, which is now CMU, and did what was then a Sacred Music Diploma. They weren’t a certified college at the time, even though when they became recognized, the courses really never changed; they were taught by the same people. There was no visible or even felt upgrading that happened. It was just a matter of it took time to accept those credits. In any case, I went on to teachers’ training here in this province. I went to Brandon (Manitoba) to take it there and then taught there for a year after which I came to Altona (Manitoba). I was
invited to teach at the Bible Institute which is now closed. It closed quite a number of years ago.

Troy: Was that MEI?

Henry: No, that was Elim Bible School.

Troy: Elim.

Henry: That’s how it was known, as Elim. Usually letters are used, but it wasn’t known as EBI, it was Elim. That was its identity. It was not an accredited college or junior college, it was just an institute where people went way back in our Mennonite history in the twentieth century to equip people to work more effectively in churches as spiritual leaders in Sunday schools, in youth work, and that sort of thing. Many became lay ministers in their churches. I did that for two years and then I went on to the U.S. to study. The quickest way for me was to take my CMBC credits and take them to our mother college because they had a much larger program at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas. I finished a B.A. major in music and I was accepted at SMU in Dallas where I did my Master’s in Choral Conducting under Lloyd Pfautsch. He was a fairly big name, especially in the Methodist Church, who wrote a lot of choral music and taught a lot of young conductors.

I then came back and I taught at MCI four years. That’s where I really found my wings and I can tell you about the differences in the school from when I was a student until I then left there to go and teach for two years at CMBC. I was doing an interim replacement for George Wiebe, whom you’ve probably met, while he was away doing his doctoral studies. This was in the early seventies.
After those two years, I went back into school teaching and blazed a trail in choral music education in the St. James School Division here on the west side of the city. I was there for five years and then this position opened up at the University of Manitoba and I got the job. I was there for 26 years.

So that’s my story. I did a fair bit of other work too in workshops, songfests, and particularly the Mennonite Sängerfests. When I was teaching at Elim, one needed to have employment beyond and it happened to be a fit for me to get work during the summer. Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization sponsored a conductor to go to the different districts in southern Manitoba to direct songfests. I would say that out of the eight districts that there were then, probably more than half of them were a group of churches. There was one around Steinbach and Grunthal, Niverville and Arnaud, and then there was another one at Winkler and the surrounding area (Manitoba). There was also one in Altona (Manitoba) and the surrounding area (which is) quite a lot more dense than farther west. There was one at Chortitz (Manitoba). All of these had singers of over a hundred youths that it would attract. Most of them were teenagers and some a little older. We would do a lot of the traditional choir music that we had grown up with.

We sang in church choirs at the age of 15. That was the magic age where you moved from your Sunday school. Sunday school was taught in the same hour then as the church service, so that was when you moved on and you were then in the church choir. I took that step with great enthusiasm because I had always enjoyed the choir singing so much.
Years later I had the opportunity to move from district to district and do the Songfests. We would rehearse from Monday through Saturday evening and Sunday would be a program day. Some had a worship service in the morning with this mass choir. It was a big event for those communities at the time. There would be a repeat of some of the material during the afternoons, but it was more of just a musical choral, sacred program. That’s where I found my wings in being able to manage large groups. All of them weren’t all that large, but over half of them were (large). I got to know a lot of people and I had the chance to do it a second time, so it was a couple of things at once. It was a great experience in professional development and that sort of thing. Then I went on to study and when I came back (from studying), I was at MCI fulltime for four years. I guess you wanted to hear about the differences from when I was a student and when I went back.

Troy: What you’re doing is perfect.

Henry: Then I came back to teach in 1967. For the first time the school was offering credit in a music course toward their graduation. Until that time, and that means during my student years of singing in the choir, no credit was given. It was a residential school throughout its history and still is today. It began in 1889, so do the arithmetic. It’s about 125 years old I guess or getting there. When I was a student we would audition in a very general sort of way, but people were selected for a group that would rehearse once a week and then visit the supporting churches. This is very common in parochial schools as I discovered also in my experience in the U.S. That was that part of it, no credit given, just a lot of
singing was done, it was the tradition of the school, and it was something I enjoyed very, very much.

I had studied piano in the one room (school) in our little, one horse town and I wasn’t well taught. I think my potential would have been much higher. I think I would have loved to play piano with excellence, but it wasn’t to be at that time. I did make up for a lot of that when I went to college. The program (at MCI) was very, very heavy academically, but at least we had the singing and we did a lot of programming in the churches.

When I came back after nine years, after I graduated from that school, I was the music teacher. I was given, as a first year, a nearly fulltime position as a music teacher in the school. The staff totaled seven people and that was an amazing step for the school to take. In the second year I became the fulltime teacher and I was allowed to teach private voice students. We got someone (from the city) to teach a whole day of violin. Ben Kehler, a guitar teacher, came in from Winkler (Manitoba) and was very, very good. I saw the yearbook the other day where there was a group of 10 to 12 students that took those lessons. Of course many people took piano as well as voice, and so out of the student body of about 210 (students), I think we had 120 lessons taught. Some took a couple of lessons of different kinds, but there was a huge amount of musical activity going on in the school.

The credit started with regular class work like it was an all-year class in each grade that met. I shouldn’t say every day because in the semester system they do study that every day. There they were all-year classes that met every
other day. I taught theory and history and then the practical side of it came from the choirs. In that sense, the ensemble credit was given as part of the total credit with the academic being the more visible on paper.

We also organized other ensembles as well. It wasn’t only the one choir. There was an all-school chorus which 200 out of the 210 students (enrolled) in the school sang. All of them had to sing except in the upper grades if someone couldn’t quite manage it and had proven that he really wasn’t interested. It was very gingerly given to these people who didn’t want to sing, but for the most part in that atmosphere, they did want to sing and they wanted to be in the group. From that also came the Concert Choir of 90 which met also twice a week. The Concert Choir met the same amount of time. There was a student male choir which met two noon hours a week and the girls’ choir which met at whatever, I think it was after school. At 8:00 in the morning, I would meet with the little chamber group, the 20 voice group.

We did a huge amount of programming and some years we would visit a series of itineration dates in the fall and in the winter. That added up to over 20 of these church visits. We would also do the repertoire from the Concert Choir, the Male Choir would do its thing, and the Women’s Choir was doing its thing, so it was a variety program.

That’s when we began to launch out and took a trip to Winnipeg which was an event because it had not been done before. Yes, they’d gone to Winnipeg, but not as a choir to sing in the Winnipeg Festival. We made a little mark there.
It wasn’t too much to enter in those days, but we did sing there so it was very heavily choir focused.

It wasn’t just choir singing, it was also a large focus on congregational singing. We had assembly every morning and each morning one hymn was sung, so hymn singing was a very natural thing for us to do. Of course we sang the hymns that everybody there sang in their churches, so they learned them better, and learned to know many of them quite well. We also used those hymns in choral programs, so there was a very strong connection to the congregation in that way because they were just more able to participate. That’s the sort of scenario with those summer songfests and with these choirs in which I found my wings and I guess it really launched my career.

The more important thing is that music was happening in the Mennonite communities and the public schools in that area also were taking on the music for credit. When music for credit started in this province with this academic course and the ancillary ensembles that would round out the course, it was only MCI and one (public) school in Winnipeg that offered credit for music students. It was a great time to be here because there was a lot of ferment, a lot of exciting fertile openness for communities right across the province to entertain the idea of music programs. There was a lot of growth in those next couple of decades. In fact it really never stopped. It’s continued to this day where communities are adding to their music programs, so it’s been an exciting time in our Manitoba history for music, music education, and it’s been glorious for our Mennonite private schools.
Troy: Is there anything done like the youth organization choirs? Is there anything that still does something like that?

Henry: No, at least that’s the short answer. That has moved over into the community in general. There are regional youth choirs that are organized and I say regional because central Manitoba is a pretty vast area. In some sense it’s generic, but it’s really south central. It takes in the entire region from Emerson, west as far as Crystal City, and then north to Portage La Prairie, so it’s quite a large area, takes in many schools, and (is called) the Central Manitoba Youth Choir. What they call the EastMan or Eastern Manitoba Youth Choir is sort of the hub is located in Steinbach and that area. It’s actually the region east of the Red River and south of Winnipeg. There’s the Western Manitoba Youth Choir which is from that line sort of Crystal City and goes north and then all of that western Manitoba including Brandon and Virden particularly. They meet once a year with three weekends of rehearsals, students travel in, and then they do a three or four day tour within that region visiting high schools and giving programs in communities. It’s gone like a lot of things have in music in Manitoba, from the church to the school. That’s where the choral activity is really happening.

Troy: When they have these, it’s both public and private schools that can be involved in this?

Henry: Yes, that crosses all (schools), it’s open to everybody.

Troy: Do you think these types of regional ensembles were inspired by things like the youth organizations?
Henry: No, it really had no connection. It took its inspiration actually from the formation of the choral association in Manitoba, the Manitoba Choral Association. One of the goals of that was to bring in choir singers from say the age of 18 to 24. The Manitoba Choral Association was perhaps the fourth or fifth province that organized its choral association for the province and it was patterned after those who were already started and from the advisement that we got from the other provinces. I’m sure some people looked at other countries to see what they were doing, perhaps what they were doing in the U.S. Of course that means that you’re looking at university students so they were auditioned and a professional choral conductor was brought in to teach and to train. The next phase was the idea of creating regional youth choirs who would actually feed into this Manitoba Youth Choir. It was a place where you could fire up those who were potential singers for the Manitoba Youth Choir and it operated in the same way that I just described. Sometimes it was period of a solid week of rehearsals in one package and we tried different times of the year. Other times it would be several weekends including a long weekend which then would extend that rehearsal period. They also sometimes traveled throughout Manitoba and they’d choose certain places and travel for three or four days and give daytime and evening concerts and that sort of thing. That had no particular connection with the Mennonite schools; although, always a lot of Mennonite names were found in the choir lists.

Troy: That’s convenient when you’re looking for things that you can recognize the names.
Henry: It’s an automatic thing we do and we’re sort of assessing from which region they might come. Of course if the names of the towns are given, we’re studying it from the point of view of who the influences are, where the influences might of come, whether they come from that particular high school, or from a private teacher. Some schools didn’t have any choral programs. That’s been a very, very good thing for Manitoba and I think the private schools didn’t have need of that so much because their programs are so very, very active because of all the visitation that they do within their own constituency.

Sometimes there are festivals like the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools Festival which is held every two years. They travel across the country and choirs from MCI, MBCI [Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute], Westgate, and Steinbach would be invited to a place with other provinces coming in. They would do it by turn, in no particular order, but they would travel to places like Leamington and do a similar festival there where there is a private school, or to Waterloo, British Columbia where there’s a very large one, UMEI [United Mennonite Educational Institute], this sort of thing. I guest conducted in two of those. They were really wonderful, major events with a huge amount of energy, very well trained choirs, and very well prepared choirs so it was wonderful.

Troy: When did you conduct those? Do you remember?

Henry: One was in 1980 and the other one in 1990. Both were here in Winnipeg. They tried different things then and I don’t know if it is still actually going on.

Troy: I see them advertised on the CAMS website.
Henry: You know you lose track a little bit if you haven’t been directly involved. My own children sang in those, but now my grandchildren are singing and that hasn’t come up on their agendas.

Troy: Do you belong to any professional organizations?

Henry: A number, well I did. You get a little lax when you’re not active in the teaching program, but the Manitoba Music Educators Association was my first professional sense of belonging. (I also belonged to) the Manitoba Choral Association, the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors, A Triple C, and I was always a member of ACDA in the U.S., and then when World Choral Symposium came about I joined that too. That’s been great connecting with others you know from local to global.

Troy: What role did the organizations play as far as you as your role as a teacher and conductor?

Henry: I think it was first inspirational and it was always that way for me. It was inspirational in the sense that it stimulated my thinking and the imagination about what could be. When you saw somewhere the world class groups that came about by just good teaching back in the school where they were being taught: those became goals for me in my teaching situations. It was the same in the school that I went to after I taught at MCI for those four years and two years of college interim teaching where we also did a lot of touring. I went the first time into the public school system at the high school level and blazing a trail. It became apparent how great the possibilities are for development. In the Mennonite schools, especially in those days, at least half of the students in the school at MCI
when I was teaching there had sung in the church choir because there were church
choirs. I would say probably even a greater percentage than that. I have no idea
how many, but for example where I grew up at Boissevain (Manitoba) in that
Mennonite church there was a choir of at least 30 young people when I was in
there and it went up when I joined. The numbers went up and down between 30
and 40 (students) and there were always that many young people singing.

When students came to these schools they already understood something
about choral music singing even though it had not been in a program in an
elementary school. There had been a choir, but it was extracurricular, and they
didn’t meet very often. The junior high was like it is in many places now. It was
very thin on the choral side and especially so in those days, so it was the church
choirs who really gave people the experience of singing tenor for the first time
and the motivation to stay in there with that guy who had already sung in the
church choir for four or five years. We learned a lot just sitting beside each other
and sitting through what was often not a very good rehearsal, but we just sang
songs from beginning to end. The only way you could know it better was by
singing it again. There wasn’t a rehearsal. Technique wasn’t widely known, so it
was just by repeat, but at least they got that right. There was such a swarm of
people that knew the old pieces and they were done over and over and over again
that basic repertoire of probably less than 20 pieces that the choir sang got known
very, very well and you got on to it very quickly. That stimulation that I got at
MCI as a student and was able to receive from the students coming from these
churches where they had sung and the choir we created was not there when I went
into the public school system. It was every little bit of discipline that we take for granted in choirs when we’ve grown up with them had to be done. You don’t stand there and stand around when you’re focusing on the beginning of the piece. You know that moment when some of your senior high students would be looking into the audience and looking for daddy and mommy like they were 10 years younger. That was just one example of the many, many things that I suddenly realized was not understood. This is a school where we were blazing a trail. It wasn’t that they were badly taught before: they hadn’t had any experiences, so it was all new. This has grown hugely and you know the Manitoba Choral Association has done an awful lot to stimulate that.

You’ve probably heard of Choral Fest that’s being held here every fall. It’s a two week event that requires (students to) come in and they sing three or five pieces, it’s their choice. It’s non-competitive, they get adjudicated by a visiting adjudicator of some stature and ability, and then they go into a workshop session for half an hour. I have done this many times where I was invited to be the clinician. If they are from out of town it’s a one day event and so then you go to your favorite food place to have your hot dogs and that sort of thing. Back to the choral association, this is a program of over 150 choirs that, over a two-week period, get this kind of an experience. There’s a photo session and there’s a lot of positive reinforcement about what choirs are doing. It’s a very good time of year to have this because it’s at the beginning of the year and what the teacher is trying to teach is being reinforced and stimulated. It’s just such an interesting phenomenon. I’m sure you have noticed this in your own communities where you
live that it seems to be the same all over. I mean church choirs are hurting or are they?

Troy: Where I’m at they just have choirs for special occasions like Christmas or Easter.

Henry: That’s what’s coming here a lot. In the churches, this is aside from where you are going with this, but I’ll just plug this in here. Many of our more evangelical churches have incorporated the worship team with their ensemble of players. I’m told there’s been some real confusion and (frustration from) the dyed in the wool choral directors who are striving for improving the singing in their church and four-part singing and hymn singing. It really polarized a lot of people and I think maybe we missed an opportunity there by just polarizing rather than maybe having incorporated some of it. The best survive and so take the best and incorporate it with the hymn singing and the choir singing. You can even do some of it in choir and arrange it in a way that it can be a satisfying choral experience as you sing it. That didn’t quite happen.

I’ve never been involved in worship team organization or playing. I didn’t play one of those instruments well enough to lead a group, but I hear from people within the fold of that practice that it’s wearing thin too. You know it had its life, now what? You just sing louder? So I think there may be some swinging back in time when you know a new generation of people will kind of discover or where congregations will rediscover what it was that we almost gave up. I’m not saying this in a critical way, but it’s just that our hymn books are full of hundreds of years of history and many timeless texts. I use “Amazing Grace” as the big example of that because it’s been taken by so many styles and it works. Many,
many more tunes could work that way. We need to continue to add new tunes and we need to learn from jazz how tunes from all genres of musical composition are incorporated into this and done differently by every different group that does it. We need to think in those terms here too.

I need to point out that I think we did more classical music in the choirs in the days when my colleagues and I were teaching in those schools than there is being done now. Some do, but I go to programs where an awful lot of it has an awful lot of Afro repetition in it and that’s good, it’s stimulating, but I think what I would like to do is address this issue with a group of choral conductors and say, “What about this, what about that?” There are great pieces and young people love to sing them. I think part of the reason for that sort of less of the classical music in the choral programs is the fact that world music came in so strong, not only from Africa. That’s a very attractive one because it just was the next natural step from the American Black Spiritual and it’s exciting to see innovative, creative groups do those styles, but there have been so many others also.

I mean the music that has come and this is what the professional organizations have done: ACCC, ACDA, and the World Choral Symposium. You would get groups performing at those huge conventions with great panache and enthusiasm; things that were a little bit on the edge for a lot of people. The new contemporary music in the serious sense got its airing, but take again the African Evangelical piece which might be very, very repetitious, but was met with great enthusiasm at these. Everybody takes a copy home, they make their own orders, they rehearse that music, and suddenly it just spreads like seeds in a wind storm.
All of that is good. I guess what that leads to is being selective. When you’re building programs you try to apply it to a group that you’re teaching because conducting is always teaching, then there’s lots of room for you to choose exactly what you would like to do and still do many different styles. I don’t know if we’re on target here or not.

Troy: One of the things I was wondering about was that do you think the attraction to the African music is that it is something that can easily be done in harmony in parts and a way for choral directors to take students that have been in this praise and worship mode of thought and starting to get them to sing parts? Do you think that might be some of the attraction in that?

Henry: I haven’t thought of it that way, but I think it could. I think what really stimulates the interest in the African music that we’ve had here in the last 20 years or perhaps more, but where it’s come on so strong, is its appeal. What’s appealing about it is it’s so active and this is what makes it very enjoyable to do. It’s quick to the memory with a little bit of organized thought about how this piece comes together and how many times things are repeated. Some choirs can study it up almost in one rehearsal and get it done. That’s a huge payoff and there’s this feeling of really getting into it. That’s been very good for choral music I think all over because it’s showing people you don’t have to be an advanced vocalist, musician, and music student, et cetera, et cetera in order to get into this music. You know you can. There’s this feeling of being able to let go and exactly that abandonment we see with groups doing this music. I think the Africans have
clearly shown us great leadership in how to get into it and how to express it with abandon: just let it all go.

Our Mennonite heritage has been very restrained, very pious in the past. [We] wouldn’t have thought of swaying a bit or moving around. When choralography came along it seemed to be a short lived term and practice, but the idea of movement with choral singing (became popular), and then came spreading the choir out in the space that you use whether right across the front or all the way around the congregation or the audience. That sort of thing (generated interest). We know the initial inspiration came from the 16th century, but still this was exciting.

I know always when I traveled with the youth choirs, especially in these youth regions and in communities where no choral singing had happened ever before in that formal of sense, it just captivated everybody in the audience when you got away from that traditional stance of four rows at the front and people reading music. Here you had the music memorized, you were listening, you were projecting, you were involved, and you were communicating. You know that’s what we always work for in music, so that’s one thing that has changed a lot from the time when I was a student until the time I became a teacher in the same school. It happened already in that nine year period, but it’s happened more across the board: many people have picked this up and done it their own way.

Troy: When you were teaching at MCI were you involved in music activities outside of the school?
Henry: I did a church choir throughout that time in that community just seven miles away north to Altona (Manitoba) where we attended church. I had a little church choir and then for very special things I would ask the chamber choir from the school to join the church choir and both choirs enjoyed that very much. You still had that feeling of the Chamber Choir except the two put together. I did that. I did not at that time conduct a choir in the community other than the church choir.

Troy: When you took the job at MCI, what were they looking for in a music teacher?

Henry: They were looking primarily for someone who would keep the choir tradition going for the sake of the tour and the end-of-term programs. When I was a student there we had a Christmas program which, of course, always ended with the “Hallelujah Chorus.” I remember how frightening it was at first because you know people and in rehearsal, you weren’t rehearsed as much as that you kept singing the song through and making the same scary mistakes. But, it was an event and it’s like one student said when hearing a recording of such a performance, “Boy, it sure wasn’t very good the way we sang it, but we were sure excited about it!” I think that was key: it wasn’t always important how well it was done, but that people got inspired by it and by that whole activity. I think that was really key.

There was Christmas and then the program in May or June at the end of the year which was an all day affair. It was the MCI Sängerfest and their morning was more of a worship service: that same pattern which had permeated all of Mennonite activity when there was a full day event. The morning was a worship service with more singing than would normally be done, but there definitely was a
keynote speaker and sometimes even a children’s story. In the afternoon was more of a sacred concert. Reciting poetry in my student days was a very important thing (where) poetry appropriate to the day was recited and the theme was always chosen (for the event). That format was held to very, very strongly. Readings were sometimes given and then sometimes a little cantata was done—a half hour to three-quarter hour cantata.

That was very hard for people who were really lay music teachers or choral directors who did not know where to go. Now we dial it up, Google it, and find out. We can even get it all described for us even before we order the piece to see whether we actually want to do it along with some other pieces. We have hundreds of places that we can go to and they didn’t have that. Back then was just word of mouth. Somebody said, “Well somebody did this cantata thirty years ago and we were so inspired by it,” so they’d get one copy and then they’d find a place to duplicate it because photocopiers weren’t around. I don’t know how they did it, but they got it. Ink jelly pads, I don’t know if you know those things, but with a certain kind of pen and staff paper. It came off on a kind of carbon paper so that was the second sheet and it would press that ink from the carbon onto a page that you would use for the copy. Then you would put the copy of that onto a jelly pad the same size as the paper. It was just a moist jelly pad like rubber bands with that kind of consistency but maybe a little softer. So you press it into there by hand and take it off and then you can make as many copies as you could possibly print. You were reading off this sheet of blue copy. That’s how they would duplicate cantatas for us at MCI. It was amazing. I mean the hours and
hours it took. We think we’re long standing at a photocopier sometimes when somebody’s written an arrangement of a piece or permission has been granted to do it, but that’s how it was done. I mean weeks and weeks of preparation went into that.

I think (when I reference) those years, I have to mention in the context of MCI when we’re saying cantata, it was Andreas Romberg who was a contemporary of Beethoven and wrote a piece called Die Glocke (which means “The Bell”). It’s a story about the casting of the bell and came from a Friedrich Schiller poem called Das Lied von der Glocke. I have a copy of it at home in Peters Edition and it’s a cantata of about forty minutes or so. It compares life with the casting of the bell where a hole is dug in the ground, the cast is made, the pit for the fire, the burning of this metal, and so on, and always the metaphor for life. That particular work was done several times. I’ve conducted it myself and it’s been done by at least one church here in the city even though it’s not a sacred cantata. (It was) not so many years ago the last time I heard it. I think it was about seven years ago. It was those kinds of things that were done in the afternoon program at these spring Sängerfests.

So getting back to your question, why was I hired? It was for these events which were high points and, somewhere instinctively I had a sense about supply and demand. If you supply something, it becomes a demand. I worked awfully hard within the school to make myself a music teacher only. I wouldn’t teach English, German, or any other course. I appreciated those courses very much, but what I wanted to do was music, so I asked for the consent first of all, or the
endorsement rather, of being able to use my teaching time to teach students 
privately. So that (private lessons), of course, very quickly filled my load besides 
teaching grades 10, 11, and 12 at separate times their music classes. Add to that 
the choir for which I was given teaching credit also for the first time. (Prior to) 
that time that had also been an extracurricular activity for a teacher. It wasn’t 
.nearly as expensive when they made the decision to make me a fulltime music 
teacher and I was the first one there.

I guess the school liked what they got from it. The board and the 
constituency as well and the parents certainly (liked it) because their children 
were learning this with a kind of energy and a kind of base from which to educate. 
It was not just the music itself, but it would reach into the churches and come 
back to the families and that sort of thing. I think that probably even changed 
within the school where they started to think, “Well we need someone to do the 
choir so we’ll hire somebody.”

That was probably as simple as it was and it was the principal, P. J. 
Schaefer, who wasn’t even a singer himself, he was a new sort of Mennonite and 
then was the principal of that school for a couple of decades, who stimulated this 
a lot. He believed very, very much in song and you engrave your theology with 
singing: the way you believe, the way you think, and the way you express your 
beliefs. That was very much his thinking, so he was just proud to have somebody 
take this on with a passion for the school and what it stood for, but also for the 
music. I was all of those things at the time. Whether I really qualified I don’t 
know, but I sure had the passion. I developed the leadership. It was scary
because suddenly you’re standing in front of a school choir of 200 kids and you
know there needed to be some growth in discipline, and it’s an ongoing thing
anyway, but I managed. So something special grew out of it because it was given
the focus in the timetable. It was given room in addition to the fact that they had
to go out and do their itineration and that was recognized very highly. So it’s
something we grew into I think and it was just simply we need a music leader and
a choral director.

Troy: Were there traditions from Russia like the choral festival tradition that there were
remnants of when you were teaching?

Henry: I wonder whether it didn’t all come from Russia, except the fact that music was
an academic subject for credit. That was very much an American influence gone
Canadian because many of us did our graduate degrees in the U.S. at the time.
Now we have many more graduate schools here in Canada and so that’s changed
a lot since I was a student, particularly since I was a student. So hence, singing
was always a large part of people in Russia. You’ve probably heard the name
Ben Horch. He used the word Kernlieder (to describe) the central songs of our
faith that expressed our beliefs and were always to which you would always
gravitate. There would always be something from that pool of favorites as it
were. They were really the bookmarks of the day as far as music that we would
sing. That came out of Russia and there were some groups that were more
chorale-based such as the German chorale. There were Lutheran communities
near the Mennonite communities in southern Russia and in the Ukraine as well.
I’m sure that must have had an influence as well. There were those who were
more gospel oriented, here represented more by the Mennonite Brethren churches, but both sang each other’s sort of favorites. It crossed over in the course of the twentieth century. Now the crossover has become even more in recent times and most people look upon that as a very, very healthy thing. There’s more cooperation between those that were clearly divided farther back.

The choirs existed out there and I think they just continued here in much the same way. Somebody was selected from within the church. If he could play guitar or sing, well naturally he would probably be among those that would be asked to the choir at some point or other without training initially. There were workshops given by people like Ben Horch and later George Wiebe, but earlier on before Ben Horch there was a fellow by the name of Kornelius H. Neufeld who was very influential throughout this province and in some ways across Canada. He would just call up and say, “I’m coming on that and that day,” and so it was announced. Schedules weren’t like they are today: “When can we have this because there’s this, that, and the other thing going on in the community?”. Those things that seem to me a very Russian tradition and so was the combination of the informal singing, the great amount of hymn singing that was done in the churches, the choirs singing together, and special events created around that. That tradition just kept right on going and for a long time here it was exclusively German.

When I was a youth growing up those Sängerfests had no English in them, and so those changes came and with that some different styles of music. I had gone to CMBC for three years when I did this. I was going to be choosing some
of those numbers that had become my favorites in these programs. Whether it was a Handel chorus “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring,” or “Ave Verum,” those were ones that we music students gravitated to very, very quickly and tried to instill in choirs the same love for the piece that we had. I’m sure that maybe one or two of these might have been done in Russia. It may have been a Russian publication of sort they may have done, but I think that’s about as simply as I can put it.

Troy: How about the repertoire between the music that was carried over such as the Kernlieder and the chorales? Had that lasted pretty much through from the time you were there?

Henry: Yes. I guess because I had a very strong connection with that from my student days and youth in the church choir and so on, I just kept it up and kept using it. Even when we extended our repertoire into other areas that was still always a part of the program. Of course part of that was pure psychology. I mean you always wanted to make a connection with what people knew or were familiar with in your audience or congregation. Whatever the case may be because your congregation was also your audience when you did a concert. It didn’t make any difference. There was always an awareness by the planners, whether they were the musicians on the committee or whether I was consulting with my principal at MCI, it was always an acute awareness of connecting with that assembly of people that would be coming to hear the program. So it was a given then that you went back to the Kernlieder and the two people that did it most effectively were Ben Horch and George Wiebe.
George Wiebe was perhaps nearly the next generation. He would say he was the next generation representative from Ben Horch. Ben Horch’s work was done here when he was in his prime, probably 1930 to 1955 maybe up to 1960. In that thirty year period, I may have started a little too early there for him, it’s hard to say: you can check that out. George Wiebe’s influence, who was appointed to teach at CMBC in (approximately) the early 1950s, taught there for 35 years. He just perpetuated this kind of thing all over the place. His wife Esther was a very strong arranger of hymns, creating hymn anthems and arrangements of hymns in various ways (such as) carols, children’s songs, and even chorales, but especially these Kernlieder which were a mixture of gospel songs and just songlike hymns that were very easy. Some two liners and four liners that people just loved to hear (were arranged) and the arrangements were set in a way that was very appealing for its time. I think many of them still are audience appealing, but it was very appropriate for its time, and all of this grew out of the Russian tradition.

Troy: When did English start creeping in?

Henry: At (first) very little, but it started creeping in during the 1950s and it came about from those who were directing the choirs who were born here in this country. Because I know I started singing in the church choir in it would have been about 1954 and we were still singing primarily German and that was pretty much across the board in southern Manitoba and the city as well. The church choir sang German and it was during that time that English would come in. If you sang an occasional English anthem it was okay, but if you sang two on one Sunday morning you got reprimanded in very considerate, firm, careful ways. They
would say, “You make sure you don’t do too much of that.” I think it was a good thing because we didn’t just go at it like throw out the baby and the bathwater both: it made people think. One often wishes that process would have gone slower later on too. It would have been an easier way to incorporate the new with the well-aged music that we have in our resource. Some churches did.

At First Mennonite Church where I attend we still sing a lot of chorales. That’s standard fare for us for Sunday morning. We don’t even sing many gospel songs. We sing them and we sing them with enthusiasm. There’s no issue on that at all for or against or whatever. In our case we don’t have a screen and so the songs aren’t (projected), but sometimes they have portable ones brought in. Normally something is reprinted in the bulletin and we sing from there. I’m saying that some (churches) did move over very quickly and moved into English very quickly farther back. Some did the change over say about a ten year period and it was all English. Others kept it slower. Those churches that were larger decided on separate English and German services so there were two services and there still are in this church where I attend. At first the English service was very small and now the English service is the larger one and the German (service) is very small. It’s not been an even thing at all; that was very irregular as far as those. It had much more to do with the people who were in the church at the time I think—the leadership and the people and the congregation in general. You know you can sense as you go from one congregation to the next. You know there are people who would be happy about the fact they were going new directions, and others were happy about the fact that they were keeping the
tradition. Now the mainstream is all English and they say the German service now is one of service to people who prefer a service in German.

Troy: You said you were there for how many years?

Henry: At MCI?

Troy: Yes.

Henry: Four.

Troy: For four years.


Troy: The repertoire that you did then was mostly German?

Henry: No, I would say in the school context it probably was 50-50. That’s very rough.

It might have even varied from year to year and it was driven by your audience and just making sure that that’s where our sustaining support comes from.

(Decisions) were driven by that kind of cautious consideration about where we’re going and often whether a piece you know was published in English. “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring” is an example where you know now you just look it up on the internet and you’ve got it in seconds. You’ve got the text right there in your face.

There weren’t the resources and so you did a search, you wrote letters, and you tried to find out. You didn’t have a copy of the cantata much a less a recording of it. You had to find the text and write it in to have it in both languages. I did that with a lot of music where I wrote in the German text. I even took things like the Gounod Sanctus which was not intended for German at all, but Latin. Latin was a stinky word too in farther back. Then English and new music, new in the sense that it was a new experience, (emerged). I came across a copy with the German
text and snatched it because you didn’t trust your own translation powers. That was the other thing that we had to grow out of that mindset that was there—if it was published you knew it was high end [laughing] and you know you didn’t know whether you should go in there and change something. That particular piece I remember doing it in German and feeling very, very good about having sung it in the German service. The music is powerful and therefore it made a connection even if it was “new”.

Troy: What were some of the pieces that you enjoyed doing while you were at MCI?

Henry: We did some Handel choruses from Messiah because they were published separately and they were such fun to do. There was Handel’s “Swell the Full Chorus.” Handel was great to do because basses could shout a B very, very nicely like in the “Hallelujah Chorus” and once you got it out of them it was a great satisfaction on their part to create this big sound. It wasn’t that hard and it’s so vocal. That’s what makes Handel’s music so attractive. We did for example pieces from The Creation, “The Heavens Are Telling,” which I actually sang there as a student as well.

Troy: In German or English?

Henry: That was English in my student days and Handel’s choruses were also in English. With that it didn’t seem to be a problem at all. I remember when I was teaching there, there was a little piece by Telemann that I remember enjoying hugely and it’s sort of in that trio mindset with two violins and a bass which more often we did with just piano. Psalm 117 was a formative piece that I remember created great energy within the group and we did the Guillaume Sanctus too. I think we
did the Schubert *Mass in G* with one of the groups. I gravitated very much to the classical, but we did folk songs too with arrangements of that time period of Robert Shaw and Roger Wagner arrangements of folksongs were a connection for many people because it included the cowboy song as well as the “Shenandoah” type folk song that is a classic. We did that as well. We didn’t do very much in the way of pop; here and there we throw in a piece. Mostly then it was the hymns and hymn arrangements.

When we worked for something specific we would do *Das Lied von der Glocke*. In fact I did it one year with a former student who became a very good friend of mine at the time. He said, “You know, you’re doing this *Sängerfest* here in Gretna. This is good, but this also deserves more.” In short, he arranged the following year for us to sing in the city. We rented Centennial Concert Hall and that hall seats 2,200 people. I think there were close to 2,000 people in that program which I constructed with the four choirs we had out there, the 90 voice Concert Choir, and the other groups did their little bits too. We did the whole evening. We did for the first part of it Romberg’s *Das Lied von der Glocke*. This was 1971 in spring just before I moved to do my interim work at CMBC. Romberg’s piece (for the first half) and then the second half we did Murray Schafer’s *Threnody*. He wrote it in 1969 and we did it in 1971; it was only two years old.

When I think back, we were really pushing the borders and it’s such a way out piece of music, but it is so powerful with its five narrators. I remember getting the advice of Ben Horch. I said, “How do I end it? I can’t end that
program just with that. We don’t do it first. We have to do Das Lied von der Glocke first because this is what would appeal to that audience and so this has to be last and partly also because it makes such a powerful statement about the bombing in Nagasaki and Hiroshima.” And he gave me a wonderful piece by I think Martin Shaw (the English composer), “Oh Brother Man, Fold to thy Heart thy Brother” and so we ended with that. It’s just a three minute piece which talks about the same spirit as Beethoven and the Ninth Symphony with brotherhood in the world, so we did it there.

In fact that was the second of two concerts that we did at the concert hall. The first time we did just a potpourri of everything. The second time we came back a year or two years later and we had former MCI students that sang the solos and we used the Winnipeg Youth Orchestra for that program. There we had a very traditional piece of music on one hand and after intermission we did a quantum leap into front edge, cutting edge new music in Canada.

It is a beautiful experience when we still reminisce about that amazing kind of experience and even though all of us still had a lot to learn about, but there we were taking that daring jump at renting the concert hall and driving in from out there, doing one quick rehearsal and then on with it. It was an amazing thing. Those were the kinds of things we did, but I wouldn’t say that those were the pieces that we performed on an ongoing basis. You do them once right like an oratorio choir and it’s done. You don’t tour with it. We had a lot of fun with madrigals, the standard ones you know: “All Ye Who Music Love,” “Ein Hennlein Weiß,” and that sort of thing. That was an enjoyment mainly for us and
a few kinds of secular and social evenings that there would be. Say you sang at a banquet and you would sing your sacred music, but then you would also be able to do your secular repertoire. I wish I could think. There were some Mozart anthems that we did.

I gravitated very much to the classical and we did Bach’s *Cantata 50* one time for double chorus. I wish I could have done it about twenty years later and go back to the same choir because you know I had the wonderful opportunity of studying with Helmuth Rilling for three summers at Oregon. The reason I went is because I was so frustrated. I thought I was frustrated about how to do Bach and he put us all at ease about how to do it. When you consider the text and how you express the text with the music, you make it transparent. This means that you don’t sing it like a blast and then the music starts to make sense on its own. There’s more to it than that obviously, but there were a few basic things that we were helped with hugely and then we grew from there. I enjoy nothing more than Bach. And so that *Cantata 50* was really only an excerpt that was probably an opening chorus for something that was still intended to be completed, but is a complete opening chorus. Nevertheless it’s double chorus and it’s quite a tour de force, so students really, really enjoyed doing that music. We didn’t have many opportunities to repeat it. It got several performances, so I don’t know if any one particular piece stands out because I was in the unique privileged situation that every piece that I really loved to do was new for that place and so that part of it was very, very exciting. I think that’s all I care to say about that.

**Troy:** Do you want to say anything about music you wouldn’t do?
Henry: In a general way I can explain it best by quoting something that came about very spontaneously in a summer workshop. We were singing at the feet of Julius Herford who wrote and edited that book called *Choral Symposium* with Harold Decker. He was a classic pianist turned history analyst, music analyst, and teacher. He would sit at the piano and teach. My first encounter with him was with the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* in Minneapolis. I’d read in a magazine that Robert Shaw was coming to Minneapolis and he was just still rising to his peak. There was huge energy in this regional University of Minnesota workshop. For two weeks we were there and every day we sat at the feet of Julius Herford. It wasn’t at that session, but that’s when I decided if I ever got a chance, I would go back and take another course that he would be teaching. He did these one week or two week things all over the place in the U.S. It was at another one of these sessions where we were talking about music and talking about what music would be good to do. I don’t remember what we were talking about or which piece or pieces; in any case, he knew just enough about our subject to sort of put it aside because he probably knew every classical piece worth doing. He said something like, “Why wouldn’t you take this piece by Brahms and do great music?” It was an engraving that I experienced right at that moment and it was something that always went with me no matter what style you do choose the best there is because that’s the power that changes us.

I believe very much in music that it has the power to change. I have often said to choirs, “You will not be the same when you’re finished working on this piece of music whether it’s an oratorio or another musical project. Something
will affect you, and it’s probably going to be in a positive way, but it might be in a profound way and so in that sense could be life changing.” The thing I always emphasized was “You won’t be able to measure it. It might make you a better person,” and then I am swift to add “not better than the next person beside you, but better than you would be if you hadn’t done it and in that sense life changing.” I think of so many critical life-changing moments that were hugely inspirational, helpful, turned you in another direction simply because of what you got from what I call a “brush with greatness.” You go to a great art gallery and you see this huge painting with profound detail and the power of the picture changes you and makes you feel better about having done that. Your mind always goes back to those places, so I think that’s the premise from which I would take anything in any style.

It builds a good program too if you believe in your program. You have to sometimes do these toss off pieces that not only toss off in the sense that they are entertaining, but they can have schwoomp, panache, pizzazz, and you have instant appeal. It’s that kind of thing and that’s a good thing; it’s necessary that it be done. I’ve also been at programs where people who should know better, program a whole program of encores and it gets very tiring because they try to be funny all the way through. It’s just the whole thing is so brittle and really so shallow that nothing affects you except for the moment. I think picking solid music, no matter where, stuff with substance, stuff that feeds you, stuff that changes you or has the power to change (is more effective). Sometimes even when it’s incomplete, to
have done great music it’s like the student said, “We didn’t do a great job, but we were having a great time. We were really into it!” And that’s the power of it.

Troy: This is kind of changing gears here, but you talked a little bit about itinerations. Could you talk about the role of concerts and tours?

Henry: Special concert events are hugely critical in the whole aspect of bringing people together, bringing a focus to that gathering, and building up to a huge climax in that experience. In a human experience I think it is of huge importance. People take more from music than therapy and Robert Shaw put it beautifully when he said something like, “In an age of political, personal, and economic disintegration, music is not only therapeutic nor is it the universal language, but is the persistent focus of man’s intelligence.”

There is something about going toward aspiration. I had it (the quote) on my door for years and it’s somehow difficult, but the persistent focus of man, intelligence, aspiration, and then there’s another word in there. That is what it is. I think what he means is we continue to strive, to seek, to experience together things that are beyond the surface. There’s something very powerful when a lot of people come together, (for example) here in a choral situation, where you’re singing the same music, the same spirit of the music, the same text, at the same time. That doesn’t happen in any other art or in any other form.

All of sports is selective; six at a time, in soccer ten at a time; that’s it. In choir we don’t say, “We’ll bring in the closer.” “Jerry you go and play center in the choir, and then we’ll you take you out for the final cadence.” We don’t do that. Everybody experiences every moment at the same time and together, and
it’s very, very unique. It’s a part of that whole, powerful experience that puts everybody into that common space.

Troy: Was that part of your thinking when you were at MCI too?

Henry: Yeah, I gravitated to that or have been drawn to that (idea) very, very much. In fact, this happened during the auditions (at MCI). During the first week of school we would have the auditions. This was very common then and still is in a lot of places, though in many places they already audition in the spring the year before or the week before classes start, that sort of thing. I was looking out the window of this classroom where I was having the auditions and having a little break. I saw a clique of people there and a clique of people there and it was just like they are in high school. I was thinking there’s talent in there, and there’s the talented one in that group, and there’s the talented one over there, and it cracked those cliques. I intentionally brought those individuals together and I think it was a revelation from somewhere else because I didn’t read that in a book or study it in a classroom. I took those talented people and some of them were very surprised to be in the choir because they’re often not chosen as they happened to be in the wrong group. Within a short time after we did that the graffiti in the washrooms disappeared, the wreckage in all kinds of places ceased, the school spirit rose, and the energy given to rehearsals was amazingly focused because of the payoff that had happened with great music together. I always talked about that so I’ve personally experienced way, way back where it was in that sense life changing for me. It was obviously life changing for them because the gang drive was being
dissipated simply because they were having a communal experience that everybody could identify with.

Troy: This was at MCI?

Henry: That was at MCI and since that first year, I was intent on just bashing this kind of cliquishness in a way that was very justifiable because that’s when I came across this idea that talent is no respecter of race, position in life, prestige, or economic (status). It crosses absolutely all barriers. It was almost like it was linked with the Word of God. There is just no separation and that’s a very liberating kind of feeling to feel. I would talk to students in certain moments in rehearsal where they worked hard and I knew there was some magic in the air or there was something very special happening and then I would point this out. A new meaning came into the group’s existence and we experienced that many times.

I did it here too. I always tried to make application to real life about what we do. I remember so clearly when 9/11 happened we had women’s choir rehearsal that afternoon. Our dean walked in and we didn’t know very much about it except that the tragedy had happened. He just mentioned this to the choir and he came only as a visitor as he would drop in on classes and rehearsals and that happened to be that day. He said this is why we do what we do. He said it a little more neatly, but that’s really the bottom line and this is why I have said, quoting Lautzenheiser, “I think music is the single most important subject in school.”

I remember using that phrase and somebody told me afterwards in the back of the hall a guy said, “He’s crazy.” Usually when I made that statement I
would also explain why. It’s always stuff that we’ve talked about before about people coming together and people unifying. Why was there singing in the streets in Hitler’s march parade? It rallied the groups. Why does the military band play? It’s hundreds of years old. Why do people sing in the bar? It’s bonding all over the place. Our singing in the churches, our hymns, the thing that made us strong as a Mennonite people was the singing. There wasn’t anything else that we would sing. Sometimes people make fun of the songs that were suggested for certain things, but when they waited, they were singing. There was no organ, so they sang. That’s the way it was done in our church; the hymns were not accompanied. Men sat on one side, women on the other, and I and the little boys sat right at the very front. As I got older I would move back in the rows. When I later became a married man and then I sat back there with the others holding their little ones at the back, and the older men sat in the middle.

One time people were lamenting at one of these workshops about congregational singing. Well I said, “Step back and think of it; remember people in family situations who are suffering from a complex from ‘I don’t like the way you sing’ attitude whether it’s the husband over the wife or the wife over the husband or the parent even having said, ‘My child doesn’t sing.’ Is he going to sing standing beside you then if you’re going to be together as a family in church?” I said, “Men on one side, women on the other, boys at the front, men at the back separated all of that, and the men sang because they wanted to sing. The young boys heard those basses over, and over, and over again and those strong central hymns in the church they learned to sing bass, and tenor, and alto by ear.”
You would have eight-part hymn singing and more with rich, rich harmonies with people just heaving the rafters and especially at the festival times such as baptism and communion time, definitely Christmas and Easter, but during other very special events too. I remember how deeply Thanksgiving affected me. If you think back that was a tradition that just brought, and brought, and brought people together. It brought energy into the group, brought spirit into the group, brought a sense of direction, gave focus to things, and it has its application today where there are choirs there is very little strife. There are problems, but not strife so much within the group. They’ll even sit beside the guy with the bad body odor for the full year and they work out their problems. That’s the other thing the community of singers has to work out. They sit closer together than cello players do and they have to live with this kind of shoulder to shoulder life. You have to work out personality, you have to work out habits, you have to work out discipline such as coming late, being absent, all those kinds of things, not having your music with you, and all those kinds of things.

When you tour, that was your question by the way, why tour? Well a tour teaches much, much more along with all this that we talked about than just the tour itself. I mean every time we went to Europe or somewhere else I said you’ll come back different than you were; it’s inescapable.

One year we just spontaneously got into a bit of an evaluation session, a bit of a free-for-all talk in a rehearsal because I asked one or two questions of the group. It was the day to just leave the music and talk. It was in spring and one of the fourth year students said, “You know, in my time, this choir was in a tour to
Saskatchewan to a couple universities there and churches, the next one was Europe.” (We were a resident choir for the Bach Academy under Rilling. He had said, “Why doesn’t your choir be the resident choir for the conducting workshops?” What a huge break—a huge break and opportunity.)

Troy: Where was that at?

Henry: It was in Stuttgart (Germany) and we did some other traveling too. The next year we were in Minneapolis for the ACDA convention and then the fourth year we went to Quebec City and did Montreal, Quebec and through there to Trois-Rivières (Quebec). She said, “You know what, we’ve been all over the place and one of the times that was the most meaningful with those? Right at home.” It happened to be for her there were certain magical moments that happened then. She went on to sing with the Society for Ancient Music in Montreal; a very recorded group. She was a very articulate thinker and though she didn’t come from the same sort of country experience that I did, but I thought that was significant and so we talked then for awhile about this life-changing aspect about music.

It doesn’t matter whether it’s here and you’re doing something with it like performing for people and engaging with other choirs or whether you go to Europe and you’re the feature choir in a place. To end that week we sang a Bach cantata in a Sunday morning service the way Bach would have done it, not at St. Thomas in Leipzig but in Stuttgart in the church where Willie was the musical director. It was absolutely amazing and tours are exposure; they’re about self-discovery. I think this was the chief thing that music does. It’s an amazing
experience of self-discovery because students from their first time in whether they joined the grade 6 choir, the grade 10 choir, or the special group. It doesn’t matter what it is; it’s the same all over. The other thing is it’s just an enormous opportunity for growth and so you discover this, then you discover that. There’s management that’s needed, there is organization that’s needed, there is being helpful that is needed, and there is focus that is needed all the time. It teaches extraordinary discipline along with punctuality, reliability, and all of that kind of stuff. It’s just being focused all the time. I feel that it’s just so full of gratification and it all just comes to you. All you need to do is work.

Troy: Is there anything more you want to say about festivals or is that good?

Henry: Festivals are distilling. They help to distill. They distill the group; they distill the focus that people could give to this. So from that you come back and you learn and you will evaluate what it gets from a certain event. You evaluate if you noticed when, did you realize what was happening, or did this or that or the other thing, et cetera. So even in retrospect, if they didn’t notice it then, it is brought to light and so in that sense distilling. You know every time when you look back again it’s growth.

Troy: How about the role of music in chapel services? Did your choir perform in chapel services?

Henry: No, the choir never performed in chapel services there. There was just the one hymn and a devotional. In my services that I had when it was my turn to do it I often did hymn singing and just moved from one hymn to the next and gave some background and talked about the hymn itself. Then when I look back after those
four years I thought, why didn’t I do much, much more of that? Why was I so frantic looking for topics for chapel? If we just sung three hymns and I would have talked about what was inside those hymns that’s all that’s necessary, but we did sing every time. Oh yes, and on Fridays that was the tradition from a way, way back: on Friday morning after chapel there was an extra fifteen minutes given to hymn singing and that’s all we did was sing hymns. We sang sometimes in place of using that period to correct something that had not gone so well earlier, or to reinforce, but always to sing through. That was a wonderful tradition and a tradition that was there under P. J. Schaefer when he was the principal. He would spend time every week teaching a new hymn and we would memorize the texts. He couldn’t sing and we didn’t sing in the class; we had memorized the words for that hymn. We memorized many, many hymns from the old German Gesangbuch. Many we can still sing from memory and that’s an invaluable treasure. That (memory work) had already stopped by the time I was there teaching. He wasn’t principal any more is maybe one reason.

Troy: Did they ever use any cipher notation when you were there?

Henry: No, that was a fair bit earlier. It was already not in use when I was a student, so it would have been probably in the 1930s.

Troy: So not even as a student?

Henry: No, I was a student there from 1955 on and then I stayed home a year. I guess 1954 in the fall I came and then I stayed home a year, but I graduated in 1958 and there were no ciphers there.

Troy: How about musical theater? Did you do any of that?
Henry: None when I was a student. When I taught there then I took some scaled down
operettas that had been written by somebody for high school use and happened to
come across them. You just wrote, wrote, wrote, and studied catalogues. So you
would go and order it for some reason. One was a version of Fledermaus and you
know any religious school could do that, but you see also the story was toned
down. The fact that Orlofsky is a gay was not mentioned at all and maybe at that
time it would have made no difference anyway.

Troy: What was the name of the play?

Henry: I’m trying to think; when they do a contraction of that then it someway is
simplified. The summary of the operetta’s still a full evening show. They didn’t
use the original title so they didn’t call it Fledermaus and I forget what the actual
title.

The first time we did a play it was by Schubert which was a series of his
songs strung together and it was a very easy thing because it was so tuneful and
then there was a little bit of drama built around it. I was the editor of that. Then
we did a version of something from Magic Flute, but it just was just little
excerpts, basically the tunes were taken out of there. Papagena and Papageno
were put in there and part of that duet was changed also, but it really wasn’t much
of a story. There was a lot of just holding hands and walking across the stage and
(it was) pretty boring. Still people came; it was the first of musicals that was done
on stage. It either says something about how ancient I am or how late we were
getting to musicals here in Manitoba. Immediately the next year we advanced to
that *Fledermaus* one. Then we did one each year. I guess I was the first one to do stage musicals there.

The issue was always dress—how are people dressed (especially girls) and what kind of costumes are you using. We were the first then to haul in the costumes from Malabar’s here in the city. You know everybody took their measurements and sent them off to the costume place here, and I guess they were sent. Then when they arrived everybody went for his fitting and it was pretty exciting. I don’t know how they do it now. It depends on what kind of a play you do. A lot of things are done in modern dress. So that was the musicals; that’s where we had our start, but I would say caution was the word. You know to be careful how you present and in some instances we toned things down or changed things. It made no difference to the drama, but you took out a couple of swear words or whatever.

Troy: Do you remember what year that those first started?

Henry: Oh yes, we did this in the school year of 1967 and 1968. They’d always done drama, but of course operettas are different because it’s light music and meant for light subjects.

Troy: How about changes through the years? Like within choral ensembles, were there any changes?

Henry: I think we were very comfortable in those four short years with just more of the same program; a packed program of choir rehearsals in a traditional sense. Movement within choir or the pop choir which was popular then already in the U.S., and the U.S. had a huge influence on the choral scene in Canada. Jazz
choirs were far from us then still, but the pop choir thing added to the madrigal group. It would be kind of stayed and you wouldn’t make attempts to make good except to make joyous singing from the spirit of it in there, but so in that way no change. The change that I told you about was really a huge contrast with *Die Glocke* and *Threnody*. That was the biggest quantum leap.

Troy: So in the repertoire then?

Henry: Yeah, in the repertoire.

Troy: Is there anything more you want to say about that? How about instrumental ensembles, anything there?

Henry: There was no band; there is now. We created a string orchestra. That was interesting. I think that was propelled by the fact that there were several students who had taken violin lessons and of course after the violins came the cellists. People wanted to try it and did quite well in it, so they accompanied the choir, but didn’t play independently. I think once or twice we took some very accessible suites and did those, but no, they would accompany the choir. We did for instance Bach, that little Telemann song and theme, and we did a Buxtehude cantata. That was perfect because if we didn’t have a viola, the one who did play viola could also play violin, so it was not a problem. We also used cello a fair bit. That gave color to the Buxtehude cantata which could be boring with high school students partly because it was a little boring. It’s very much worship music; it’s not concert music. They always enjoyed singing it, but it isn’t quite like Bach which is mainly so motoristic.

Troy: What was that word you used?
Henry: Motoristic.

Troy: When would the orchestra and string ensemble rehearse then?

Henry: That was also an after school or maybe was even evenings because it was a residence school the students were all right there. I think it was an after supper rehearsal and I walked because I lived two blocks away. It was crazy; if I were to do some things over I’d leave something for somebody else to do, but music is that way for a lot for us.

Troy: So after school, and then how many times a week did they practice?

Henry: Oh, probably two, I can’t remember. I was never satisfied with the group meeting once a week. I don’t know how I did it, but you say that about a lot of things in life.

Troy: Was that an hour then?

Henry: Yeah, I would say probably an hour.

Troy: You used to do string ensemble?

Henry: Yeah.

Troy: Do you know when that stopped? When did the string ensemble stop?

Henry: It stopped pretty much when I left.

Troy: Okay.

Henry: The next person didn’t have that level of interest so it disappeared. I remember it being fun because I was interested from a conducting standpoint. I was very interested in the string sound and the string accompaniment.

Troy: Did you have any string background?
Henry: I took two winters of violin. It would be similar to a term of class strings or up a notch was probably the level at which I played. I wouldn’t be able to join the orchestra here.

Troy: I just had the strings class, so that’s a notch above me.

Henry: I wouldn’t let that make me arrogant at all.

Troy: You talked to me about your philosophy of music education. Is there anything more you would want to say about your philosophy on music in education?

Henry: I think it’s probably all pretty much all there. I think to be aware that music has so much more to teach than facts, and notes, and rhythms, that we always need to be aware of how much more comes to us when we do music. I think when schools, administrators, and parents see what it does then you don’t have to do a sell job; the idea sells itself because it changes the attitudes of those who observe it. They say, “My, that must be a great experience for kids to be able to do that.” I think the effect of it is so much greater than what it’s doing at that moment. I don’t think there’s any magic. Each person has to go at it. A teacher must go at it in his own way and the outcome will almost always be the same in that way because it affects people so profoundly. Certainly it solves the problem of boredom for young people in the school, especially like with the residents. People will find their own things to do if there isn’t something that is programmed. This was constructive, creative programming that was going on for its time. There was such a demand for what we did; we could have had more invitations than we could fill. That again created demand. You’ve got a product and people will want to buy it.
Troy: Do you mean people wanting into the school?

Henry: People wanted to come to the school; the school enrollment shot up. In fact 210 was peak in my third year there. It had come from a low of something like 120 or 130 (students). So then people wanted to come, people wanted to participate, and the spinoff from it affected everything else. You were drawing quality students because a lot of these people were paying for the school. Yes they wanted to take their high school, but they wanted more than just the high school choral program. So they were kids who had spent a lot of time private study. They were bringing discipline with them and so you had a field of people who had done even grade five piano. We have it in grades because of [Royal Conservatory] Repertory Grade and they had taken five years of piano. They know something about what it means to bring a piece to a level of cleaning it up; this could be a recital. It doesn’t come overnight, so to realize that you have to work at something. To achieve anything, you have to persist. Enough said.

Troy: You had mentioned connecting music with real life for students. That ties in there too.

Henry: Yeah, I think I’ve said it. You’d be able to pick that up.

Troy: Then all that related to the mission of the school?

Henry: Yes. I think I had no problem relating that to the mission of the school. Everything that we did in music we did the self-discovery thing, the service thing. Whether we sing in service or the way that we serve others by doing the task together, by the importance of the team, and by what it does when we do work together when we do sing together. It doesn’t matter whether we go from the
rehearsal down or out to the yard to work on something there or to the shop. It’s that same kind of experience, so there’s carryover.

Troy: Was there any influence from other teaching philosophies like Orff, or Dalcroze, or Kodály, things like that?

Henry: No, there wasn’t. I think we can go on from there. I knew of these because I’d just done my Master’s in Education and I’d first come across the word Dalcroze then and read a bit about it and it was talked about in class even though there was no outstanding Dalcroze person. It was the same way with Kodály and Orff, but those people who had some closer connection with these approaches used them, and you could use them very effectively. Here I always encourage people take, even if their goals are beyond, if it looks like you can benefit from this Orff course for your immediate next year or (if that’s going to influence you) in strong way down the road. I mean it’s something that’s going to go with you like a companion because it’s very solid proven approaches that have been distilled here. I think I used everything that I could think of that I’ve seen in workshops in addition to the classes that I’ve taken, the studies that I’ve done, and the reading that I’ve done, but you still have to make them your own. For its time it seemed to work quite well.

Troy: You mean your own approach.

Henry: Yes, the kinds of things that I felt would work, would apply, and the kinds of things that I felt should be done differently than the way they’ve been done before.

Troy: What kind of things did you do?
Henry: Well I think one of the key things I think that happened was maybe a different style of rehearsal that I gained from my advanced studies in music, perhaps mainly from the modeling that I saw from the people that taught me and whose choirs I sang, and that there was a process. Even if you read through verse one, then you get down inside it, and then you actually rehearse it. You were asked the question when you were doing your weekly time in front of the choirs in those schools, so now what are you doing, where are you going from here, and that kind of thing. I think that was something that I tried to apply. Every time I went to a workshop or to a convention I observed these kinds of things going on. I would always be fired about trying these things immediately at the next rehearsal, whether it was the Robert Shaw style of count singing or whether it was stopping and cueing chords; just simply sitting on a chord until it was tuned. It just didn’t all come to me at the same time, but there was a payoff of those disciplined approaches to studying the scores.

I did some things very spontaneously one time at MCI. We were going to our first Winnipeg festival and had a 90 voice choir. We had studied the piece, we knew it from memory, and it was boring. I remember getting all sections to huddle and just stand in a group like this as large as a circle would be and we sat up the rhythm for the madrigal with finger snaps. I told them to sing it and sing it three or four times and here are important words, here are important stresses, here put on the power, and so on. We went back and forth on it, we got into our rows, and it was a revelation because they had to get off the page. It was still on the page even though they had it memorized. It was that sort of thing. I think one
was free to try things and there’s always been that, but I had my own road to
travel here. It was a good time because the students were of that age where they
were very ready to pick up anything, do it, and had that complete trust in the
teacher like the example here. It was very strong and energy feeds energy:
students’ energy gave me energy.

Troy: Maybe you’ve answered this next one already, but did music education have an
impact on the community then?

Henry: Yeah, I think I answered it already. You know the impact of how it changed
things: no graffiti on the walls in the school, a lot less breakage in the residence
with everything from doors to furniture and things like that because people were
becoming more considerate.

Troy: It had a moral influence.

Henry: I think it clearly had a strong spiritual influence too if you’re singing sacred
music. We were always talking about it and then there were those magical
moments that would happen in a performance. All you did was your work; we
kept on and then all of a sudden something magical happened or something
magical happened as a result of it (the feeling that was created).

Troy: How would you describe the status of music education? (For example,) you had
students that came in from different churches and communities; that was one
aspect.

Henry: The status of the level of music coming from one region and another?

Troy: Or even that or the enrollment in the total school compared to enrollment in choir.
There was mandatory choir too.
Henry: The school choir was mandatory. More people wanted to sing in all the other
choirs than got chosen, but there was a huge interest in it, and that showed me
how deeply rooted some things were in our culture that even the unspoken, the
unread, the unstudied aspect of this for the students, yet there was a feeling about
when they come here you sing. Singing’s okay. That’s unexplainable, to have all
of this singing, and there wasn’t nearly as much of it in the hymn singing of that
group that met once a week that became the tour choir, that drove the bus, that
went to the churches, and created tremendous interest whenever they came to the
church or to a small community in a rural area. Even that was deepening this root
and it was all there, readymade for a great awakening, which I was fortunately a
part of.

Troy: Curriculum-wise, your music was the curriculum?

Henry: Yes.

Troy: Were you autonomous? Could do what you wanted?

Henry: The freedom I had was amazing, maybe because I was still in many ways so
closely tied to the traditions of the school. Even within there was so much that
the school had not selected from the great repertoire or from the range of
repertoire that there was. There were many, very good hymn arrangers or writers
of anthems that were very good for the high school choir. Americans were being
published widely. Pfautsch was one, but there were many others. Shaw and
Wagner arrangements, especially of the Christmas carols (were good) too. There
was always (room in) every program for one of their arrangements because they
were just so long lasting, so well crafted, and seldom was there anything that was sort of kinky. It was just good solid musical rewriting or arranging.

Troy: What was Pfautsch’s first name?

Henry: Lloyd. He was a deep bass, spoke with a very resonant rich voice, and did Elijah many times; not that that needs a rich, deep bass. Apparently in his days when he was in New York and sang he was in the early group of the Robert Shaw Chorale.

Troy: Scheduling-wise you had music during the school day?

Henry: Yes. I got paid for everything I did during the day and then the rest was just add on. So in other words, I was given free rein in what I wanted to do pretty much. I was never stopped with, “Say look, don’t create another group,” or “Don’t demand more of the students still.” Somehow it all got done.

Troy: Then outside the day that was just on your own time then?

Henry: Yes.

Troy: You had plenty of financial support for the choral program?

Henry: That was amazing. I was never stopped. I managed to fit it into the budget, but I was never stopped on the budget. People saw that it was a worthy investment. I’m sure my principal might have gone to the board and said, “You know, look we’re going to need a couple hundred dollars.” I think they saw that I was being careful and selective and used pretty well every piece that I had ordered. It was necessary to not have too many of the same pieces, at least for a year or two, and then you come back. There was a time to do new things, so I was very lucky that way.

Troy: Did you get support for the instrumental program too?
Henry: I must have; although, it was very low. They had to play a long time with the short rehearsal time that we had. I don’t think it ran all year either consistently. When we were working towards something, then it would be several weeks before we would meet. I bought the music that we needed and it was just never an issue there.

Troy: You bought the music through the school?

Henry: We had a budget from the school. We didn’t have to raise money separately for the music.

Troy: During that time did you have a music library to work with too for the choir?

Henry: Yes. It was the stuff that was done traditionally in our church choirs, some of which I would include in our choices. It wasn’t very well organized, and I have a love for making neat cupboards and filing cabinets full of music so that wasn’t hard for me to maintain. There was music there, but we added a huge amount of music in those four years and did it all pretty much.

Troy: Did you have a place to practice, a rehearsal room?

Henry: Yeah, we used the gym and what is now the chapel. We used the gym, the chapel, the large choir rehearsal room, it was everything, and space was set aside for that. During operetta time we were in there and the smaller groups would rehearse in the classrooms because neither the gym nor Buhler Hall was there during the time that I taught. I taught in the main school building. I came in 1967, so it was all new, but it was just that main building with that long hallway; that was it and the gym which is now the chapel. Somehow all the rehearsing that I wanted to do could get done.
Troy: In the gym?

Henry: Yes, and in the large classroom.

Troy: Where did you do you concerts?

Henry: A lot (were done) right there in that small gym and as I said a couple of very special events. Twice we went to the city to the concert hall. We would (have concerts) in the towns where it would be school gymnasiums, halls, as well as churches as we itinerated our way through southern Manitoba.

Troy: Do you have any thoughts on the outlook for the future regarding the music program?

Henry: Well I hope they keep everybody. I wouldn’t have any influence I don’t think because it has to go with the administration that’s there. I think they certainly want music to continue. They are very comfortable with choral music being dominant. They want to carry the traditions forward and they bring in the new. They have a jazz group which probably includes some vocal too, but I don’t know that they have a jazz choir. I just hope they keep it and give it as an important a place in the program as they do. They have since I left as it has always been important that they keep singing. My wish would be that they would carry forward the hymn singing that was in the tradition of the church. Bring in the new hymns and from other countries (such as) the South American Latin songs, the Afro songs, and the Korean songs by all means do those things, but do it all. We all have our preferences and changing of staff (no staff stays very long) in that place, which is in a sense good because it gets a freshening up, a new approach, different ideas; that’s helpful for an institution. Just keep on doing music, good
music will take you there. That’s my feeling. If you keep searching keep going for enlightenment then you find things that you want to do and they’ve been very fortunate in getting people who are self-motivated and very interested in doing the new thing. Try the fresh thing, some of which doesn’t always work, but then you move on to the next thing. That would be my wish.

Troy: Do you have any memorable stories that you’d like to share or a final comment?

Henry: There were so many high points. I guess you know the memorable ones at MCI were us coming to the concert hall and getting a review in the paper for both of those concerts that we did. One was a potpourri which included that Bach Cantata 50 and the Telemann. The other one was Romberg and Schafer; those were pretty high points. The tours broad stroke were always highlights. I think the spring Sängerfest to me was very much of a highlight because that’s when the groups were peaking, and they could just present their very best. That’s why it was so much fun because it was so much giving the students did. What was special was the context. It was an oasis; something all by itself in the middle of nowhere from things that were happening. So we created the entertainment, the music, and the community. The community was us; the musical community was us. We did good stuff. We even created a recital series which hadn’t existed before. At that time that was the beginning of grand pianos in the school. We got a huge bargain on a nine foot. It was a bit problematic, but it was a grand, and it worked. People came in and played piano recitals or piano trios with that as the centerpiece. It worked; we had good community attendance for these things. It was a very different time from now.
Troy: Thank you. Is there anything else you want to say?

Henry: No, thank you. This was a great opportunity.
Appendix B

Marilyn Houser Hamm Interview

Marilyn Houser Hamm, 19 June 2008, Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna

[The first interview recording was lost.]

Marilyn: Mary Oyer has really shaped the character of Mennonite singing in the last half century. Definitely I would think through her teaching at Goshen College and through her very significant work and impeccable research in the historical community that went into the 1969 collection and then their groundbreaking inclusion of music from other cultures in that edition of that Mennonite hymnal long before any denomination was thinking about including music from other cultures. So that openness that the Mennonites achieved to other cultures I think just really opened windows to the ways that in the Mennonite schools, music from other cultures then was embraced and sought out. Now we’ve got such a plethora of publications of music from other cultures, but I think that whole piece was really lodged and owned within the Mennonite Church long before it was in the popular stream.

Troy: So the multiculturalism as part of congregational repertoire?

Marilyn: Right, oh definitely. Mary had done extensive post-doctoral work in central and southern Africa. She spent a number of years in Kenya, and she did ethnomusicological work with African musicians in Kenya and then she studied
with other musicians. Then she wrote and her work was respected to the point that she taught indigenous music in a Kenyan university to nationals.

Troy: Wow.

Marilyn: Yeah, she also received an invitation from internationally renowned ethnomusicologist Ito Lo who was based in Taiwan to begin a department of ethnomusicology at the university there. She’s in her mid-eighties now, but this was in her late seventies that she was beginning this department of ethnomusicology in that work, so her work went from exploring and bringing European folksong, then Asian song, then African song, and then a more extensive inclusion of global music into the Mennonite repertoire. That has to affect what happened in the context of education in the schools. Just to even have a hymnal that had that kind of breadth and collection in the school where things were used in chapel, or at events, and whatever just created a certain kind of resonance and a certain character that just wasn’t there in many other places.

Troy: Okay.

Marilyn: So that’s preamble.

Troy: Neat.

Marilyn: Yeah it is.

Troy: So it was at Goshen College when you came into contact with her?

Marilyn: Yes, when I was a student there. She was my faculty advisor and she also became my mentor. We had a wonderful relationship. She mentored me in understanding congregational song, leading congregational song, and communicating to congregations that way.
Troy: Was that with your Bachelor’s?
Marilyn: That’s right.
Troy: What else do you have?
Marilyn: My work just had other directions. It didn’t allow me to pursue post grad studies until about five years ago, so I’m working on a M.A. Theology in the Arts right now. I’m hoping because I can’t be engaged with fulltime study and I should be finished in a couple of years.
Troy: Where is that through?
Marilyn: Through CMU.
Troy: Through CMU.
Marilyn: Right, some of my courses are with the University of Winnipeg department of theology and some of the courses will be certified through the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, but it will be lodged at CMU.
Troy: Where’s Elkhart?
Marilyn: That’s in Indiana.
Troy: Gottcha.
Marilyn: Yeah, I know, in the Mennonite world the borders transcend.
Troy: I was trying to think Canada.
Marilyn: Canada? No, I don’t know an Elkhart anywhere in Canada.
Troy: I was just going to ask you about your role as an editor or what things have you edited?
Marilyn: I’ve been involved in committee work more so than editing work. I chaired the music committee that compiled and published our present hymnal: *Hymnal*
Worship Book. I did edit and compile the most recent Mennonite World Conference Global Assembly Songbook that was published for Zimbabwe in our Bulawayo assembly in 2003. I also did extensive work on the collection that was produced for the 1991 global assembly in Winnipeg. That was even a more extensive collection, so I was involved in that.

I contributed both in music and committee work and in arranging and composing for the Hymnal Worship Book and especially for our hymnal accompaniment handbook that has extensive supplements for a keyboard instrument (and) for wider instrumentation. That collection also allowed us to include a number of essays that would help music and worship leaders understand the many styles of music that they’re being called to represent and they certainly can draw from and they can learn from those in our conscience right now.

My most recent work has occurred between 2003 and 2007 with our two supplements which are called Sing the Journey and Sing the Story respectively and I’ve served on both of those committees. Those supplements are collections of roughly about 100 and 120 songs and worship resources that are designed to supplement the work of Hymnal Worship Book.

Troy: Okay.

Marilyn: That’s been a very steady involvement in nurturing and compiling resources for the wider church’s worship. I know it affects our schools too very much.

Troy: When you’re working on these committees, what besides the instruments that are potentially going to be playing these things, what other considerations are there when you’re compiling things?
Marilyn: Well, we’re looking for quality, and we’re looking for character within whatever musical genre we’re looking at. We’re looking for those two things within the musical parameters and then I’ll speak to checks just a wee bit too. We’re very careful, and this doesn’t exclude anything that comes from a folk tradition or is simplistic at all, but with text we’re very scrupulous about clichés; writing that can very quickly and easily tend to be cliché oriented either with theological language or with poetic language. Because you have many people who are not poets who are writing and creating texts.

We are looking for a strong Anabaptist theology, so we’re looking for a Biblical foundation and centeredness. We’re looking for something that strengthens the understanding of the church as a body and the understanding of that body in its life and witness in the world. So concerns for community, for peace and justice, and for the church’s larger witness in the world in that way are very strong for us. We are looking for the church’s spirituality and how that is nurtured both individually, but that the individual is nurtured within a corporate context. We’re looking for those kinds of things in a text in one way or another in the overall balance of things, so the nature of those kinds of parameters excludes many texts very, very quickly if they’re feeling oriented for example, or whatever. Then as we take our given framework, whatever that happens to be, with Sing the Journey and with Sing the Story we had decided that the Sing the Story collection would focus on the life and witness of the church post Pentecost and so it had a particular thrust that way. Within each of the categories of the church’s life and witness we would look for a balance in the inclusion of musical styles.
We would look for a balance also in voicing. We wanted to make sure we had four part textures, we wanted to make sure that there were other colors—two, three-part textures along with unison. Textures that would balance and supplement this homophonic sound that is the core of Mennonite singing, and so we would look for those kinds of colors. We’ve been much more sensitive probably since the creation of *Hymnal Worship Book* because if there was a trend that happened for us as we were working on *Hymnal Worship Book*, we were really reclaiming the oral tradition again because Mennonites worked so hard to achieve this wonderful high level of excellence in congregational singing that only happened in other denominations in choral contexts. The Mennonite Church is known for this amazing sound that was in the congregations, so we became orally deficient. We were so visual oriented to the page that we lost the oral sense, and I think that’s been one of the wonderful things about reclaiming music in the African American tradition, for example, and also in claiming so much music that comes from other cultural contexts where the oral tradition is primary. So those were some very significant guiding principles for us.

The second supplement which is called *Sing the Story* focuses on the life of Christ. We deliberately wanted to center ourselves there, but we were using the proper times of the church year, Advent through Pentecost, to create that framework. We wanted to strengthen spirituality for the church by creating an awareness of walking and living with Christ through the church year. In that way, we were nurturing both a corporate and an individual spirituality as we did that.
Those have been probably some of the primary considerations for us as we’ve worked now in last four/five years.

Troy: Do you do any composing?

Marilyn: Yes, I’ve written several settings that are in *Hymnal Worship Book* and I have tended to be more functional in my work. In the last number of years I have been working particularly at arrangements for piano or other instrumental settings that will supplement the resources and be included in the resources that we have in our collections. Sometimes I have been able to do other things, but it’s not been a time in my life that I could have the space to work at composition in other ways. I’m very fulfilled and very satisfied in doing that kind of work because I think it’s so important to give people good resources. I have the ability and the gift to both improvise and I’ve studied significantly in my discipline with piano and in vocal studies that I have that balance that I can read, interpret, and analyze, so then I can create things that I improvise that many people just say that they can’t. They can read something that’s on a page if it’s there, but someone needs to put it there. So I just have such a passion for the church, that’s very strong.

Because I have this deep passion for the church, to be writing things that would be named functional are very rewarding for me. I know what it does for young musicians and I know what it does when I do workshops throughout the church because I do that very extensively. I know what it means for people to have resources that they need because it strengthens what is available. It strengthens what our schools can do too if there are good resources that are there for the students. That’s a very strong commitment for me.
Troy: Could you talk a little bit about those workshops that you do.

Marilyn: The workshops that I’ve done in the last number of years have been in primarily in training church music and worship leaders and church pastors to use our new resources. I’m introducing resources, but I’m also helping people understand how to use them, what their context is in worship, and helping them to grow in worship in that way. I have also done other workshops that focus on worship in the church with a music emphasis, so something that’s a little more inclusive in that way, but starting more from a theological or conceptual premise of worship and then taking people through those understandings. I can be addressing pastors, worship leaders, worship planners, and musicians at the same time. We can address what becomes then a framework that each of them then can move into their specific areas and work at in workshop settings, and then I’ll either work with either song leaders usually or pianists, keyboardists, or other instrumentalists in specific ways. Most often when I’m working with other colleagues, I will tend to work primarily with instrumentalists and after a presentation, for example someone like Marlene Kropf from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary that I work with often in workshops, then Marlene will take that teaching component and then work with worship leaders or whatever.

For probably the past fifteen years, I’ve worked with Dr. Ken Nafziger from Eastern Mennonite University who’s on the hymnal committee and Marlene Kropf. The three of us have been the leadership team for the Laurelville Mennonite Church annual music and worship leaders’ retreat that has happened the first weekend in January for just over twenty years. In that setting, Mennonite
music and worship leaders from the central U.S. over to the east coast, a few people from Ontario, and other parts of the U.S. as well participate. It’s central, but it’s the most major training event for Mennonite music and worship leaders that exists and it’s the most consistent one that exists. On a weekend like that, we usually bring in some kind of a guest clinician who will do plenary sessions and then we bring the arts together. We usually focus them thematically, but very often we’ll work with the lectionary passages for that season or that time of year, bring the arts together, and tap the potential of what can be happening with all of those disciplines working in worship. That’s a very exciting and dynamic time. I function there as an instrumentalist workshop leader and presenter in that way.

Irma Fast Dueck and I have worked over the last four years to found the Camp Shekinah Canadian Mennonite Music and Worship Leaders’ Retreat that is modeled after Laurelville, but it’s taken on its own identity. We’ve had just remarkable success with that. The event correlates with an event that Canadian Mennonite University sponsors every two years—a weekend event now that’s called Refreshing Winds that focuses on worship and worship education in the church. Even though I haven’t been a part of CMU’s faculty, I’ve always been a part of the resource team and part of someone who is either working with the primary leader in a presentation or someone who is constantly doing workshops or leading worship in those contexts. I don’t know how long, but I’ve been doing that for a very long time. So those are consistent and for me, at (least) I work in the church anyway.
Troy: How much is there a connection between the strength of the choirs like say here, and what happens at the local congregations? Does your work that influences the hymnals and bringing that to the congregations come back and help shape the backgrounds of the students that you get then? Does it help with the choir then from their foundation in the churches?

Marilyn: I think certainly in the past that’s definitely been so because if you grow up hearing homophonic four-part sound, it affects how your ears listen to things, how you perceive sound, and how you perceive yourself in the creation of sound and a part of a sound that is happening around you. I just think that’s been absolutely essential. I think it’s been even more essential in our university settings. The Canadian Mennonite University for example, it’s just been extremely primary there when you get the combination of the congregation, and the choral programs, and the schools feeding into the university. That’s why you get such a high caliber.

What’s happened more recently in Mennonite congregations I think with so much exploration with the popular culture sound in praise and worship music has been that the students have been less exposed to a depth and breadth of sound because some of that has been left in order to embrace something else that has seemed to be a way to identify with a cultural context or perhaps to meet some needs that congregations have. It’s been interesting to watch that tension because how it has affected the schools is that the schools now in recent years have had to take on more of a teaching role in the hymn tradition of the church for the students because they’re coming not knowing things that we assumed that
students would know a number of years ago. So that reversal has taken place and so the onus has been placed more on the schools. What I’m seeing and hearing that’s just perhaps more of a recent trend is that congregations are feeling more dissatisfied with the lack of substance in that music and so they are looking at the resources that we’ve created and they’ve been widely embraced.

So you understand that anything in tradition is a living tradition, but what I’m picking up on in the wider Canadian context is that there’s this sense that the directions that we’re going stay true to who we want to be and what we want to be doing as a church in our worship. The choral singing experience that the students have in a place like MCI and the way that it feeds back into a local congregation is amazing, especially if you think about the large Concert Choir that you heard in Sängerfest. So many of these students never having sung in a choir or singing a voiced part, and here they are singing a hymn or an anthem and they say, “Oh, I can go back home and I can sing this in my church now,” or “I learned this hymn and I can go home and sing it.” Students came back after their Easter break, they were so excited that one or two of the hymns that we had worked on here they had sung in their churches on Sunday morning. They could do the voice parts and they were very excited about that. That’s what you want. You want that nurturing back and forth and that living sense that is such a beautiful interplay and we want to keep feeding that. I think it is happening, but those are trends that I can clearly identify.

Troy: Just in the interviews that I’ve done, that’s something that I’ve heard a lot of too.

Marilyn: Have you?
Troy: Yeah, so that’s amazing. This is maybe the third or fourth time I’ve heard that very same thing.

Marilyn: Good.

Troy: The relationship to if the congregations have gone to the praise and worship music, and then the burden of teaching part singing becomes slowly the part of the school education. So then it’s something that they have to work harder at what used to be just there more accessible rather than having to go more to the basics and training and then build up.

Marilyn: Yes, yes, it’s true. It’s very, very true. This is where particularly music like the music from southern Africa has been such a gift and the work of John Bell and the Iona Community in transcribing so much global music for the church in the north, the west for our western culture. The homophonic sound that is cyclical in nature and so repetitive then because it is cyclical is absolutely beautiful for teaching part singing. So this sound that is so rhythmic and so strong and yet can so easily be identified with has just been wonderful for moving that direction.

Another thing that’s a trend that I’ll identify for you is that we’re hearing from congregations who are urban and who have people coming to their congregations because of Anabaptist theology, we’ve gone through a time, a decade or maybe fifteen years, where it was widely held that the high level of Mennonite congregational singing was being exclusive to newcomers and therefore we had to in essence dumb down to either a popular cultural sound or something that would be lesser than. The wonderful thing that we’re hearing now is that people are saying that are coming into the Mennonite church, “We love this
singing, we absolutely love this singing and we want to learn to do it.” There’s no expectation that you have to be able to immediately be able to enter in and do something the people are saying, “I want to sit beside you and I want to learn this part and I want to learn how to do this.” Good things take time, and “I want to be a part of that learning.” That’s just another one of the new turns that have happened for us as a people and it just reinforces so much who we are and who people are in general. What do you want, what makes an experience satisfying for you? What creates community? There’s just delightful things that are on the horizon right now that I think will be very significant in the directions we take as a church.

Troy: You talked about the repertoire and you mentioned a lot of the global influence. What is probably the biggest global influence? Is there a particular continent or anything that the music is coming from?

Marilyn: Oh definitely southern Africa: Zimbabwe, South Africa just simply because of the four-part texture that creates just an instant owning and an instant affinity. Clearly that’s the largest influence. The second one, even though it’s not considered global probably technically, but it’s the embracing of the North American black gospel tradition and that sound which gives this amazing solidarity and strength in either a homophonic setting or in the way voices interrelate. White Mennonites are black culture want-ta-bes and just loving that music and loving its energy. Those two things I think just have been at the forefront. If I would name a top three or four hymns from *Hymnal Worship Book* that have been very significant, one of them would be just this absolutely simple,
beautiful song setting from I think it’s Argentina, “Has Venido,” and it’s called “Lord You’ve Come to the Lakeshore.” It’s very simple, it’s a guitar song. It has a folk-like quality and people just strongly, strongly identified with that song and learned it and memorized it very, very quickly.

On the whole, if I speak to particular cultures that have influenced Mennonite singing most recently it would be those two: the African and the African American tradition. There are other things that are just finding their way that are gems that really work significantly. The other reclaiming that we’ve done is the reclaiming of the American folk tradition. The movie, *Oh, Brother Where Art Thou?* brought all of these old time songs back into the canon and it went through all our choirs, it went through congregations, three or four of them ended up in our supplements. You know, just claiming, and that’s the joy, that’s just the joy of singing and the joy of that sound and those influences have just been very strong for us. I think that Mennonites have achieved an openness in engaging these cultures, for example look at something that comes from a Southeast Asian tradition or an Indian tradition. That’s something that doesn’t resonate as quickly, it’s also met with openness and we’re willing to try. I think that’s what is so important, that we’re not closing ourselves off from other cultures or other people. We want to be able to engage and understand what that is. I think those things, in my view, are the significant things.

Troy: You kind of talked about the aesthetic considerations and then textually that it’s gotta be Biblical and Anabaptist.

Marilyn: Yeah.
Troy: Those two things. How about with some of the musics you’ve explored even as a choral director, are there ever criticisms that you hear about the type of repertoire that gets performed?

Marilyn: No, not the type. I think people have embraced colors and textures, that kind of thing. We have found critique and it’s been very interesting just to see these responses come and go. Here’s one example that I’ll give you that kind of epitomizes all of this. When we were compiling *Hymnal Worship Book*, there was a strong sense at the time that the concept of only using male pronouns to address God was incomplete. There were two very wide camps within the church at that time: people who wanted all language change and all male pronouns obliterated and people who felt that male pronouns were absolutely essential to being true to Biblical authenticity. Those two camps coexisted and one would be happy to obliterate the other. It was just very, very extreme. So in our work we made a decision that as much as possible hymns that we were accepting into our collections from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would either not have those language issues, that they would be written in such a way that there wouldn’t be language issues, or that an exclusive male pronoun would not be used in those hymns.

We also discerned that the church wasn’t ready to address God in the feminine, but we thought we could bring out other additional qualities that are in scripture that describe God that we didn’t have in our present canon. So one of the hymns that we passed into our canon and sought out for musical interpretation was a hymn called *Mothering God* and it was a Trinitarian hymn: mothering God,
mothering Christ, mothering Spirit. The hymn beautifully just went on to describe these attributes of God: just a beautiful nurturing hymn. This hymn created the greatest controversy. When *Hymnal Worship Book* was published, there were any number of congregations who said that they would not purchase the whole book because of this one song, so there were these theological considerations and concerns of being theologically inaccurate so we’re not being true to scripture. It was just so interesting as people delved further and further into this text and understood what it was saying and the musical language then which was chosen to compliment it, it’s just very stark and gorgeous. As people lived with this you just saw this amazing turn around in the church to the point that it’s not easy to sing, it’s not accessible to an average congregation that doesn’t have strong singers, but at the same time where it is accessible and people have owned it or in choral settings it’s just been very loved. It’s had its journey and those have been the primary constraints. There are other things we’re willing to look at and explore. Should I tell you another example?

Troy: Yeah, another example would be great. I was just going to ask if there is a relationship between or is there music that bubbles up from the people? Then there’s this and it sounds like the reaction to something like this with the two camps, is that music coming down from the top or where did it become an issue?

Marilyn: Yeah, yeah.

Troy: When did it become an issue?

Marilyn: That definitely was the case of leadership taking a risk and bringing something to the people. This is primarily true when there was some kind of a risk with the
amount of global things we put in the collection, but the greater risks for us were in twentieth, twenty-first century writing: choral or four-part writing with twentieth century musical language, serious composition. We just said because our collection has to be a product of its time, we have to include some very significant writing. Some of those things become much more challenging, but if they’re written very well, the voice leading is so good that congregations have moved into it. Those were decisions that were made by leadership.

Just as in any good choral program you have to be selecting the things that will make your choir grow, that will pull them up, that will help them understand, and bring a text alive. A good poetic text has to have a good musical language that supports it, so those are the risks. We were listening to our people, we were listening to a wider context, and we were trying to be aware of what was happening on a larger scale with this broad survey of material. Then we were trying to take a leadership role in the things we chose to include and the risks we took that way. These are things we need to do. I think that also has a back and forth corollary with what happens in schools and choral programs.

Troy: Did you have another example then too?

Marilyn: I was just going to say something that just seems absolutely so far out for us is something we put in our last collection. The text speaks this way: it says, “Silence my soul, the trees are prayers. I asked the tree, tell me about God, and it blossomed. I asked the wind, tell me about God and then it blew” or whatever. It has this almost an Asian-Oriental kind of quality about it, but the idea all of nature is praising God and it has this chant-like quality. This drone, this perfect fifth
drone underneath all of this with the voices in the distance of a fifth just singing very quietly “it will silence my soul, silence my soul” at whatever speed any individual wants to do so there’s this undercurrent of sound that’s just absolutely magical; and then voices over the top creating this pentatonic singing of doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo. The finger chimes and this current of an intense whisper voice. That is just so far out, that is so far out, but when we found it ourselves and sang it we said oh this is magic. Every time that we’ve introduced it in workshop settings clinic sessions, it’s just been absolutely amazing what happens to people. It’s just totally out of anyone’s experience, but becomes its own experience. So you take your best sense of knowing what something does and you take a risk and you bring it to your people and then it enhances things. We’re on a pretty wide scale being able to venture as a church.

Troy: What was the name of that piece again?

Marilyn: That piece is called “Silence My Soul.”

Troy: “Silence My Soul.”

Marilyn: I’ll show it to you.

Troy: Okay. How about as far as conducting goes when you’re teaching, are there any choral conducting schools that you’re into?

Marilyn: I’m clearly a product of those who’ve mentored me: Dr. Mary Oyer and Dr. Ken Nafziger. My conducting techniques came from my training at Goshen College with Dr. David Falk. Those techniques remain. Alice Parker, she’s another mentor. I think when you work within a choral context you work for a kind of clarity and a kind of precision that must happen. In a congregational
context you’re working for similar things, but not in the same way and you have to achieve them in different ways. One of the things that I rely on very significantly when I’m either training or I’m asked to be a guest conductor or leader, I rely on my voice setting a tone: a vocal tone, a vocal quality, a vocal color, and a vocal tempo. Often I’ll sing the first phrase or something just to give people the sound of what I want. If I use crisp diction, if I sing with a light texture, or if I sing in a very fluid way then without having to explain and create something, I create an aural sound of what I want to do and then I try and emulate that with my body language so that’s created. The techniques of conducting technique are always there and are the framework, but I’m always moving from there to pull the sound. I’m always listening. I’m always listening to the sound and then I’m always working to guide it and direct it in a certain way.

Troy: It’s been mostly by your mentors that you’ve developed. As far as English School of Conducting or anything like that?

Marilyn: No, that’s not been in my experience at all, and I think I understand at least in having directed and worked with our people and worked very well with our people over the last two or three decades. I understand what works well and how to achieve that, so it has a grounding and then it moves in its own way to shape them.

Troy: If you were going to give guidelines for directing, like some pet things that you would want to mention if you were teaching somebody to direct, what would some guidelines be that you’d give?

Marilyn: In conducting in general?
Troy: For choral conducting.

Marilyn: For choral conducting, I think clearly the first thing would be that one must always conduct the pulse. One must find the pulse. One must find even within a time signature you have to understand where the pulse is that is going to allow line to flow or a particular style to be shaped. It has to be based there. The other thing that was very significant for me and I received this from Alice Parker in a clinician setting, maybe in a workshop about fifteen years ago, is that even if you're working with many, many textures you have to begin with the melody. You have to understand that melody, you have to know its shape, you have to know its character, because you cannot move too quickly into the complexity of other things that is happening unless you have listened very, very carefully to that foundation piece and you have to start there because it is from that point that everything else emerges. That was one of my great learnings: one of my very, very great learnings. That affects everything that I do no matter what style it is that I work with.

One always has to determine what kind of gesture or conducting approach is helpful and what is excessive. You want to understand all of those points and what that means. You want to be emulating what you need to express to allow the music to flow with your body, but not excessively. Ideally you want to work with your group in such a way that minimal gestures will create a maximum kind of effect. I see that happening over and over again I think those are the very core things that guide and shape good conducting. Other kinds of things, attention to detail either in musical language or in textual language for clarity, just come from
continued study and working with those things. Usually the more that you ask for in terms of clarity without being pedantic, the more that clarity is adhered to, the more the music becomes itself, and becomes identified in whatever kind of musical language or whatever it is speaking.

Robert Shaw was such a great teacher when CMU and Mennonite Brethren Bible College in years past would sponsor what was called a church music seminar—have a weeklong festival with a world renowned conductor. We did two occasions with Robert Shaw, but the one all of us that participated will remember is doing the Brahms *Requiem* with him. Shaw was impeccable for detail and our scores were marked with every rest, every cutoff, every particular detail, and he was such a philosopher. He would speak to us for ten minutes about something theological that was happening with what Brahms was doing with the text. All of that was embedded in understanding what Brahms had done by taking that text and giving it musical clarity and form. So being true to that form enabled substance, and emotion, and an ethos: it was an experience to come through. That has also been extremely influential for me in my own approaches to conducting whatever the context I find myself in.

Troy: How would you describe the relationship between you as a conductor, the choir, and the music?

Marilyn: Music on a page is lifeless: it’s static, black ink on whatever tint of white. My job as a conductor is to listen so carefully to the page that it becomes alive. I have a very clear understanding then of what that sound is doing, because what we’re doing when we approach a piece of printed music is we are recreating sound, and
the sound becomes new with each performance. My job as a conductor is to supply the components that are needed for the choir to (a) understand that sound, (b) to understand its character, and (c) understand what they must do to communicate that sound to an audience. My role becomes, yes a teaching role and a guiding role, but to the point that the music is sound so recreated that it becomes new and that it is owned, if I have done my job well, the sound is owned by the choir and we together become a part of that sound expression and communication.

Troy: I think that looks like we answered all of these questions at the bottom, so that was all that I had for you.

Marilyn: Okay, cool.

Troy: Thank you very much.

Marilyn: You’re welcome.
Appendix C

Rick Heppner Mueller Interview 1

Rick Heppner Mueller, 20 May 2008, at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna

Troy: What is your educational background?

Rick: To be pertinent to this conversation with it being on Mennonite education, I graduated from Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and that’s in Winnipeg, Manitoba. That’s sort of a sister school to MCI run by General Conference, now Mennonite Church Canada body of churches. I went to Canadian Mennonite Bible College⁴, which is now called Canadian Mennonite University or CMU and worked on a theology degree there and upon completing my coursework there I moved on to the University of Manitoba and received a bachelor of music degree as well as a bachelor of education degree. That rounds out my education. That’s all undergrad.

Troy: Do you have any professional organizations that you belong to?

Rick: I belong to the Manitoba Choral Association and the ACCC [“A triple C”] which is the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors, soon to be known as the Association of Canadian Choral Communities. That was just past this weekend in New Brunswick at a conference that I was attending.

Troy: They can keep the same initials then.

---

Rick: They can keep the same initials, but they’re giving more autonomy to the local choral associations.

Troy: Are you involved in musical activities outside of the school?

Rick: Yes, I do some solo work. I’m a tenor soloist, I do clinician work with various groups, and I do guest conducting. I’ve directed the Manitoba Provincial Honour Choir—the senior and the intermediate levels. I’ve directed the Westman Youth Choir, and this coming fall I’ll be directing the Central Manitoba Youth Choir.

Troy: That is neat. That kind of gets publicity for this school then too a little bit.

Rick: To some degree, for me it’s just being part of a broader community and connecting with other singers and other organizations across the province. I’m sure it does to some extent have an impact on the school, but it’s more a personal development for me: keeping things fresh.

Troy: What was this school looking for when they were looking for a music teacher? When you got the job here, what were they looking for?

Rick: They were looking for someone to take over their choral department and band program as well. They were looking for someone with a background more in choral music and with a background in sacred music, congregational music, and to have someone come from a Mennonite background because we are Mennonite Collegiate Institute. They were also looking for someone to give leadership to their band program, but that was not the focus of the job but was a component of it. The workload was to look after the choirs, the band, and also to direct a musical. Those are sort of the job assignments. I’m not sure if you were looking for more than that.
Troy: Is there more that you could say about that?

Rick: They asked a lot of questions about my faith background and they asked questions about worship, and my musical background.

Troy: What kind of questions did they ask about, like your faith background?

Rick: That was ten years ago. That’s a very good question. I think they asked questions about tell us about your faith journey, what has that looked like, your church experience, your relationship to Christ, how your faith impacts your daily walk, those sorts of things. I think they might have asked some questions about my theology.

Troy: Were they looking for somebody who was confessionally Anabaptist?

Rick: Yes. That’s a very good way of putting it, yeah.

Troy: It fits in with the mission statement then.

Rick: Yeah, right.

Troy: How long have you been here?

Rick: Ten years. This is my tenth year.

Troy: You mentioned the repertoire that you were doing, or that the school was looking for. What repertoire? Is there anything in particular that you’ve done that you would like to mention? What types of pieces are popular or staples?

Rick: What I try to do is create a healthy choral diet for the students that exposes them to many different styles of music in terms of genres throughout the ages, getting good representation that way, but also music from around the world, and new music that is being written. I’m trying to really expose students to a variety of music to prepare them for a world that is very diverse, that has many traditions,
and to see the beauty in other traditions. (I also want them) to know the beauty of one’s own tradition and the place that our own Mennonite music making has in that greater picture. I have a few staples that are sort of always present in my programming. That would involve doing something from our Gesangbuch or from the Kernlieder, which is sort of traditional Mennonite congregational music. I would put in some music we would broadly categorize as classical, but perhaps something from Renaissance, the Baroque era, or Classical, Romantic: I try to get a good sampling of that. Usually present is also a good gospel spiritual, some ethnic music, I love African music that gets students moving and teaches them some choreography. Contemporary pieces that can be so varied and diverse in nature take up all your recording time here, but it’s mainly sacred music. We do try to do some secular works as well, some folk songs, and that sort of thing. I also have a vocal jazz group that sings of course vocal jazz and pop arrangements. That group tends to be more secular in nature.

Troy: Fun music?

Rick: I think it’s all fun music, but it’s just again exposing them to yet another style of music.

Troy: This probably relates to what you’ve already said and if you think you’ve already answered it, just let me know. How does the repertoire relate to the mission of the school?

Rick: Well our goal as a school is that students accept Jesus Christ as Lord. Our expression of that is through leadership and service in the world and also that our students get a really well-rounded education: aesthetically, physically,
emotionally, and all that. The music fits into the mission statement, by virtue of it being sacred and balanced in terms of different components of worship such as praise, confession, benediction and all of that. All of those components I think bring our students into a closer relationship with Christ. Worship does that. Worship draws you closer to your Creator and through the repertoire that we choose, through the church services we sing in, students are broadened, and are given a language of worship.

In terms of the service part of our mission, our choirs aren’t meant just for the school body, but the choir is meant to share their music making and their message with others. We go around the province and sing for others, for our church constituencies, at festivals, and with other groups. Hopefully through that experience, they then upon graduation continue to share and plug into a church setting or choir setting or whatever and continue to use their gifts. Aesthetically speaking, that’s one component of our mission statement—students be exposed to aesthetic things. Music is aesthetic in nature, so I feel there’s a really good fit with our mission statement and implementation of it through our music program.

Troy: Do you have any traditional favorites? Any names of favorites?

Rick: Every Christmas we sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” from the Messiah and we also do a beloved Christmas favorite called Der Friedensführst.

Troy: Is there music you will not do?

Rick: Absolutely. There are pieces that ethically and morally don’t line up with the school’s mission, we don’t sing them: songs that are risqué nature or that are sexually implicit. Having said that, it is a bit of a tough balancing act because
there are some pieces that might be perceived as not lining up with our mission statement, but show the cruel reality of the world. You try to discern what makes sense and what communicates reality, but at the same time doesn’t compromise who you are as a school. Songs that would glorify violence, glorify drinking, or any you know things like that. That’s a very simplistic way to look at it, but obviously it’s a pretty easy decision to make. You know there might be some other songs or say even the musical, *Les Mis*. There’s some disturbing scenes in there of prostitution, of drinking, of broken lives, and those things don’t line up with our mission obviously, but they are the reality of the world and something that the Church needs to be aware of. The fact that art has duality and that you know there’s the goodness and hope of God, but there’s also the broken nature of humanity. We don’t want to be in denial about those things and cover them up, but want to acknowledge their presence in a context that provides hope and redemption for all.

**Troy:** What role do music performances, like you had mentioned earlier the tours, concerts, festivals, chapel, and music theater, what role do music performances play in your school, and how often do they occur?

**Rick:** The role of the performance is to share the music making that has been going on in rehearsal. Music that just lives within the rehearsal setting is then just an academic procedure and we want to make it connect with others. One of my groups is called Resonate, that’s a vocal jazz group, but I like to use our philosophy with that group with the whole music program. Our goal is to resonate with one another, to resonate with audiences, to resonate with God our
Creator, and to tie those together. So through that, the concert is a pretty essential piece of resonating with others, connecting, and that sort of thing. How often, we have some main concerts that happen throughout the year. The first one is the fall concert and happens in October. We have Christmas concerts, two of them in December, and we do a yearend Sängerfest in June that involves a morning worship service and an afternoon concert. Our Chamber Choir and Resonate sing in five itinerations which are church services where we lead worship and also attend Manitoba ChoralFest. We often go to the Canadian Rocky Mountain Festival in Banff, Alberta, and we will do collaborations as well and join with other school groups, institutions, or choirs. We’ve connected with university groups, with other high schools, with elementary schools, with community choral groups, and so it makes for a pretty busy yet fulfilling year.

Troy: Sounds that way. You’ve already kind of alluded to what role the performances play in the community. That’s to connect?

Rick: Yes, in fact, to share our music with joy, and to hopefully inspire people by the music that they hear to become better people and to just get a glimpse of the beauty that God offers to us all, to come into contact with that.

Troy: Has this changed over the years, performances and the role they played?

Rick: I’d say it’s pretty consistent. Our performances are also based on the necessity that our school needs to have a voice within the community and people need to know that we exist. We offer a residential program at MCI and we are a private school, so we receive partial funding from the government. The rest of it then comes through tuition and through donations, so we need to get ourselves out into
the community so that people know we exist. So that our resource engine can operate, we need students here at the school. If we don’t have students, then we shut down as a school. The choir plays a pretty significant role. We want to be careful that’s not the choir’s only role. Our choir isn’t just about sales and marketing, that’s one component. More so, it’s about sharing their music with others, connecting with people, providing times of worship, and providing times of music that bring people together. That transform people and people are better for it. I don’t think that has changed through my tenure at MCI, nor has that changed throughout the years. I’m not the only director that has worked here and that’s stayed pretty consistent.

Troy: Have the ensembles themselves, like the choral ensembles, have they stayed pretty much the same over the years?

Rick: They have transformed a little bit. Our Concert Choir is our largest group and at one time that was a mandatory choir. Everyone had to be in it and during my time that’s changed slightly. There’s been a little more of an opt out policy where, through communication between student and director, we determine whether or not it’s best for everyone’s best interest that person participate in choir or not. For many it’s just something they feel very uncomfortable with or just are unwilling to be a part of and when that starts to compromise the group experience, then it’s best for everyone that that person not participate. We strongly encourage everyone to be in it, but some choose not to. It’s a small percentage. Out of a school of 145, we have 130 students in that choir. It’s still very well attended and gives students the basics of choral singing and just introduces them to that world.
Our Chamber Choir is a roughly a 40 voice audition choir—soprano, alto, tenor, bass. That has been pretty consistent for the last 20 years. I think that it sometimes fluctuates whether it includes grade 9 or not, right now it’s currently at grade 10 to 12, but has not always been the case. Our vocal jazz group, Resonate, used to be called the MCI Vocal Ensemble and that was offered to grade 10 and 12 students. That group has probably changed the most. We’ve moved from singing just sort of a cappella to singing on a sound system. That’s partially due to the province of Manitoba and educational curriculum for vocal jazz that requires a group to sing on a sound system. We do it for more intrinsic reasons, not just the government told us. For some, vocal jazz just sounds better on a sound system. It also exposes our students to a different way of singing, which I feel is really important to give them all these tools. That group is currently grade 11 and 12 and the size has moved all over the place being as small as 12 to being as big as 18, so it really depends on the year and what I’m hoping to accomplish.

We’ve started a group over the last few years called the Junior Vocal Ensemble which is about the same size as Resonate, but is sort of an opportunity for younger students to sing a smaller ensemble environment and prepares them to be in Resonate one day. It also gives them that opportunity to be more independent and sing with fewer voices around you. Those are our four choral groups and we also have a band here at the school. That has changed too. I think it was started in the 1980s and the size has fluctuated throughout the years. I directed it for five years and then for one year it wasn’t even in existence. We experimented with some ensemble work and then Marilyn Houser Hamm came
on staff and started a sort of a grade 9-10 band and that has grown in size and now
is offered throughout grades 9 to 12. It is about 30 students in size.

Troy: What kind of repertoire does that group do?

Rick: The band?

Troy: Yeah.

Rick: Your standard concert band repertoire. You’ll have to talk to Marilyn more about
that.

Troy: Let’s go down to number six here. I have 11 questions including number six.

Rick: Okay.

Troy: What is your philosophy of music education? If you think you’ve answered this
already, that’s okay.

Rick: I should give you my written philosophy that I have just to highlight a few things.

My philosophy of music education is that it’s for everyone. Everyone can learn to
make music. The degree of success they experience will be based on interest and
natural ability as well. I strongly believe that everyone can do it and teach out of
that, so that’s why we offer Concert Choir open to everyone: we don’t make
distinctions. It’s very welcoming. I also believe, however, that students who
show interest and ability should be given a chance to really plumb the depths of
their abilities and to strive for excellence. That piece to me is terribly important,
that students be given the opportunity to explore their God given potential in the
realm of music. We try to provide that for our students and to encourage
excellence. Not at all costs, that’s not the ultimate goal of music, but to give them
that opportunity. I’ve probably talked about this, but to expose students to a wide
variety of musical styles. I think I’ve talked about that, so I won’t talk about that.

For me, connecting music making to one’s own personal growth I feel is really important. They don’t happen in isolation, but as a person grows personally, that affects their music making and vice versa. There’s that interplay between the two that I feel is integral to students learning music. Students learning music isn’t just about making beautiful noises, but it’s about music being transformational. It’s about music being a gift from God that allows us to express ourselves in ways we wouldn’t normally be able to do. It takes us to new and exciting places and connects us to different communities, ethnicities, and cultures. I try to paint that picture for our students and execute it in a way that provides a meaningful experience for all.

Troy: So that does relate to the mission of the school then too?

Rick: Yeah.

Troy: That was my next question: how does this relate to the mission of the school? Has music education changed with the influence of teaching philosophies? So like any Orff influence, Kodály, or Dalcroze? Is there anything like that?

Rick: I have taken some Orff. I have my Level 1 Orff from the University of Manitoba. I don’t know if I go with any school of thought it terms of Kodály, Orff, Suzuki, or whatever. I try to expose myself to the best choral conductors in at least Canada through going to workshops and festivals. I’ve encountered really choral conductors from all over the world. I’m not in the position to seek them out, basically I benefit from those who come to our province. Through working with some of these choral masters, I try to implement their techniques, I take what
works in my setting, and then try to discern what suits my style as well. Certainly my influences have been local conductors: George Wiebe at CMBC, Rudy Schellenberg at CMBC, and Henry Engbrecht from the University of Manitoba are all profs of mine. Ed Hildebrand from Steinbach who taught at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School and he’d be another strong influence.

(Other) names that I’ve encountered since graduating: Scott Leithead from Edmonton, an innovator of choral music in our country, connecting so many concepts, and connecting communities and whatever. I’m rambling a bit, but just his philosophy of music has really rubbed off on me and so many others. There are countless names. This year alone at the Rocky Mountain Festival, John Trepp and Richard Nase had a strong impact on what we do here. I don’t know if that is of any benefit to you, but I try to expose myself to the broader choral world and bring that into what we do here.

Troy: Okay.

Rick: So you will have heard many Mennonite names in there, and also others that aren’t connected to the Mennonite community officially. A friend is a friend and that connects us. A lot of informal sort of connecting is the way. It’s not a certain style or brand of music education.

Troy: You’ve kind of alluded to this one, the next one: has music education had an impact on the community?

Rick: Absolutely. It can’t not. If it is not having an impact on the community, then there’s no reason to do what you do. We have created an arts community in southern Manitoba through the construction of Buhler Hall which is our
performing arts facility. It was designed for the natural human voice so that choral music would have a venue that would give voice to the beautiful sounds that are created. Through that we have about 10,000 people coming onto our campus each year, not to just hear our choirs, but to hear other arts events, concerts, activities, or whatever is coming. In a way we sort of feel like we are the stewards of some of the arts activity in this area and as a result it’s allowed us to make really neat connections. We’ve brought in artists that have helped do fundraising for cancer organization, Janina Fialkowska is a world class pianist, and for the South Central Cancer Resource Centre she was able to raise $2000 dollars. We’ve had numerous events that have been fund raisers for local organizations. We’ve had workshops, we’ve had schools come here to sing with us; to sing with facilitators and clinicians. There’s our own concerts through MCI where the comments alone, and some of the tears in some of the eyes of the listeners (are apparent) after you’ve really touched them with a certain piece. It changes people and it does connect with the community. I think that’s our goal: we want to connect with each other as a choir, with our audience, and with God. If we can keep those things in balance, we’re doing our job.

Troy: What are some of the schools that have been here?

Rick: A huge list. Schools come to perform at our chapels. They want to perform in a music friendly facility and so often they’re not. I will answer your question with specifics, but I just want to give a little bit more background that we have sports facilities all over our province, beautiful sports facilities, and then we expect our music groups to perform in those sports facilities such as gymnasiums or arenas.
Although there’s some nice churches that sing well, there’s not enough of them. Our mission was to create that environment, either for choral music, singing, or instrumental. So as a result, schools call us to perform in this environment because it’s rare. We’ve had the high school in Altona, W. C. Miller; Winkler, Garden Valley Collegiate; and Morden, Morden Collegiate Institute (another MCI). We’ve had schools from Winnipeg (Westgate Mennonite Collegiate). We’ve had a school from Saskatchewan (Rosthern Junior College). Rosthern, Westgate, and MCI are all part of an association of Mennonite schools. That’s just to name a few. I don’t know if I have statistics, I could probably find it, but numerous schools have come through. St. John’s-Ravenscourt from Winnipeg—another private school. And then through our choral workshop days, we’ve had numerous schools from the southern Manitoba, central Manitoba region coming. So schools alone, yeah lots.

Troy: How would you describe the status of music education at your school? So for example, feeder schools, enrollment, those kinds of things.

Rick: Feeder school?

Troy: Yes, what are the schools from where the students come from?

Rick: Okay, feeder schools. Well we have students coming from all across Manitoba and ultimately across Canada and the world. We would have students coming from western Manitoba as far as Brandon and Boissevain, which doesn’t take you quite up to the Saskatchewan border, but you’re well on your way. We have students coming from as far east as Steinbach. We’ve had students from Dominion City and that area, students coming from as far north as Churchill,
Manitoba, and as far south as Gretna. We’re right on the border, so we have a smattering of students from all over the place. The majority of our students do come from the Gretna, Altona, Winkler, Morden area which is sort of a catchment area and many of them will drive in daily. Now you’re asking the question what’s music like in these communities? Or what the role of music is here at our school?

Troy: Now we’re looking at status of music education here.

Rick: At MCI?

Troy: At MCI. I mean the feeder school’s the one aspect of it, what are you getting in? How about enrollment-wise, how has that gone up or down?

Rick: Our school enrollment?

Troy: Yeah.

Rick: This is not really a music question, but more just the makeup of the school.

Troy: We could make it specific to the music program.

Rick: First I will answer enrollment. That’s fluctuated throughout the years. The year before I was teaching at MCI which was as low as 115, it’s been as high as 165, currently it’s 145. It moves up and down. We’re trying through recruitment efforts to stabilize that and sort of have it more consistent, but anywhere from 115 to 165. It’s been all over the map. In terms of the role of music in our recruitment, if that’s a good way to frame this question, some students do come specifically for the music program. To what degree it’s hard to say, but I think that does factor into their decision. It’s more than that, we as a school aren’t just about our music program. It’s a holistic program that offers residence programs, sports, fine arts opportunities, student council, and academics. Our music is one
part of a broader package. I think that usually with high school students it’s often about relationships as well and are there going to be people that I can connect with and will I connect more with people here or in my home community. For many students it is a risk. Our music program, however, is probably one of the most prominent programs at MCI. In terms of the students themselves, 130 out of 145 students suggests that it is well subscribed. In terms of the culture of the school, it’s a prestigious thing to be in the choirs and it’s looked upon favorably. Students don’t need to feel as if they’re in choir and are embarrassed about it. It’s a thing that they are proud of and it’s cool to be in the choirs.

Troy: How about curriculum-wise, are there any considerations for the school as far as music curriculum goes?

Rick: The curriculum that the province puts out is very loose so it gives us a lot of freedom to investigate music. In terms of curriculum I basically make my own curriculum, and it’s based on sort of the principles that I talked about before. Manitoba doesn’t have a strong curriculum that way, so it gets left up to the individual. There’s a new jazz curriculum that has been helpful. That sort of guides Resonate to some degree.

Troy: Is that that model of the butterfly? Is that the one that you use or is that more for elementary?

Rick: Butterfly?

Troy: The one that I’ve seen is that it has musical performance in the middle of the body, it has the four wings of the butterfly, and then it has different performance aspects and creating aspects.
Rick: Oh wow, I haven’t seen that.

Troy: I can send that to you if I find that in a website. It is something with the Manitoba Music Arts Curriculum.

Rick: What I try to do is to create some basics. Lately the emphasis in Manitoba has been to go through different stages of learning. It’s “of learning,” “as learning,” and “for learning.” So “of learning” is what are we actually going to learn and setting objectives with your students. So for example in a choral setting it would be about breath management, about tone, about blend, and shape. These are the things we are going to work on. Rhythm, that’s “of learning.” Then “as learning” is the process, giving feedback to your students on route. I try to do individualized voice tests, but they’re more coaching sessions where we talk about what they’ve learned, we talk about objectives, how we’re meeting the objectives, and I try to give them feedback and tips that help move the learning process along. It’s not just about that final product, it’s how you get there, getting tips and suggestions. We are sort of collaborating. “For learning” is sort of more the traditional idea of education in the past, the final product. Music is never a final product, but just try to create some evaluation that encapsulates the “of” and “as learning” into a final product. The final, and we still give numbers here, but it’s more the process rather than the final result. That has had an impact in my teaching and on my evaluation of students. I try and incorporate those ideas and notions that music is a process.

Troy: You talked about autonomy, that you’re pretty much free to do (what you want to do).
Rick: There’s a lot of freedom. Within a choral setting the course has to be about choral music.

Troy: Scheduling, about how much time do you get with students?

Rick: I’ll just go through the groups. Concert Choir, I meet with them three times throughout the week with half an hour each rehearsal. Chamber Choir meets for an hour two to three times a week depending on how the schedule works. Resonate is about the same, about two hours a week. Junior Vocal Ensemble is two hours a week.

Troy: Is it an independently funded school?

Rick: Yeah, partially funded by the government. The majority of our money comes from tuition and we do have donations that also help to round things off.

Troy: You’ve talked about the choral programs and instrumental programs. Facilities, you’ve talked about that. How about like equipment or music library?

Rick: We have an extensive music library with over 1,300 pieces of choral music, that’s just talking titles. We have a lot of band repertoire as well. I’m given a budget of about four to $5000 dollars a year to spend on choral music, but also other things, the other costs we incur and uniforms and whatever.

Troy: It goes fast.

Rick: It does go very fast. In terms of equipment, we’re always trying to buy equipment for the band and choir programs: things like sound system and Resonate with the use of mikes. We always have costs incurred by that. Our musical has also become very big. We’ve done some very large shows in Buhler Hall which
enables us to do that. A lot of equipment purchases have been made there: headsets, suspended mikes, you know that sort of thing.

Troy: What does the future of the music program look like?

Rick: I think the future looks very bright. Students love to sing. It’s something inherent in not just students, but people like to sing. I think they’re just not always given the opportunity and there’s a lot of stigma around singing and people have had bad experiences with singing that have impacted their response to it later in life. Sadly enough, there are few programs that really give voice to that. Southern Manitoba is doing reasonably well, but a lot of schools just don’t have singing programs. So in terms of our own program, I think there will always be kids that want to sing. If we can just get the word out to them that we’re doing it, you know they hopefully join us on our journey. I’m excited about the future here at MCI because I feel that music never ends and there’s always something to explore. I feel the day when I explore every realm of music, I don’t know if that day will ever come.

In terms of my energy and where I want to take the program, I have a really clear vision of where I want to take the kids and that’s to take them to a point where they can be more transparent through music making and experience more of who they are and share more of who they are with others. If that happens, then I think the music making here will have a really long life. As soon as the music making becomes product oriented and it becomes about us trying to be the best, then I think that will be to our demise. I think it’s so well connected to what we do as a school with our other programs and in the mission that I feel
that singing will continue to be vibrant here. In terms of choirs in churches, like that’s not happening as much as it used to, so I feel the work that we do here is so important because it’s not happening outside the school systems as much as it used to. It still is, but to a much lesser degree. People are very busy now and so that community choir, that church choir that used to happen you know even 50 years ago is just not a reality any more. I feel that it makes sense with our setup and structure as a school that we’ll just keep working with that and try to just be really innovative and find new ways of expressing ourselves through music.

Troy: Do you have any memorable stories that you would like to share?

Rick: There’s many. I don’t think I have time, but there’s many, many memorable experiences. For me, there’s the mountain top experiences of us performing at the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall to over 1000 people and just the applause of us singing the songs that have been at the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools. Interestingly enough, I didn’t conduct the concert that my choir was singing in because I had a collapsed lung. I had been gone for a few weeks and came to this concert where my students from across this concert hall saw me and they just yelled out my name and they came running. It was so overwhelming to have these young people be so concerned about me and then to hear them sing on stage, it was almost like an out of body experience just to see them perform and that they didn’t need me. It was late in the year; I had done all my teaching, and there was a conductor filling in for me. They just went with it and they took the initiative. It just sent the tingles up my spine being able to hear my own group, but to objectively hear them from a distance. That was really a special moment
because sometimes you get so tunnel-visioned that it’s hard to see the bigger picture. I have a lot of personal connections with students: students just coming from a bad situation and coming here and finding their voice musically, but also personally as a person. You know, I’ve had some tear felt conversations of how much they appreciated their time here. That makes the job really worthwhile. Sorry, those are a few. There’s many, many more I don’t have time to tell, there’s not much time.

Troy: Would you like to make any final comments quickly?

Rick: My goal as a teacher of choral music is to also be a student of choral music. I demand a high level of dedication from my students to learn this craft, to be singers that really do their homework and work hard, and I put that on myself as well. I want to keep learning and not just settle into one way of doing things, but to keep pushing that envelope and find new ways to be innovative. Lately it’s been more to explore movement within the framework of singing and choreography, and whether that means me doing it or bringing other resource people in, I have found that that its’ been a real joy staying away from that awful “c” word of complacency. It just makes the job really exciting and I think it makes our program exciting. I want to continue with that and hopefully our students will get something out of it. I think they do, but you don’t always know. That’s I think as a program here at MCI, that’s our goal: to make it an experience where individuals can come together and be part of an organization that’s bigger than themselves.

Troy: Sure.
Rick: Together we’re stronger, united we’re stronger, and all that sort of thing.

Mennonite music making has really gone through a transition in the last number of years. With hymnody being a very strong element of the Mennonite Church and choirs being a strong component as well, that’s changed, and we’re in a world now that is more diverse. There’s different styles of music that are making their way into our churches and I want to approach the change that happens in our world with arms open. I don’t want to be resistant to it. I want to hold on to the things that are of the utmost essence to who we are, our faith and our God, and we have a strong peace theology, our importance of church community, and these basic foundations of the church. I don’t want to ever change them, but the way we express them will have to change. If we don’t, we’ll implode on ourselves, so we will continue to recognize the musical tradition that has come, but we will also move forward with it. That can be a bit of a controversial way of looking at music making here for some and I think that’s a pretty small group. If we move forward from here on end with that openness, if we can pass that on to our students, I think that is what God would want us to do. We need to recognize the diversity of this world and also recognize the uniqueness of where we’ve come from. Trying to put those things in balance is basically what we are trying to do here. The way we might do things might change, but the spirit of how we do things hopefully won’t.

Troy: Is it safe to say that the changes that do occur are strongly rooted in the faith?

Rick: Absolutely, that can’t change. The faith can never change, but the way you express it has to. Yeah. Thank you very much.
Troy: You’re very welcome. Thank you.

Rick: Hope this helps you and all the best.

Troy: Thank you.
Appendix D

Rick Heppner Mueller Interview 2

Rick Heppner Mueller, 19 June 2008, at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna

Troy: One of the questions that I would like to look into is when you’re choosing repertoire, like some of the things that you’ve chosen this past year, I was wondering how much of it is aesthetic consideration, how much of it is textual, that you choose things by text, is there a balance like sometimes do you choose things just because of their text and not because of their aesthetic value or vice versa?

Rick: Right. I think it would be a combination. When I choose repertoire I try to choose it from an educational standpoint so that I’m really giving a wide variety of music from all sorts of different genres and time periods. That’s a big consideration. That would be an aesthetic thing because different genres sound very differently. Text would certainly play into that as well. It would have to have good text, sort of good poetry, and one of the priorities of our program is to get the choir out into the churches, so then that means coming up with a worship service order. I try to find pieces that would work well into a worship service, and what I usually try to do is create themes and then with those themes create different sections within the service that would address certain things. It would always need something that was very praise-oriented, sort of a call to worship, to
bring the congregation into that time of worship. A benediction song is standard fare as well. Based on sort of the themes that I’ve sort of chosen ahead of time, well sometimes I choose it ahead of time. Sometimes it works out where there’s some music that I’m looking at and then I sort of see, “Oh, this theme is coming through the texture and through the fabric of the music,” and so weave them together. That would be a pretty large consideration of how I choose music as well. The worship service is very text based. My starting point is always trying to just find this wide variety of music that spans the ages and then from there I’ll sort of weave something together.

Troy:  Could you give some examples of themes?

Rick:  I probably still have them on the computer. This year the theme was “Can You Hear?” and that was the title of one of the songs that we’ve sang. It was about highlighting the injustices that are happening to children around the world and it’s sung from the perspective of a child. The question is, “Can you hear my voice; can you hear my pain; can you hear my struggles?” and all that. That is not a sacred text, but I think something that as a Mennonite church we’re convicted to act socially in the world and to live out the kingdom of God here on earth. That formed the basis, the focal point for the services, and then from there we chose music around that. I also chose “Find the Cost of Freedom” which again is a secular tune by Crosby, Stills, and Nash. It talks about the futility of war, and it’s based on a visit to a civil war cemetery. It seemed like those two songs related well in highlighting the injustices that happened in the world, the futility of war, and the loss of life. I wanted to just have the congregation just sit with our reality
and then from there with the other songs, through the scriptures, and through the message look at how God can work through all of that—through the despair and through the hardships of the world. We choose songs that would contrast with hope. I know we did a song “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” It is a spiritual right so it talks about delivering Daniel from the lion’s den, talks about I think Moses, and you know just various struggles. Then I choose hymns around that as well. This year our call to worship song was “All That Hath Life and Breath Praise Ye the Lord” (which is René Clausen) as a benedictory song. That’s one year’s example.

Troy: So is it kind of like you have a worldly problem, the Christian answer, is it kind of like that?

Rick: To some extent, like that was just this year. Yeah, I think it’s just integrating our faith into life and into what’s going on in the world, and essentially it’s a message of hope.

Troy: Kind of like an answer to a question?

Rick: I don’t know if it’s that simple, because sometimes there’s more questions that arise when one relies on faith, but I guess to some extent it would be that. That’s not always the case. It won’t always be like that, but that sort of scenario.

Troy: So it kind of shows maybe the practicality of faith?

Rick: Sure, yeah, to some extent.

Troy: Are there any criticisms of that type of approach to forming a program? What is the reaction to the music or do different generations perceive music differently?
Rick: Are you talking thematically the way the worship service is constructed or the choice of my repertoire?

Troy: Choice of the repertoire.

Rick: Choice of the repertoire. There’s always some form of criticism because music is so very personal, and people have their own tastes and their own dislikes. When it comes to music selection I try to listen to the voices out there, but at the same time I don’t try to let it ultimately control my decisions. So is there criticism? Absolutely, people are always plugging what they want. I get lots of comments about I’d like to see more of this type of song; I’d like to see more of that. It’s usually mixed in with a lot of encouragement as well, but you know it’s not even a generational thing. Sometimes I find it’s a personality thing. Different personalities like different types of music. A young person could want more classical music just as an older person would. One comment that I do get a lot is from our older supporters is that they’d like to hear more of the German hymns. That’s always a consideration for me, and I always do one a year. The students don’t have a lot of connection to those hymns, but I still want to expose them to it. If I would do too many, I would soon lose their goodwill. That’s not entirely true: I usually do two. I always do one at Christmas and one for the rest of the year or whatever. We might even do another song in German that’s not a hymn, but classically related. This year we did “Verleih uns Frieden” by Mendelssohn and Christmas time we did “Leise rieselt die Schnee.” At the end for one of our fundraising banquets we did “So nimm denn Meine Hände.” We also did the hymn, “Liebe, die du mich zum Bilde” (from) the *Gesangbuch*. 339
Troy: I’ve heard about the Gesangbuch.

Rick: The Gesangbuch was a very important worship resource throughout the twentieth century. A lot of the songs here are from the Russian Mennonite tradition; although, many of them are not written by Mennonites. I don’t know if any of them are. That’s certainly part of the tradition as I’m sure you know. We can get you a copy of the hymn as well if that’s helpful.

Troy: Okay. Thank you.

Rick: You were wanting to know more about if there were critiques or criticisms?

Troy: Of the repertoire.

Rick: Of the repertoire, yeah. So I’ll get that angle. I’ll get some people that would like to see more classical music. Just the other day someone said that they’d like to see more Bach in our programming. Bach is very hard on the voice and hard for high school singers to do well, so I’ll often choose lighter music from the Baroque era or Renaissance, just sort of lighter motets. Buxtehude works well and so does Giuseppe Pitoni; his stuff is quite nice. There’s another one that I did this year that was really good, Hans Leo Hassler. Bach is very demanding and it sits very high for the men. You’ve got to be careful. I have done Bach with the choir and there are some things that you can do. At the same time, you can’t please everybody and you also want to keep current. I want to keep current with my music selection. I want to do what’s being written right now and not just sing music of the past, so there’s just great music being written from all sorts of places all over the globe by great composers. I like to do world music and like to do new compositions.
Mia Makaroff is sort of a new favorite composer of mine. She’s from Finland and she writes a lot of music that’s performed by a vocal group called Rajaton. We usually do a Mia Makaroff song each year. That’s been a neat development. South African freedom songs—such a great way to get high school students singing, just singing out and projecting. I like to add that into the music. I think those types of songs are well received. As long as that music is done in a context that acknowledges our musical history and tradition, most people don’t have a problem with it. There are those that would like us to just do German hymns and that’s just unrealistic within my given context.

Other criticisms, I like to choose a song or two that has choreography and when I first started doing it I think it sort of turned a few heads. I don’t know if they necessarily appreciated it. I think they found it a bit striking, a bit showy, but it’s not intended to be glitzy and showy. It’s not intended to be a spectacle. It’s intended to engage the audience so that they really connect with the music. If we can connect on different aesthetic levels and appeal to the visual sense as much as to the ear, I feel that we can do a better job of communicating the music and the message of the song whatever that message may be. I think the community has adjusted to it and I think they really enjoy it. Other than that, most people really like the music. They like it when there’s upbeat stuff. They like the gospel, the African American gospel. I’m not talking about the sort of the gospel country songs; although, that’s loved as well. I am talking about the African sort of the gospel music that is very rhythmic and sort of has a rhythm and blues sound to it.
Troy: A little bend to the voice.

Rick: That’s right; lots of clapping and moving around. I’d say that pretty much summarizes the criticism that I would get.

Troy: So with something like “Minoi, Minoi,” was that well received?

Rick: I think so. Again, I don’t always hear what people are thinking. But “Minoi, Minoi” had choreography and judging by the applause at the end, they love it. I think once we had the choreography in place it was better received than when we just sang the song, but it has some unique cultural characteristics to it like also these glottal closes: e te, e te, e te. It’s novel and it’s different, and people like that. It all depends on who our audience is. Parents love all that sort of music, specifically world music and sort of newer compositions. Our older supporters would probably not connect with it as much, but that’s also a personality thing. Some older supporters love it when we do this wide variety of music. I want to be careful. I don’t want to say that it’s just a generational thing. In many cases it’s just personal preference and I want to acknowledge that.

Troy: Did you get a chance to perform “Minoi, Minoi” without choreography?

Rick: We sang it a number of times without choreography.

Troy: Who did you get to choreograph it?

Rick: Her name is Jeanette Hefner. She lives in Winkler (Manitoba). She has worked at MCI before and she helps us with our musicals. She has a dance background and a drama background. I like to bring her in at least once a year to help with a song and just to give it some movement. Last year she actually came in and helped us do “You’re the One that I Want” from Grease. That was a Chamber Choir song
that she came in and it was very fun. We did it at Sängerkfest. Grease is the sort of musical that I wouldn’t do at MCI. I don’t think the themes in there resonate with what we stand for as a school, but yet it’s still a fun show and students have been asking me to do it for years. I thought this was a healthy compromise: let’s do one song. I asked her to do “Minoi, Minoi” and she researched, came in, and had all these movements. She comes in for one class and then I videotape what she teaches the choir. From there I do the finishing. Students need to move and feel the music, so that’s why I do that.

Troy: Did the movement just accompany the music or did it stand for something? I mean you definitely had masculine guys.

Rick: I think so. I think from Jeanette’s research, the choreography, the Samoan culture integrates singing and dancing all the time. Their movements, from what she found out, are very much related to common day experiences. You saw the men at some points rowing. I think in that culture the women were historically to be adored more, so their movements had more of that quality, more of that feminine sense of royalty.

Troy: Yeah, because it kind of looked like a Hawaiian hula.

Rick: Right, that’s all that South Pacific kind of culture. For our students, I want to expose them to that because we’re a global community now and we can’t just live in our own little worlds. We need to know what’s going on beyond our borders. We are to be a people of peace and I think when we understand other cultures better, I think that’s where unity comes from. It’s from the unknown, from fear of other cultures we get into conflict. I think this is just probably more symbolic
than anything. At least in some small way it exposes our students to what’s going on out there and maybe at some point later on in their life when they’ve seen another culture they might make a connection between their experience here. I don’t know if it always connects; I don’t know if it will change the world through this, but it certainly can’t hurt. Certainly within North America there’s even a diverse pallet of music and our students know from what they’re listening to on their IPods and their MP3 players: it’s anywhere from country, to rock, to thrash, to rap. So in terms of what we do musically within the church, we need to acknowledge our past and our history, but at the same time, we need to acknowledge what is going on around us. We can’t just stay within one sort of musical framework. To me, that just doesn’t acknowledge what’s going on in the world and it certainly doesn’t acknowledge what’s going on with our young people.

Troy: It was very fun to watch, very enjoyable, and it looked like a very rich experience. It looked like it was something that would be fun to participate in.

Rick: Absolutely.

Troy: I mean it was something that as just being in the audience it drew me in.

Rick: For some people it draws them in so that they’ll appreciate a style of music that they might not appreciate. The German hymns, that’s always a big point of contention because some people don’t like them at all. “Well that’s boring.” For others there’s “Minoi, Minoi”—“Well that’s just weird.” If you can really have a wide diversity of music, I think if people like a certain part of the program, it allows them to then appreciate other parts of it as well. The “Minoi, Minoi,”
music like that, it’s just important for me to get those students moving and having fun. If they’re enjoying a song, then it’s easier for me to say, “Okay, now we’re going to work on ‘Liebe, die du mich zum Bilde.’ Even though you can’t speak the language, it’s hard for you to pronounce, and it’s not as rhythmic as you might like it.” It’s the diversity, they like that, and they learn to appreciate these songs.

Troy: Is there anything else you want to say on that?

Rick: I don’t think so.

Troy: Are you an advocate of any of the different choral schools that are out there, like the Shaw school or the Christiansen school or any of those?

Rick: Christiansen school, is that in Sweden?

Troy: I was thinking Norwegian.

Rick: Norwegian, oh like Eric Ericson?

Troy: Some of that.

Rick: Those guys. No, I would certainly have influences. I think I would have influences to these schools second hand. Many of the conductors that I’ve studied with have studied also with Robert Shaw or have had exposure to him, so I’m sure I have had that impact me. I sang with Robert Shaw once and he was a proponent of rhythm, so I do implement some of his techniques. I use count singing from time-to-time. He was also focusing on music that was bound to the beat and music that was very metronomical. For some of the world music and the newer music, that has a little more stretch—more flex in terms of how you sing it rhythmically. I’m not sure if it comes into play as much there, but certainly for the standard repertoire that we do I would say Robert Shaw would have a large
influence. He was an absolute master and I remember him saying that his ears weren’t that good; although, they were certainly better than the average human, but he was a stickler for rhythm. I feel the same way: I love rhythm. Even in my sight-reading classes at university, it didn’t matter what rhythm they put in front of me I could figure it out. I do a lot of metronome work, a lot of count singing, and finding ways to get things to settle rhythmically. That, in turn, fixes a lot of your harmonic and tuning issues.

I would say in terms of a choral school, right now I think my influences would be Scott Leithead from Edmonton who directs a choir called Kokopelli. He’s a true innovator, and one of the mandates of his choirs is to perform new music and world music. A lot of my repertoire choices and rehearsal techniques would be influenced by Scott. He’s incredibly inspiring and early on in my teaching career I met him and it just set me in a direction that I just have not regretted. We’ve had him here working with our students once and he has such a positive way of interacting. He believes in the power of music. He believes in the power of working together and building people up. I would be from a school of thought now that would be that we are not just building singers, but we are building human beings, we’re building community, and we’re doing all these other things. If those things are happening alongside good music making, that’s when a choir really is effective. I encourage you to look him up on the internet or see them.

Kokopelli’s so sincere when they sing, it’s an absolute spiritual experience. It moves you to tears because they’re so authentic and that’s
combined with just fantastic musicianship. I think he’s still in his thirties, but he’s had a huge impact on at least the school choral community across the country. In Manitoba, I think there’s a number of us that work together trying to carry out that vision of building those choirs in a way that brings about these different aspects, not just the music, but everything. In Manitoba there’s a choir that’s similar to Kokopelli. It’s called Prairie Voices and is directed by Kristel Peters who is a graduate of MCI. The new music, the world music, and these types of groups are what I look to for inspiration because they’re the older age category. Kokopelli’s (has ages) 18-22, Prairie Voices is 18-25, but you always have to look to what do we as a high school choir aspire to and that’s sort of the next level up.

Elroy Friesen, who teaches at the University of Manitoba, has taught at Steinbach Christian High School which is an Evangelical Mennonite Church school. He’s now taken over the head choral duties at the University of Manitoba. He’s an influence as well to see what he does with his choirs and how he programs. He would be very much in line with Scott Leithead’s philosophy, so there’s been sort of a community that forms.

Vic Pankratz teaches at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg and he’s my former director, a great colleague, and a great friend. He would be a strong influence on how I do things as well. I don’t know what school of thought you would call that, I don’t have a title for it, but I think that influences me more than any of those big names that are out there. I continue to want to expose myself to the broader choral community and go to conferences and the like.
Another strong influence has been John Trepp who’s from Vancouver, British Columbia. He’s retired now, but I really have appreciated his approach to choral singing. He has different models of how to approach tone, blend, and shape. He’s been an influence as well. Henry Engbrecht, from the University of Manitoba is a former director of mine. He was a huge, huge influence and he would have been influenced by Robert Shaw who talked about him often.

Troy: Have you had any English school influence?

Rick: No, very little. I would have some contact as I sang with Simon Streatfeild one time. He directed the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra. Bramwell Tovey used to direct the WSO, so I’ve sang in choirs and smaller ensembles with him. That would be the extent of the English influence and they’re more symphonic directors than choral directors.

Troy: As far as pedagogically or anything, do you have any guidelines for directing, things that you would consider necessary as a director that you would recommend?

Rick: Okay, be a little more specific about that.

Troy: Do you have any pet peeves about directing? What should people do if they’re directing a choir? Some things that are essential?

Rick: What are the essential skills that a director needs? Well, first off, you have to have a pretty good sense of musicianship; although, I’m by no means the most musical person on the planet, but I have at least a decent working knowledge. You have to decent ears. You need to have a fairly decent grasp of the conducting gestures and you need to be somewhat articulate in how you
communicate what you want musically. I’m always amazed how gesture impacts the sound even at the high school level. You don’t think they would pick up on some of these subtleties, but they really do. A lot of it is just nonverbal, so if gesture doesn’t come naturally to you, you’re going to struggle. Hopefully then you’re very articulate. I think my gesture is better than the way I communicate verbally. I think I’m very average in terms of how I communicate, but some people are just masters with language and how they create images and metaphors. I don’t know if you necessarily have to have all of them, but you need to be able to communicate in a way that is effective, that inspires, and communicate in such a way that you are able to get your choir, your students, or whatever to buy into your vision and your vision has to be more compelling than their fear because that’s what prevents people from really giving themselves to a project is fear. “Oh, I can’t do that,” you know, doubt. If I would try, I might fail, and all of that sort of thing. Your vision needs to be more compelling than that and whether it’s through gesture, through the way you communicate, or maybe it’s just sheer energy or passion, but there needs to be a few things in place in order to make it work.

I think it’s pretty important that you have a strong love for people—a love for the individual and for the group as a whole. When you conduct a choir, it’s easy to see your choristers just as your puppets and they are so much more than that. To some extent, you can get a little bit on a power trip because what you’re doing is you’re controlling people and you’re getting them to act in a way that you’d like. It has to be so much more than that because you have to be very
sensitive to the individual that they’re giving you something and then you’re responsible for that. You can’t just exploit people for your own glorification. The glory is God’s alone, and to some extent, this is where Mennonites struggle: we struggle a bit with pride. I think what you want to create in your choristers is a sense that they’re proud of what they do and they’re happy to share it.

It’s not that they’re boastful or egotistical about it, it’s just they’re proud of it. I try to release my students to be proud of what they do, so how do you do that? You have to create a relationship with them so that they trust you. That again goes back to that fear thing. Your vision has to be more compelling than fear, well then they need to trust that means you have to have relationship with them. You can tell choirs that are fear-based where the director says do this or else. There’s a certain sense of humiliation or whatever. Musical groups can attain sort of a high technical level, but do you get that sense of authenticity when they communicate? For me it’s not just about excellence for the sake of excellence, it’s excellence with a sense of the excellence you see at the end (that) is a celebration of an experience that was real, it was connected with people, and grounded in a relationship. I feel that’s necessary. I’ve seen many conductors and certainly on the professional level I think that’s less the case, but professionalism covers up. I’m not working in a professional environment, so I can’t rely on professionalism.

I think I’m also influenced a bit by Marcus Buckingham, a social psychologist of sorts. I even have a book here where he talks about how you need to play to your strengths. As a conductor you need to find out what your strengths
are and play to those, then in terms of your weaknesses, you need to manage them. Don’t think of them as areas of opportunity. I don’t think there needs to be a set guideline for what a conductor needs. It’s sort of like there should be some strengths that you have in certain areas that relate to the choir field. If you’re tone deaf, that’s going to be hard to manage around, but if you’re a lousy conductor, your conducting gesture just doesn’t inspire the choir, and it’s going to be a challenge. It’s not like you have to have everything together. I know some directors who have a great ear where they articulate, but conducting gesture’s not so great. It still works because they’re so articulate and they’re able to communicate their message in a verbal way. It still works. I’ve found that you need to play to your strengths and manage around your weaknesses. Address your weaknesses, but Marcus Buckingham would say don’t see them as areas of opportunity. For example, I am not a very good piano player. I don’t think I could accompany a song. If I were to play, it would take me a long time. I have my Grade 6 Royal Conservatory. I have a general proficiency and I can play through all of my music by myself at my own tempo, but I rarely rehearse the choir from the piano. So how do I manage around that? That just means I have a pitch pipe, maybe we’ll do more a cappella singing, I’ll get a student, I’ll get Marilyn Hauser-Hamm to help us out, or we’ll break into sectionals. There’s no point in me spending hours at the piano, because I just don’t think that’s going to bear a lot of fruit. My passions lie more in finding good repertoire. Rather than me spending time at the piano, I should be on the internet, listening to CDs, or on the phone finding great music. I think another strength of mine is energy. I’m
passionate about what I do and I think I rehearse in a way that engages kids. I throw in some humor and stuff like that. That’s a strength; that gets something out of the choir musically. I think I’m really good with rhythm, so I try to work on rhythm a lot. Sight-reading, I’m not the greatest sight-reader in the world. I can certainly do it. I’ve done it for years in choirs. I’m okay at it, but it’s not my absolute strength so I’ve learned to manage around that. So then I listen to a lot of recordings. In terms of what does a conductor need, a conductor needs I think personal skills, they need passion, and there needs to be some inherent musical ability: the rest of it’s all open for discussion. You just have to find out what works for you and if you find something that works, then you focus on that. Try to address your weaknesses: I have addressed my piano playing. You know I have a certain level, but I’m not going to become an accomplished piano player by no means. I’ve passed all my proficiencies, but that’s just not my strength. I think I have a pretty good conducting gesture which makes up for at times perhaps an inability to communicate things verbally; although at times I can do that well. In terms of gesture, I’m always looking for input on gesture. That’s a good place for me to spend my time, because that’s where I’m going to grow the most is in those areas of strengths. I’m totally borrowing from Marcus Buckingham, but I’ve found that it’s been really good advice and I try to get my students to focus on that as well. People make it into the choir for different reasons: some because of their ear, some because they’re just really dedicated, and others because they just when they perform they light up the stage. You know they just move naturally. I’ve had students that pitch-wise you know it’s
okay but it’s not where I would like it to be, but there’s just a joy they emote when they sing is so powerful. That needs to be part of the group and that’s what they need to work on. It’s amazing when you work on a strength how that actually helps your weaknesses. I spend most of my time looking for good repertoire, rather than playing the piano, but what happens when I find a good piece of music? I play it on the piano. All of a sudden it’s not me working on my weakness it’s me trying to find good music, and in the meantime, my piano playing gets a little better. That’s sort of my philosophy.

Troy: I think you addressed this a little bit, but I had on here if you could describe the relationship between choir, music, and conductor. Do you think you’ve answered this already about relationship?

Rick: The relationship between?

Troy: Choir, music, and conductor.

Rick: Choir, music, conductor, yeah, I think the music forms the core of why the choir functions. What are we here to do? Well we’re a choir. We sing music. That music has to be excellent choral literature if that’s to be the purpose of what you’re doing. You have to believe in what the activity is, so if you’re giving them poorly composed music you know it can still work, but it’s not like you’re getting the most out of your group. You’re trying to find that music that just connects with their heart and soul and mind. At times they won’t recognize that at the beginning. At first glance they might not like a piece of music, but you’re trying to find music that has that long-term, lasting effect and appeal. That sort of forms
the core for at least the purpose: what are we here, what’s the activity? It’s not the be all, end all.

The relationship between the choir members has to be healthy so students need to get along. You try to foster that in a variety of ways: tours, activities, and just doing things together often builds community. At the high school level leadership dictates to some extent how that group will function. You need to be aware of what’s going on dynamically so their needs to be that relational aspect between you and your students to make the whole wheel turn. I’ll often talk to my students about how I’m a bit of a different person at times. It’s all context-related. When I’m directing choir in rehearsal, I act differently than I would one-on-one because I’m essentially having a dialogue with a forty voice entity, so I communicate differently to that entity. As the choir gets larger, we have a choir here of about 120 (students), my personality changes to match the personality of the group, and the bigger the group, the bigger your personality needs to be. That’s not very personal and it’s more of a teacher-driven scenario. I wish there was a way of getting around that, but it’s a challenge. There are different ways of addressing that and relationally, the smaller the group, the more personal I can be. What you try to do is outside of rehearsal. You try to connect with your students. We do musicals which helps with that, I do lunch duty where I’m dismissing tables, and we do a school retreat, things like that. You try to make connections with your students one-on-one and you make connections with some more than others. Again, that’s a personality thing. We’re all so very different and you naturally gravitate toward certain students and that will be perceived as
favoritism. I think we just have to acknowledge it for what it is. Everyone has favoritism then right; we all have our friends that we gravitate towards and that happens the same with teachers and students. This is sort of a friendship scenario to some degree, but it’s still a teacher, student friendship which is different and all of that. I feel it’s important that I need to connect with everyone. You have to be aware, “Hmm these are the students that I naturally connect with, I need to make sure I’m connecting with everyone.” The more you can do that, the more trust you build within your choir, and then when you are in these situations where there’s 40 (students), 60 (students), or 120 (students), when your personality changes to meet the size of the group, they still remember that you’re personable, approachable, and you’re a real person. You have to really keep those two in balance and you have to sort of gauge your organization and ask students where they’re at. I try to get input from students in these informal times: in the hall there’s three of them sitting having a chat, perfect opportunity just to say a few words. They don’t want you hanging around forever, but just a few words, just to catch up, what’s up, those sorts of things are really important.

I also try to do one-on-one testing throughout the year. I might change the name, because for me, it’s more just a touch base time where I get to talk with them and see where things are. I think the more that I take that test element out of it and just try to help them with their learning and give them suggestions, they really respond to that. With a group you kind of buildup equity. You know the more personal contact you have, the more equity you have with them then. You spend that currency that you’ve accumulated through the personal contact when
there’s a large group. If you’re not spending enough time with them individually and contact with them that way, you spend all of your currency, and you’ve got nothing left. That’s when you have to resort to these group management techniques that aren’t necessarily effective: raising your voice and all those sorts of things. It really is a balance because it could go the other way to where if you get too chummy with them, then it’s like you know it’s kind of like inflation [laughing]: you’ve given them all this money, but it’s not worth as much as you thought. I use all these financial metaphors. That’s an important piece, the relationship between chorister and director. You know how the students relate to one another, so you try to create situations that will create community. We do this on tours, even if it’s just going to a waterslide at the hotel. It’s huge. They can’t just do musical things together. It has to be broader, so if you’re in an environment that allows you to just do something else that’s lots of fun and that’s how it all works.

Troy: I have one more question for you. Does the church music influence the readiness to sing in the choir? For example, your students’ backgrounds, the churches that they belong to, does that help when they get to the choir here?

Rick: That’s a very good question. I don’t think it does as much as it used to. At one point, however, many years ago kids were singing in their churches and choirs. I think even in the 1970s and 1980s there were probably more youth choirs. From some churches they tell me they’ve got all this church music and I ask them when did you use it? Well, we had a youth choir back in the 1970s and 1980s and that
sort of thing. As the late 1980s and 1990s came, life just got really busy and the church became less of a focus in people’s lives.

I don’t know if it necessarily prepares them. I’ve had a few kids that don’t have much of a church background, but they’re really musical and gung-ho, but for some, it certainly does. Some have plugged in and I think it does help, so I would say yes it does help, but probably not as much as it used to. At the very least what it does do, is it allow you to get a certain amount of buy in. I think our students are still connecting with churches and I think when I talk about what we want to accomplish as a choir, in terms of our worship service, I think it connects with them. Musically maybe the churches aren’t having as strong an influence as they used to, but from a faith standpoint, a theological standpoint, and community standpoint, it still has helped for sure. It’s the church and the parents, they’re the ones that are shaping these children to a large degree, and the students we have here, they’re just gold, they’re wonderful to work with. Maybe the churches musically don’t have as strong an influence, but you’re still getting students with just great character.

Troy: Thank you very much.

Rick: You’re very welcome.

Troy: Is there anything else you want to add?

Rick: You know, I could go on forever so I’ll just wrap it up there.
Appendix E

Rudy Krahn Interview

Rudy Krahn, 28 June 2008, at home, Altona

Troy: I have several sets of questions. I can ask you either teacher’s questions or knowledgeable person questions. The knowledgeable person questions are just people that were involved with the community at one time or other and the teacher questions are more geared for current faculty. I might ask a little bit of a combination of questions. To begin with, what was your educational background and training?

Rudy: I acquired my first degree in musical education degree at Brandon University, then I added to that a regular education degree, and I added to that a Baccalaureate in Special Education. I also did in-services. I went to that place in Princeton, the choral place, Westminster. One summer I went down there for a couple of weeks.

Troy: Who was the teacher there? Was it James Jordan?

Rudy: No, the guy from Atlanta. He’s passed away since.

Troy: Robert Shaw?

Rudy: Robert Shaw. We had Alice Parker in the background. That was great.

Troy: What were some of your most memorable experiences there?
Rudy: I’ll have to admit having done a lot of Robert Shaw’s arrangements, having listened to his work on recording, to work with him was really phenomenal. I never knew a person could sing a whole tone in 12 equal steps, but he made us do it. The ear training was incredible. There was tremendous energy and a remarkable Christian spirit, absolutely remarkable.

Troy: What was his background?

Rudy: You know I honestly don’t know, but he spoke very openly of being a Christian. I think his father was a preacher if I recall correctly. I don’t know, what’s the most common denomination in Georgia, Southern Baptist?

Troy: I would guess that.

Rudy: That would probably be the most common one as far as I know.

Troy: I think in Georgia you’re gonna have some of that old English influence, so maybe one of those denominations.

Rudy: Maybe, I’m not familiar with them. That was a great two weeks.

Troy: Neat. Do you belong to any professional organizations?

Rudy: None other than the Manitoba Teachers’ Society. That would be the only one I belong to now.

Troy: How about when you were at MCI?

Rudy: I was so busy there I couldn’t belong to anything if I wanted to; although, that was a time when I was getting my second and third degrees. That was the time when I went down to Westminster in the summer time, so those were very busy years.

Troy: When you got the job, what was the school looking for?
Rudy: They were looking for a music director and the history at that time was choral, and that was my specialty. The previous instructor had introduced a band program, so I inherited both. I quickly realized that as far as my skills were concerned I could not do justice to both, given that the choral experience was, as far as I was concerned, the deeper of the two. I recommended to the board a year after I said, “Really, to do justice to the school, maybe we should stick with the choral tradition and let someone better than me do the instrumental stuff.” They only had one music person on faculty at that time. Now they have two or three.

Troy: Two for sure. Do you remember what year that was?

Rudy: I joined them in 1975 and I left them in 1986.

Troy: Who was it that started the band program?

Rudy: The name was Alfred Dahl who now resides in Winnipeg. He’s an oboe player and, strangely enough, he was my choral director when I was in high school in Saskatchewan at Rosthern Junior College. He was my immediate predecessor.

Troy: I’m from Wolf Point, Montana so that Saskatchewan side of things feels closer to home to me. You gave me the years of when you were there. When you were there, what kind of repertoire did you do?

Rudy: I’d guess you have to call it “small c” classic and religious. I would have to say 90% of it would have been considered sacred, choral music and then on the side I taught voice lessons and that kind of thing. Another person, an itinerant piano teacher, came to teach our piano students, but the repertoire we prepared was for use in churches and sacred concerts. We also did lot of anthems, what they call choral pieces. For a number of years I’d do a smaller oratorio or a cantata with
what we called the Concert Choir, which was a volunteer choir and probably included 85% of the students at the school at the time. I had some fun times with those bigger groups.

Troy: Do you have any experiences in particular you want to talk about from those?

Rudy: We had a total at one point of five choral groups. We had something called the All School Choir which was quite an interesting creature made up of everybody whether they wanted to be there or not. Repertoire was simple. We would perform twice a year. I think it was at Christmas and at the end of the year. We had this other group Concert Choir which was volunteer, then we had a small girls’ choir, a boys’ group, and then we had an auditioned choir, the Chamber Choir. I think they had thirty-five singers max because that’s all the bus would hold. That would be the visitation choir. We would go out on weekends to what we called constituency churches. I think one year we ended up with fifteen weekends—I mean all day Sunday. At the beginning of my tenure we could do three a day: we’d do a Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon, and a Sunday evening. It didn’t take too long though and the churches wouldn’t come out in the afternoon, and after awhile we stopped coming out in the evening as our society changed.

There was an auditioned group, the Chamber Choir, and we did some pretty tough stuff. I remember one concert we gave in Brandon and my old Shakespeare prof was in the audience. When the concert was over he drove up and he said, “Anyone who went to any other concerts in Brandon tonight went to the wrong place.” At another concert which another choir gave in Butterfield,
South Dakota after the concert was over somebody came up to us and said, “Man, you’re a high school choir? You sounded like a college choir.” So the singers have a lot of heart. We put a lot of work into rehearsal, everything from technique to how to handle yourself on stage. Lots, and lots, and lots of good experiences, good memories. Those singers become your friends later on and some of them have gone on to massively huge careers of their own. Al Enns, Jr. is an opera bass. He’s gone to Germany and he’s done New York. Victor Engbrecht, you were talking about Henry Engbrecht, his son Victor was a student of mine. There are all kinds of them.

I’ll think of this guy from Germany who came to conduct the Winnipeg Festival Singers. Have you heard of it? It’s a loose group of singers, mostly from Manitoba and Saskatchewan although we’ve had a few singers come up from North Dakota, and they get together every year or two to do a major work with orchestra. Helmuth Rilling came out to do a concert (that) involved a major oratorio and one of Bach’s cantatas. They chose about 20 singers out of the full choir which was about 250. I got to sing with that group beside my students that I just mentioned, so out of the 20 or 24 singers, I think there were two or three singers who had been students of mine at MCI. It’s a very fulfilling and humbling feeling to do that, to sing with your students and have them go right past you.

Troy: Do you remember what year that was?

Rudy: No. No I don’t.

Troy: How about decade?
Rudy: It was probably in the 1980s. I think so because I was still teaching at MCI. Yes, it would have been in the 1980s.

Troy: So, the repertoire that you did, it related then to the mission of the school?

Rudy: Yeah, we did everything from the Renaissance music all the way up to the twentieth century. It depended a little, of course, on the abilities of some of the students. What we were able to cash in on was that the churches our students came from were still singing. They sang in harmony, they could sing unaccompanied, and they still had church choirs. By the time I left you could notice that some churches were getting out of that particular scenario, getting more into a contemporary, what we used to call “off-the-wall music.” They would project the lyrics on the wall with no music; harmony is implied. It got harder and harder to be able to do some of the really intense traditional repertoire. They could do it, but one of the first signs though was if we sang in German when I started most of these students could still read what they call gothic script. Within about six years very few of them could, and so things would have to be reprinted. When we started we could probably perform a whole concert in German, but by the time I left there we would include one or two numbers for interest’s sake, nostalgia if you will.

Another interesting thing that no one expected was I was able to inform Henry Engbrecht and George Wiebe (who was the choral director at what used to be CMBC) what was coming down the pipe. Such as all of the sudden I would notice we would have a real dearth of contraltos. I would mention that to him, and about two or three years later he would say, “Yeah, now the wave has come
through.” We’d have a whole bunch of tenors or whatever, and whatever trends we had it sort of sent a ripple down time. That was an interesting spinoff I had never thought about. You don’t anticipate that at the beginning.

Troy: It’s kind of a butterfly effect. What years did you notice the difference in the language, the ability to read the gothic script, and then not?

Rudy: Probably the early 1980s. The music hymnals, the collections of German anthems, choruses, and what have you—hymns were being reprinted in regular English script. We knew that the churches weren’t reading the old stuff and we didn’t either.

Troy: I have a copy of the scripts side-by-side so I can look and kind of figure them out then. That’s something I didn’t grow up with.

Rudy: I even have a hymnal which uses numbers. I’ll have to show it to you.

Troy: *Ziffern.*

Rudy: Yeah.

Troy: Did they ever use that when you were at MCI?

Rudy: I’ve never used it in my life. My father and mother did back in the early 1900s, but they talked about it when I was studying who they mentioned. But (I) never even looked at it. It was just a historical footnote.

Troy: I know George talked about it and I don’t remember if he said they used those at MCI or not; I don’t remember. I’d have to check.

Rudy: Maybe in his day they did. I know in my day we didn’t. I certainly wouldn’t have been able to do it.
Troy: One of the students, I believe it was Gerald Enns at MCI, did his Menno Project on congregational singing and so he got a video of some old fashioned congregation and they had the chart with the numbers one through seven. (They were) pointing to the numbers and singing the numbers. Then they had a split. They would have this group sing this number and this group sing this number and then split them into parts.

Rudy: Really, that would’ve been fun to see.

Troy: Marilyn Hauser-Hamm let me borrow a copy, so I do have a copy of it. I got to see a little bit of how it worked. Did you have any traditional favorites as far as repertoire goes?

Rudy: Are we talking about me personally?

Troy: Yeah.

Rudy: Although I tried to cover all the various eras, I have a soft spot in my heart for the Romantic Era. I think it’s because my father comes from Russia. I loved Rachmaninoff, Mendelssohn, Schubert, late Beethoven, and all that kind of stuff. The Renaissance was magnificent. Some of our most memorable pieces were Renaissance. I did some of Esther Wiebe’s stuff too. I think we were one of the first schools to go wholeheartedly into those. First of all, she started off with adaptations and what have you, and then she did her own compositions. We used those a lot, especially with that All School Choir I was telling you about and with the Concert Choir because it was a little more contemporary. She’d come listen to us do it and it was fun to see a smile on her face.

Troy: Was there any music that you wouldn’t do when you were teaching there?
Rudy: The vast majority of our music was sacred. I never found any sacred music that I wouldn’t try. We had very little secular (music) and I would try something (occasionally) that was a novelty. This isn’t even a song, but the “Geographical Fugue” if you’re familiar with it is choral speaking. It just recites names of oceans, rivers, countries, and that kind of a thing. It’s quite rhythmically challenging and so for an encoring number I’d get out my pitch pipe, the choir would hum usually a minor chord, and then we’d go into this choral speaking number.

Troy: Was it improvised then?

Rudy: Oh, no, no, this was completely written. In fact, I thought he was supposed to write a whole suite of these, but when I talked to the publishers they said they were aware only of this one number. Another one that was really interesting was when I came out to the Waterloo area of southern Ontario called “The Plain Folk Buggy Song” written about the Amish from that area. It had some vocal sound effects: the sound of clip-clopping of hooves on pavement and that kind of a thing. That was supposed to be a part also of a complete suite called The Niagara Provinciales Suite, but he never wrote any more pieces. He never wrote any more, but it was fun to do.

We did “The Cat Came Back” from the classic folk song. The cat has nine lives, and no matter what the guy does to try to get rid of the cat it comes back. We used some sound effects there like cap gun and some well-placed screams. If I did secular stuff, I would try for things like that. I wanted something totally different, especially since they were teenagers: give them something to do. We
did a German folk song called “Ein Hennlein Weiβ” (“A Little White Hen”) which we did in German and it has sounds of chickens clucking and what have you. Then we sang it as quickly as we possibly could so the chicken sounds actually begin to sound believable. Let’s put it that way. We (also) did “The A-Flat Cricket and the B-Flat Frog.” It was sort of disguised as an interracial relationship. We would do them as a trilogy. We would do “The A-Flat Cricket and the B-Flat Frog,” we would do “Ein Hennlein Weiβ,” and the other one. It was our animal trilogy. We’d get to sing them two or three times a year publicly.

One thing I always did at the end of the year was I always recorded the Chamber Choir. In fact, when I was at MCI, I very quickly decided I wanted to have an archive of everything that the school did, so we recorded all of our concerts live. It’s a field recording done by amateurs, but the Chamber Choir we would record their entire repertoire including some of these secular pieces which we didn’t perform often—maybe at fundraising banquets or at the yearend concert called Sängerfest. We’d have a chance to pull in a few of the secular numbers to broaden our scope. That was fun.

Troy: Were those audio recordings or were those film?

Rudy: Just on tape. I’ve got a tape of everything I’ve ever done there. They have their copy and I made one for myself.

Troy: That’s a good historical record too.

Rudy: Yeah, we taped it on the open reel and transferred it to cassettes.

Troy: You know the other day they were looking at a box full of films and they were wondering what to do with them as far as what do you play them on and that kind
of stuff. What role did the performances like the concerts, tours have in the music department?

Rudy: Everything we did was performance-oriented for public relations, bottom line, to show our supporters and our constituency congregations what we were doing musically, what their children were learning, and how well they were doing it. There’s certainly an entertainment factor, a worship factor, but that would be just about it. I always told the singers we have lots of sports that we play seasonally at MCI, but our singing groups are the only group our school has that goes from September to the end of June nonstop. It is the most consistent advertising if you will our school has. We never forgot that; that’s why I was saying before we not only learned our music, but we learned how to dress, how to walk, and how to present ourselves to the public. We had to. Sometimes it worked better than other times.

Troy: I heard a story Henry Hiebert told me about one of his tour experiences, so I can understand. Are there any you’d like to share?

Rudy: Yeah, choose one experience of eleven years of touring, right.

Troy: Or a couple.

Rudy: Our singers, especially the Chamber Choir, would often go home with people two or three at a time for lunch. If it was a weekend gig then you’d stay overnight and whenever we got the choir back together in the bus the first thing the kids asked each other, “What did they feed you” inevitably. It was probably chicken or lasagna. Food was very important to some of them. Sometimes we would have to billet ourselves in the church. We’d sleep on the pews overnight or wherever
we could. Kids would find the baby room and that kind of thing. We did all kinds of things.

Troy: Those make for very memorable experiences.

Rudy: Very, very. We had lots of bus trips. We’d come in after a three service Sunday, roll up back onto campus about one o’clock in the morning, and inevitably they would say, “Mr. Krahn, do we have to go to breakfast next?” I’d say, “Yup, I’m gonna be there, you’re gonna be there.” “Ahh, we don’t wanna.” “Tell somebody who cares.”

Troy: Believe me students haven’t changed much. Do you have any other stories you want to tell about performances?

Rudy: I really have to press rewind on this one. One piece that our Concert Choir did which I really enjoyed doing was Théodore Dubois’s *Seven Last Words of Christ*. We had a young gentleman in our student body who played organ and had played organ for a long time. We thought the organ scoring [was better] which you could play with the pipe organ, we were using an Allen, but we had student soloists. About five years later I did it again. I got the exact same three soloists back. It was really interesting because the choir of the day saw these ex-students in a different light. The three ex-students who came back to sing the solos had all maintained their singing abilities. It was fun. For me, it meant that the original concert wasn’t a onetime event. It spanned over a different group of students. I was probably better the second time than the first time, but it was fun. It’s a feeling that is very physical, but you can’t describe it. It’s inside and the moment you describe it you don’t do it any justice.
That was the year that I was at Westminster and we did *The Creation* with the New York Philharmonic and enter those two thunderous Amens. I turned to the baritone beside me because the audience leapt to its feet. Shaw was good, so was the New York Philharmonic, and if I do say so myself, the 200 voice choir was pretty good too. Like I said, the second Amen, we weren’t finished with that “en” yet and the audience literally screamed it’s appreciation. I turned to the baritone beside me and I said, “Well, if I die now I’ll just have to take a step sideways and I’ll be in Heaven because I’m high enough.” That happens with high school too.

I’ve been chatting a lot with Rick Heppner Mueller who’s over there now. He often asks me what things were like when I was there, and I ask him what things are like now. We’ve sort of come to the conclusion that maybe we’re riding the very tail end of this innate musical ability that I could count on totally and he did too to his extent. In this town we have seventeen churches. We have one choir in this entire town, and most of the churches are Mennonite churches. The one church that has a standing choir is the United Church, go figure. Gone the way of the worship band and the attraction to the more contemporary styles. I don’t know where that’s going to go.

Troy: Where’s the drive for that music coming from?

Rudy: I’m not sure because I’m an older person. I guess the first thing I’d be tempted to say is it’s from the younger generations. The contemporary music is very strong in general in our society. It’s everywhere. It’s in our advertising. The four-part singing, or five, six or eight-part, you don’t hear it anywhere. Things change. I
learned to sing part singing sitting beside my dad in the congregation. That’s how everyone learned. I went through Rosthern Junior College which is the equivalent of MCI back in Rosthern, and nobody took voice lessons, at least very few did. That’s how every church had a choir. Every church had at least three, four, or five ladies who could play the organ or the piano competently. It was just part of your world. In the contemporary world of whatever you want, call it the non-part singing, I guess it is more of a commercial sound. It’s big. Technology’s part of it, societal attitudes, church attitudes. The church wants to keep youth in the church so they say, “Well I guess we gotta do their music instead of ours.” I’ve heard that occasionally. We had one church in town here who used to have a person who would count the number of traditional hymns versus the number of contemporary hymns that would be sung in any service, and if there wasn’t an equal balance there’d be phone calls. I think that’s so sad when you have the accountant’s approach to music.

Troy: So the people making those decisions, are they musicians themselves?

Rudy: They’re musical. They’re well intentioned singers, love music, they know what they like, and they want more of that. They don’t want anything else. I think you know what I’m talking about. The people who haven’t even studied music: they don’t know much else of what’s out there but, “I know what I like, this is what I like, and the rest doesn’t matter.” You’ll get some churches who will sing only gospel tunes, with or without harmony and some churches who will sing only contemporary stuff, no hymnbooks, just overhead or a projector. One of the saddest sights I’ve seen in a long time is just going into a church where there was
a wide age range of parishioners and the whole service the congregational singing was the choruses using an overhead projector. I was watching, looking around, watching the older people sit there staring at the wall, with a blank expression on their faces. They were not singing. It’s outside of their realm of experience. They don’t know it, but they missed the notes. Even if they don’t read the notes if the note goes up they went up, and their ear told them how far. We have a young lady in this town, a very accomplished pianist and accompanist, but when she gets into a familiar hymn she improvises the harmonies and changes them. You can’t sing harmony because the one they’ve written in the hymnal she’s not following. I’ve told her that too. Often it is a well-intentioned person who will make a decision, but that’s changed things. I miss the four-part singing, the six-part, eight-part; we’ve gone as far as twelve. Yeah, twelve-part once, but you have to work at it.

Troy: That was in church?

Rudy: That was at MCI. At church we seldom go beyond four. Our church still does a lot of harmony, but others don’t.

Troy: Is that here in Altona?

Rudy: Yes. We have a couple of very youthful churches here. They’ve dropped the name Mennonite; although, most of them are Mennonite. They’ve got a church band, a lighting system, and they’ve got all of the technology. It’s basically almost like a lounge act in a sense. It’s very popular with the younger people, so the theology is very basic as in it is very emotional theology. For some people, that’s what they need, and I don’t, so I don’t go there. The pastor and the music
leader of the church was a student of mine at MCI who sang in the Chamber Choir and did all the classic stuff. He went on a contemporary bend. I’m not going to fault him for it, followed his heart, and apparently it’s filling a need so who am I to say?

Troy: Do you want to say anything about that subjective trend or the theology? Are there differences in the theology between the contemporary worship and the traditional music?

Rudy: I don’t know how to start that one. If we looked just at lyrics, I got this from my first principal at MCI, Gerhard Enns: he looked at lyrics carefully and noticed that in the more contemporary music, lyrics tended to be more emotional, perhaps theologically more shallow. The music itself (contemporary) tends to be more rhythmic and volume-based, rather than harmonic or melodic. The melodies are narrower, usually well within an octave. When I left MCI it was noticeable that we were having fewer and fewer girls being able to sing upper soprano and contraltos had disappeared altogether. We were lucky to get a mezzo-soprano, but to get a contralto to sing a low G, forget it. (We found) the same with basses, we were lucky to get baritones by the time we were done. If we had a true bass voice, it was an exception. I think part of that is due to the changing trends of the styles of music because pop music does go for the middle. You know six good notes and one or two on either end and that’s it; whereas, some of the stuff we’d be singing would have at least an octave and a half, sometimes two, for the parts. To cover a two octave range with the same amount of support, delivery, and projection, it was easier then than it is now by far.
Troy: Did the music in your churches always follow what was current in the day? Did they perform contemporary pieces as they developed or is this just a recent trend?

Rudy: It depends on the congregation. Some congregations are still more traditional and classic, some have gone right over, and there’s everything in between. If you were to attend church in this town and go to a different church every Sunday for two months, you would get that (variety), even though we all have the same traditional, historic background.

Troy: Did you have musical theater when you were there?

Rudy: Yes, in fact it was there before I got there. They were doing a lot of Gilbert and Sullivan and things like that and when I came on board I started doing Broadway musicals. (We did) everything from Oklahoma to Fiddler on the Roof. There’s one show that we did that was kind of interesting since I’m a graduate of Rosthern Junior College. They had one of their big anniversaries. I went down there to celebrate with them and sat down beside this gentleman I didn’t know. They were doing a piece called The Blowing and the Bending written by Moyer from down south.

Troy: Goshen.

Rudy: Goshen. During the intermission I was talking to this guy beside me and it turns out it was Moyer. I found out at the end of the show. I was absolutely blown away by it musically, it had such humor in it, and such pathos. I said, “I want this.”

He said, “Well this is the first time it’s ever been performed in Canada.”

“Well,” I said, “I want to be number two.”
He said, “Okay.” We got stuff, we performed it here, and it was a grand show. It really is a wonderful piece which historically covers World War I when many of the Mennonites (young men) in Kansas, Oklahoma, and places like that refused military service. In World War I the government didn’t have alternative service for them; they did in World War II, but not in World War I. So there was this drive to convince the Mennonites to support the war effort, so the story talks about a town divided. There were some very staunch, religious, Mennonite families who would not buy the war bonds under any circumstances. It gets extremely tense and humorous in certain spots. It’s very well written, so we did our run of three shows.

On our closing night here we found out we had an invitation to go to Minneapolis to present it at the Triennial Mennonite Conference because their major theme dealt with whether Christians should pay that percentage of income tax that goes to support the military. They thought this would be a good thing to do, so some Sugar Daddy somewhere rented a bus for us and we went to Minneapolis to do the show. I had to rewrite the show quickly over a course of two weeks because we had to cut the cast down so everything would fit on the bus, plus we had a small, five piece orchestra. We were triple-casting some of the kids, but they were very malleable. It was a wonderful experience for them; it was great for the school too and they did a bang up job.

Moyer and the lyricist were at the conference too. I knew it; I didn’t tell the kids until the show was over and we were backstage taking off our makeup. I asked them to come to talk to the cast after (the show). He came in and I
introduced him to the cast. A few jaws dropped. He said, “When we wrote this it was intended for an adult cast, but you proved us wrong.” That feels good. It made the kids feel very, very good.

The two protagonists got so into their roles that they weren’t acting; they were literally hating each other’s guts on stage and you could feel it. I would get that prickly sensation in the back of the neck: they weren’t acting. We couldn’t find those two guys after the debriefing for over an hour. They had gone to a coffee shop in some grubby section of Minneapolis in the middle of the night and talked each other down. That speaks very well of how well their piece was written. It speaks well too of how they characterized and how they got into the characters. It’s moments like this that really does leave an indelible imprint in your memory. That was fun. That’s when you step back and get out of the kids way. I forgot what your question was.

Troy: It was about musical theater.

Rudy: That’s right. We had a tiny matchbox stage. It was 18 or 20 feet wide: a tiny little place. It was nothing like they have now.

Troy: When did that change? Was that when they built Buhler?

Rudy: Yeah, in fact, what we used as a theater was actually the gymnasium. It was so small that when you played volleyball, the serving line was no more than 18 inches or two feet from the wall. There was a room back there and so they would open up the door, back up into the room, come forward, and serve from under the door. The ceiling was only something like 12 feet high, so we had a definite advantage over all visiting teams. They were used to bumping up to 15 or 20 feet.
Our guys always knew the short set, so we had humble starts and humble beginnings.

Troy: The gym they have now is new?

Rudy: That’s new. It was built while I was there, so that gym became the chapel (and the) auditorium. That’s where the green room is now. The big room that is now Rick’s office was a stage.

Troy: Oh wow, that was small.

Rudy: In fact, the room is actually seems bigger now than it did then.

Troy: Do you want to mention any other musical theater pieces that you did?

Rudy: The last year I was there we did *Anne of Green Gables*. We’ve done *Oklahoma* and some lesser known musicals like *The Stingiest Man in Town*, a musical based on Ebenezer Scrooge. How could I forget? We did *Cinderella*: we had fun with that one.

Troy: What was fun about it?

Rudy: The actors. The two step sisters auditioned as a pair of friends. One of them was six foot one and the other one was about five foot, so they were just perfect foils for each other. They auditioned together and they were head and shoulders above anyone else. Just before dress rehearsal we thought about what else could we do. As a director I usually stop and tell my actors, “When you’ve accepted your character and created your version of it, then it’s your job to think, ‘What exactly is my character like? What else would my character do in this situation or the next situation?’” I can’t tell you that. I can only encourage you to look for that.” They came up with the idea of using hairspray (while) getting ready for the ball.
The tall one hair sprayed the short one all over and she got so stiff they had to bring in a hand cart and wheel her off. They tipped her forward and then put the cart under her heels. It was very enjoyable to watch students take ownership of their roles and then create those tiny little nuances that made them memorable.

Troy: What role did the musicals play in the school and the community as far as educational rationale and purpose?

Rudy: One of them was a musical balance and the other was present a wider spectrum to the community. A school in a community needs to hook up with the community. You’re not just in the community; you have to be a part of it. This is a little bit like saying, “Okay you’ve come to our services, now come to our show, and we’ll show you the same dedication and skills in a different medium.” Broaden out the experience of the students and use it to broaden out the experience of the people in the community and show them some things that maybe they thought could only be done by a professional group in the city. Say, “No, we can do that too in our own way.” I mean we even did the opera, Mennoti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. In fact it’s television opera, so again I had to rewrite it for the stage because everything had to be made bigger and grander because there was no television camera.

We tried to provide for the student and then provide a three dimensional product to the community. Just because it’s a church school we do church music, but there’s lots of other good music acceptable in every form and you won’t hear it in a church or that kind of a thing. You can have fun. I think the closest we got to being in trouble was with *Anne of Green Gables* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. At
one point during *Anne of Green Gables* the girls get into what they think is a raspberry cordial or preserves which has turned and become wine. You know the story. The next week a local minister phoned and said he was very disappointed that I would show teenagers drunk on stage. That’s all he saw. We accepted the call for what it was worth. We didn’t disregard it, but we didn’t (usually) get that kind of reaction. In *Fiddler on the Roof* when Tevya has the problem about how he’s going to convince his wife his one daughter should marry a different guy right during the dream with mother. We got another phone call the next morning from a minister saying that he was very disappointed we would put two teenagers in bed on stage.

Troy: Even though they were married?

Rudy: Yes, but he just saw the two actors; he didn’t see the characters. He just saw two young children on our stage in bed together. That’s all he saw. We were cognizant that there was that element out there and that element has to be respected because, let’s face it, a school like this is built on the goodwill of the people who send their students and who provided the money. We couldn’t afford to antagonize them. We didn’t want to antagonize them for any reason because we felt that the school was worth maintaining. At the same time, we did not want to become too polarized and I felt the music and theater programs were a healthy way to broaden the experiences of the singers and extend the constituency around us.

Troy: Do you want to say anything more on that?

Rudy: I don’t know. Something might pop up later.
Troy: Did the performances that you mentioned change over the years?

Rudy: As in format or content?

Troy: Either.

Rudy: Not very much in the format. If you go into a church on a Sunday morning we generally followed a format that went unchanged as long as I was there and that was to provide seven to ten pieces of music, some student input, and a brief meditation from a faculty member. We would take over the service, but the local congregation would have their own announcements and they would give the rest of the service to us for the hour. We didn’t feel there was a need or the time to get much more complicated than that. I think one of the features that was most fun was when we would get members of the choir to tell the children’s story because some of our singers were quite creative and inventive. They could do some interesting things.

The music, aside from having less and less German has not changed much (over the years). My personal philosophy was that good music deserves to be sung and deserves to be heard regardless of its era. What I would try to do is to tie pieces of music from various eras together in sets of two or three thematically or I would find a way to hook them together. I personally always felt that a rut is a dangerous place to be and to even make some connections that might at first seem a little unusual, perhaps even unnatural, isn’t such a bad idea in order to shake things up a little. It would mean that I wouldn’t take anything for granted whether it’s music or theology. That’s a very dangerous thing if I start taking things for granted. I tell my singers and my actors, “You’re either going up or
you’re going down. There is no leveling off and there is no plateau. If you’re doing a series of concerts or a series of plays, the high point of tonight’s show becomes zero for tomorrow’s show and you’re always learning.”

At your final show or your final concert, you’re still taking notes because no matter how much you practice, how much you get involved in the art form, the more you get involved the more you realize (what) you don’t know about it. There’s always another step, sometimes it’s sideways, and sometimes up. Sometimes you have to go back to a piece and all of the sudden it loses meaning for you. You have to stop and see if you missed something. You might have to go back historically or you might have to go back musically. I might have to leave it alone altogether and wait for a chance for me to catch up to the music again. I always told my singers, “We’re not going to redo the song. We’re going to recreate it. It’s been composed once; our job is to honor the work that went into the original composition.” Changing words, changing notes, changing the tempi, and that kind of a thing just because you don’t feel like singing it slow is not even a part of a process. You can’t do that. You change any one of those things, (but) you change the piece, and you’ve probably wrecked it.

Troy: This question might be a little bit of a repeat, but have the choral ensembles changed over the years? Do you think you’ve answered that?

Rudy: At MCI, just at the very end of my tenure there, they introduced a small ensemble, a vocal ensemble, which did only just contemporary music. That’s the only change that I experienced there. Someone else directed it.

Troy: Did they have a vocal jazz ensemble or anything like that?
Rudy: No.

Troy: I think that’s something that they added with the Manitoba requirements.

Rudy: Yeah, that came long after I left.

Troy: How about the instrumental ensembles or the band, did they change over the years?

Rudy: It died completely after the second year I was there and got picked up again after I left. If one person did the entire music program at MCI, if you attempted both choral and band, my experience was I couldn’t do justice to either one. You would lean towards your strength and mine was choral. I freely admitted that. Other conductors came in with a vastly superior band experience and you could tell the choral level deteriorated.

Troy: There was kind of an inverse relationship?

Rudy: Yeah, the students themselves would be stretched thin to go either way or both ways.

Troy: You may have touched on this, but what is your philosophy of music education?

Rudy: That is hard to nail down as a statement because music has always been part of my life, an enjoyable part. I’ve always instinctively felt it needed to be shared with whoever is willing to share it with you, either as a participant or as a consumer of the art. When I was studying musical theater, one of my instructors made an interesting observation that whether it’s a Broadway show or Verdi’s work the spoken word serves to express human emotion up to a certain level, and then the music takes over and takes it the rest of the way. It made perfect sense to me. Whether it is a spiritual feeling, a feeling of fun, anger, depression, or
whatever, the music heightens it all. It’s just like the high definition television
screen. It’s not easy to answer that question. It’s a feeling of a deeper
understanding of things I find.

I used to sing with a male choir that was sponsored by a church group—
the Faith and Life Male Choir. I finally had to quit. At that time Henry
Engbrecht was the conductor and we had a chat about it. I said whenever we have
a perfect phrase or absolutely correct balance, enunciation, projection, everything,
I have to stop singing because I begin to cry and you can’t sing when you cry. I
said I have to quit because I am of no value to my fellow singers now; I’m not
pulling my weight.
Troy: You control your own emotions so others can experience it kind of a thing.
Rudy: Yeah, but I had no choice. He understood. I knew he would. That’s why I prefer
to conduct and interpret that way. I shed many a tear while conducting, both of
sadness and of joy, but many more of the joyful ones I must admit. Does that
sound like a philosophy to you?
Troy: You know what, I think if after looking at the transcript and doing an analysis of
it I can maybe piece together something from that and see if that works for you.
We may be (able to) flesh it out later.
Rudy: It obviously isn’t a textbook statement about teaching music and learning and
what have you, and yet for me, that’s what drove me. I don’t know if I could put
it any other way.
Troy: I think a lot of the teaching philosophies in music that are coming out recently are
like some of the (contemporary) music in the (fact that) they sound a bit the same.
Rudy: I’m afraid you’re right and it’s almost less of an art and more of a business: mission statements, rubrics, and that kind of a thing. I got this from Stravinsky: “Whenever you try to label something you limit it.” He didn’t like titles. Liszt didn’t either. He didn’t like to put titles on his pieces. He said, “The moment you put a title on a piece, you limit that piece, especially if it’s like the Moonlight Sonata. Whenever you hear that music, it can’t be anything else but the Moonlight Sonata. It can’t be because the title limits its power.” It makes sense to me, so the more a person wants to zero in on that one kernel of truth, the more you miss it. That’s my philosophy right there!

Troy: It’s a bit of seeing the forest and the trees type of a thing.

Rudy: Yeah, one of my singers when I was at MCI came from Steinbach. You’ve probably heard a girls’ choir that used to come out of Steinbach called the Carillons. They were a teenage handbell choir and they would sing as well. They did videos and that kind of a thing. I had one of those gals: she came to MCI and sang in the alto section. We were coming back from a road trip. She sat down beside me in the bus and she said, “I finally realize why a choir needs a conductor.” When she had been with the Carillons they were very big on the dramatics, following the footprints—the choreography, and that kind of a thing. They sang along with it. I would not take anything away from their directors. They sang well, but when you have a musician who stands in one place and simply uses their instrument without any choreography, then they begin to realize what the music means and that the music is central. It’s not an accessory and the more accessories you put on music, the more you miss the music and watch for
the accessories. My wife always bugs me because when I go to a concert I always close my eyes whether it’s a symphony or the offertory in church. It’s an aural art, not a visual art. If you want aural art, you go to Broadway shows, the opera, and that kind of a thing. That’s part of my philosophy.

Troy: So it’s visual?

Rudy: It isn’t visual in the sense of choreography, wardrobe, and that kind of a thing. If it’s visual, I don’t know what it conjures up in my brain, but it’s not visual.

Troy: So it’s aural.

Rudy: Absolutely. I find if I’m watching the conductor, and the oboist, and soloists for Messiah, then I miss the music. There’s nothing as funny in a symphony as the face of an oboist or a bassoonist. You forget what they’re doing because that sound that comes out of that oboe is so gorgeous, so I don’t watch. My philosophy is all concerts should be done in the dark which means that they just have to memorize their music.

Troy: Did you ever do choreography with music in the choirs?

Rudy: Not with choirs, because we didn’t have the opportunity to do that. You don’t do those kinds of things in churches and that was our primary performance source. The closest I got to it was choreographing a piece of Amahl and the Night Visitors. It was fun. I wasn’t trained in choreography either.

Troy: MCI did “Minoi, Minoi” last year and it’s kind of got an islander type, folk quality to it.

Rudy: There was some choreography to that wasn’t there?
Troy:  Yeah, and they put in some islander type movements. I think they got a Jeanette from Winkler to choreograph it.

Rudy:  There’s an example of where the contemporary mode of music has gone. It has been pushed out, pulled out, and dropped out of its aural niche. It has to be visual now. Our society has become very visual and so to become acceptable, this is what they’ve had to do. I suspect the kind of music that I did when I was there and the way I would present it wouldn’t be acceptable in many places now. We would just stand up, sing, and make good music. It sounds very nice, but can you do anything else? Why can’t the singers smile? I kept saying, “Well, if you make the singers smile, all their vowels go white and you lose your depth.” (They can smile) before the song, after the song, but not during the song.

Troy:  Do you think you have to be a pied piper among them to get them to go along with what you would do? Or could it be done?

Rudy:  The time that I was there they were willing to give me a chance to take them somewhere. Does that make sense to you? They would let me take them places musically where they might not have ever been before which meant that young people like you and I we’d have to prepare ourselves. We’d have to know what we’re doing and make sure that we’re doing it authentically and say so. We had to rehearse it and present it in such a way that they would be willing to say, “Okay, we can give this a try.” It’s a lot of work in preparation, not just musical, but also philosophical, and even some historical. I would have my sopranos sing Renaissance music differently than Romantic music. I would have them change their color. I would have them sing Baroque in traditional and then I would have
them sing it in a more contemporary fashion and ask them which one makes more sense. They would say, “Oh, the traditional Baroque.” The tiered dynamics thing makes more sense than tapered dynamics. They could sense that, not because they were musical, but because the music told them what was right and what was wrong. I always said, “Listen to the music: the music will tell you what to do.” (This was true for) everything from the key signature to the time signature, and to even understanding how theology might have been different in 1200 than it was in 1800. That made a difference too.

Troy: This is maybe a little bit of an offshoot from the philosophy of music education question, but how did your philosophy relate to the mission of the school?

Rudy: Looking in retrospect, it seemed to fit in quite nicely. I don’t recall any problems or disagreements about what we did or why we did it.

Troy: Have they changed the mission statement of the school at all do you know?

Rudy: I do not know.

Troy: I remember reading in the archives at the Heritage Centre about a think tank and then MCI reaffirming their roots and original purpose of the school. I was wondering if there were any changes like that?

Rudy: Anything that’s happened since I’ve left I would not be party to it. I don’t know who you would have to ask. The outgoing principal, Darryl Loewen, was one of my singers many years ago and so was Kerry Enns. You know him; they were both my students at MCI (and may know).

Troy: Outgoing, you mean he’s not going to be there anymore?
Rudy: Darryl is taking half a year off; the first semester. Kerry Enns has left MCI and he’s coming on at the local high school here.

Troy: So it is going to be different over there next year?

Rudy: Yes, it will be.

Troy: I have a hard time with change. I think I’m a little bit of a sentimentalist or a very nostalgic type person. I can be in a place and be totally miserable, but then to change out of that (is hard). I got used to MCI being this group of people.

Rudy: Change happens.

Troy: As far as music education philosophies, like teaching philosophies such as Orff, Kodály, or Dalcroze, were you into any of that?

Rudy: The Orff and Kodály was part of my training for my initial music degree, but I didn’t use it. I didn’t see any need for it. I think I was lucky because of the background my students came from. They could, without realizing it, sight read to a certain degree. Their ears were well trained because of their church backgrounds. I had it easy because my supply of singers was already advanced if you compare it in the grand scheme of things as opposed to a secular school. So yes, I’ve heard the words, but I didn’t use them.

Troy: It wasn’t similar to a public school where you would have people that had churches with part singing in it, but there wasn’t a homogenous group of people that had that?

Rudy: Yeah, I was very fortunate in that and freely admit it. I took advantage of it.
Troy:  It is like with the trends in church music. It’s becoming less homogenous in these schools. Let me ask a question and (you can) react to it. Is this a problem that needs to be fixed or is it just the way it is?

Rudy: I miss what we had. I think most people will look back at something that they had that they thought was successful and say why can’t I hang onto that? If I tried to step away from it and tried to get a little less emotional, I think we’re missing out on some intensity and some depth of the art form. I suspect at some point the pendulum may swing the other way again. I don’t know where it’s going; I really don’t. Emotionally, I might say we went to hell in a hand basket, but that would be more of an emotional outburst than a rational statement. I see the art form diluting, being over simplified, and in so doing, the power and the beauty of music (especially choral music) is being lost. It’s going to have to be re-found somewhere. It’s not in people like Celine Dion who’s got three really good notes which she can hold forever and people say what a wonderful singer she is. I have singers in high school better than she is because they can sing sixteen notes well. It’s all marketing. I can get somewhat cynical about the question; let’s put it that way. The bottom line is we’re falling backwards, we’re going downwards, or whatever metaphor you want to use.

Troy: It seems like there are people that know a good thing, see it as a good thing, they see what’s happening, and they feel a sense of loss. There are also the people that have bought into it. I’ve seen that with some people and (they) think it’s a good thing that is providing energy or something to that effect. I’ve seen the people
you were describing in the congregation with the faces and kind of like, “I guess
we have to do this,” or something to that effect.

Rudy: We simply opt out and do nothing. You and I both know that when music is done
well, it’s done well not only because you’re talented, but because you’ve worked
at it, and you’ve analyzed it. You have to work at it and now that music generally
is commercially available all the time, why do you have to make music? You can
carry an IPod with you that holds a thousand songs or five thousand songs. I
asked my students, “Do you even know five thousand songs?”

“No.”

“So what’s the big deal then?” They don’t even listen to the songs. They
play about twenty seconds: “Oh, that’s a great tune; what’s the next one?” They
don’t even listen all the way through it. There is no need, it appears, for this kind
of input that past generations had to put into their music because there was no
other way. The commercialization of music has done a number on that level. The
depth, the intensity, that is no longer there. That has been one of the pet peeves of
mine all along. That’s why I’m no longer in music. I couldn’t even convince my
colleagues anymore that you have to work at it, you need the time, and the
dedication.

Troy: Did you ever teach music in Winkler?

Rudy: No. I taught for two years in Brandon right out of college. Then I was invited to
come to MCI and I was there for eleven years. My wife was just saying the other
day she thought I was probably their longest serving music director. Henry was
there for only five years. I don’t know how long Rick’s been there.

390
Troy: About ten (years).

Rudy: I was going to say he’s probably the second longest one then because I was there for eleven. Rick’s a great guy. He’s doing a good job. I like working with him.

Troy: Yeah, I was really impressed with the concerts.

Rudy: Have you seen the energy he puts into it? That’s how you get the students to come along and do the stuff, because on their own they can’t. They don’t understand it, so the director is also an interpreter.

Troy: He gives them a vision, provides leadership through the process, and gets them to buy into it.

Rudy: Yeah, if the director believes in what they’re doing and it’s not just a job, they believe in every piece of music, and every note in that composition. Every note is important, every note has to be prepared a certain way, and it pays off. You might be hot and sweaty by the time it’s over, but you say, “My God that thing really sailed!” That’s an addictive feeling.

Troy: It is like a runner’s high or something like that.

Rudy: Yeah, most definitely.

Troy: They talked about the church music’s impact on choral directing. How has the choral directing or the students’ experience had an impact on the community and the churches in the community?

Rudy: I have to answer that anecdotally because I didn’t follow my students, but I have heard a number of the kids who’ve left MCI do end up with those kind of positions in the congregations that they joined, whether they go back to their hometown or they move someplace else. They participate. In a sense, that was
sort of part of the educational philosophy of the school: to prepare people for
when they graduate, become adults, become responsible, pay taxes and all that.
They have some background, some experience in things that will be beneficial to
a congregation, whether it is music, preaching, or working with children. That
was the original intent of the church schools when they were first started: they
were to train people to become church leaders. In a sense, that remained
unchanged. I don’t think it was ever spoken, but it was inherent in what we did.
(This was true) even with the sports program—leadership, dedication, that kind of
thing.

Troy: It’s ultimately the philosophy of music education, philosophy for including
theater, sports, all of those things. There’s a core.

Rudy: I teach at a public school now. Occasionally, people find out that I have a
background as a student and as a teacher in a private school. I said in many ways
there’s no difference between a private school and a public school. You’ll get
some really dumb heads in both schools and you get geniuses in both schools.
You’ll have good days and you’ll have bad days, but the basic premise is
different. That’s a color that is very difficult sometimes to articulate, but it’s
there.

Troy: You can articulate a little bit on that if you want to? You don’t have to.

Rudy: I don’t know if I can. I said I don’t follow a whole lot of my students’ lives once
they left because I had another class to work with. They sort of came into my
world for two, three, or four years and then they left it and somebody else came
in. I still bump into them all over Canada and the States, but I don’t know if the

392
percentage of the kids who were at MCI who ended up in positions of caregiving or socially uplifting positions is any higher than kids who graduate from a public school. I honestly don’t know. I suspect there is a difference in that the students at a place like MCI have traveled more. First of all, they traveled from their home to live on campus, our music program took them all over Manitoba, and we would have a spring tour which went to Vancouver Island one year. We could place in choral festivals, so I think they might have been exposed to more of the world since they traveled and were with other people a lot more. Instead of always attending your own church every Sunday for the first eighteen years of your life, within one year you’ve been in twelve different churches. If you were in the Chamber Choir for two or three years, you’ve been in twenty-five or thirty churches perhaps. You’ve heard different ministers, met different people, seen different geography, and been on bus tours. The bus becomes your castle. No one relaxes until they’re back in the bus, and then they go, “Ahhhhh, I’m home.”

There is a subtle difference. It would be fun to do a follow-up. I do that sometimes if I bump into the kids. I say, “What are you doing since graduation?” I’ll hear stories about things that they’ve done that you might not expect to hear from the average citizen: they’ve done some voluntary service someplace or they’re involved in a community group, development group of some kind, or fulfilling some kind of social need. I think perhaps I hear those things a little more, but I have no proof really. I just bump into people and ask what they have been doing. They didn’t go work at the local service station or go to college and became a nurse. They did something else and that something else would be the
kind of thing that a school like MCI promotes. I’ve bumped into people and graduates all over the place. They become activists: some have become politically active, some have demonstrated on government property, and some of them have gone out on a limb on behalf of someone who needs an advocate. They are working with the underprivileged, a lot of teachers, a lot of teachers and medical personnel, and a lot of counseling-type people.

Teenagers often say they would like to be involved in anger management, child or family services, or something to help kids when you ask them what they would like to do when they graduate from high school. A lot of those from MCI actually do that and often in non-traditional ways it seems. They do it on their own or out of an outlet that isn’t a government outlet. It’s either community sponsored or church sponsored. I suppose that is all I can offer for that.

Troy: This is kind of switching the topic here, but how would you describe the status of music education at your school? Were there feeder schools? Where were the students coming from? What were enrollment numbers, things of that nature?

Rudy: We’re still talking MCI obviously. It’s funny, we never thought of them as feeder schools because they came from all over the province. We thought of feeder churches. A lot of kids came to us knowing that music was very high on the profile of the school. It was the major public relations medium for the school and we impressed that upon them. We have to learn our stuff, we have to be presentable, we have to be dignified when necessary, and always in control. It’s almost like a flag. That’s the way I looked at it because we did so much of it. I would go through up to seventy or eighty pieces of music a year. Other schools
would go through a dozen or twenty, but we had five groups plus. During the years that I was at MCI we did two stage productions a year. We always did a musical in November and a drama in spring. I insisted on doing the musical and drama because when the kids came in if they are at all interested in music, and a number of them came to school because of the music program, they knew that their voice was going to be tested from the second week of September on. We don’t wait for the spring concert. We’re going to do a major show in November, major Christmas concerts in December, and from then on we take off. We have a spring concert and then we have the *Sängerfest*. It was always performance oriented. I think the school had a huge reputation when it came to music, especially in vocals and choral.

Troy: About how many students would you have when you were there?

Rudy: In total or per year?

Troy: For the year. Over the decades were there any changes?

Rudy: Oh yeah. I was there the year we had the highest student population. I think it was just over two hundred; about two fifteen or two seventeen. One year we were all the way down to a hundred and ten or a hundred and fifteen or something like that. The school has experienced ups and downs. Part of it was due to population bubbles and birth bubbles. We always noticed the attendance would start to go up if public schools were having difficulties with social issues or discipline problems. All of a sudden our attendance would go up. It was a bit of a measuring device of society.
Troy: How about curriculum and autonomy for choosing what you did? The province didn’t have any say in what you had to have for ensembles at that time did they?

Rudy: Some of the students would be in four choirs. That was the most you could be in: male or female, the Chamber Choir, Concert Choir and the All School Choir. Depending on how many of those you were involved in, you got a half credit or a full credit just to be involved in the choir. I also taught classroom music—theory, harmony, a bit of composition.

Troy: That was all in the same class?

Rudy: Yeah, that was in that classroom setting. I wouldn’t (teach that) in a rehearsal. All of our choirs rehearsed during the day except for Chamber Choir; we rehearsed two evenings a week, ninety minutes each rehearsal. Chamber Choir rehearsed out of school time. I did that deliberately. I insisted that. It was important that there was dedication to training. There are two rehearsals a week in the evening, they’re ninety minutes long, you’re expected to be there. If you can’t be there, then you don’t have enough dedication to this activity and they understood that. There were some exceptions occasionally of course, but by-in-large the students dedicated themselves to things like that more so than now. I can’t speak for MCI now because I’m not there, but when I compare it to the music program in this public high school where I am now, they come if they feel like it, including concerts. They may or may not show up; that’s sad. It would be sad even if it wasn’t music.

Troy: It’s like the heart is gone from it.

Rudy: Why bother.
Troy: Would you like to theorize why that is?

Rudy: Probably for the same reason why kids don’t sing or make music like they used to: they don’t have to. I know educational circles, educational philosophy, or theory has changed where instead of saying this is what we do and this is the way we do it, there is more of what would you as a child like to do and how would you like to do it. We’ve done that for quite a while now and I personally have difficulty with that. If a child is that capable of making those kinds of decisions on their own then why are they in school? They don’t need us: let them go on their own. I still feel that the experience that you and I have is critical in helping them reach where we are now. They need to know how we got there, why, and what to expect. To work with a new concept and say “well figure it out,” I’m sorry; that’s relinquishing my responsibility to that child: that’s my educational philosophy.

Troy: How about funding? Did you have the resources that you needed?

Rudy: MCI was very good, because music was such a prominent feature of the school they put money into it. I was able to buy all the music I needed and I insisted on one copy per singer. The reason I did this is so they can make their own notes. For the All School Choir we’d do two (singers) to one (copy), but usually it was one to one.

Troy: It is definitely a lot easier with folders and everything, especially if people have to move around in the choir. We’ve talked about the choral programs, the instrumental program, and we talked about facilities a bit already. Was there any special equipment that you were able to use as a music faculty there?
Rudy: We purchased a whole set of Wenger risers to seat the entire school choir. I was able to persuade the board to buy that. The local high school had sound shells to put up behind them, so the two schools here borrowed from each other very freely. They still do. I think they (MCI) now have their own. With Buhler Hall maybe they don’t need it. I don’t think they do.

Troy: It’s kind of like it has a sound shell built in.

Rudy: Yeah, it has those rotating panels. The only other thing we did was buy some microphones and some basic recording equipment with a small mixer because I wanted to archive everything we did. Other than (those purchases), no.

Troy: Was there anything else there at the school that you’d like to mention as far as status information? I’ve read everything off from my list and I just have an “other” as a catch all in case there is anything else I didn’t think of.

Rudy: I guess, in a sense, the music program was quite simple. I tried to stick to the basic core of what music is supposed to do and we tried to make that entertaining, enjoyable, and valuable. Making it an experience that was worthwhile and worth the effort was important because the kids put a lot of effort into it. It was always rather humbling that the kids who didn’t live in the residence program would either come in for their rehearsals or they’d stay in and that kind of a thing. If they were getting ready for a musical, they would be there. It’s as if they accepted the responsibility—we’re here, this is what we do, and we’re going to do it. Again, I’m not quite sure how the public school system was at that time, but I freely admit I think we had the best of it all because we had the support in general. We were able to do some pretty amazing things musically. Every now
and again I flip through my files and look at all the music we performed and am amazed. I’ve never been part of any organization that has gone through that much music. It was wonderful!

Troy: We talked about this a little bit and I just have three questions left. I think you’ve covered them, but one of them was what is the outlook regarding the future music program?

Rudy: MCI’s program, I don’t know. Rick would be the person to talk to especially since he’s put so many years in there now. He’s been there long enough to feel the flow and the shifts, but I’ll go, see what they do, and listen to what they do. It is significantly different from what I experienced twenty-five years ago. I just push that out of the equation. I don’t know where they are going. I know he’s a dedicated musician. He’s very good and he’s great with the students. He’s also somewhat diluted. I was a dedicated music teacher, but that’s all I did; whereas, he has to run Buhler Hall too.

Troy: He has to run the Buhler Hall?

Rudy: He has a lot of input there. He runs the technicians course there for lighting, sound, sets, and that kind of a thing. He’s part of it with a few other people, so some of his other duties are non-musical. They’re related obviously, part of the performing arts, but they they’re somewhat different. He’s the guy to ask.

Troy: Anymore memorable stories that you’d like to share?

Rudy: When you drive off my parking lot I’ll think of them I’m sure.

Troy: What was it like being a new teacher there? I guess you had two years experience didn’t you?
Rudy: I had two years teaching at the high school in Brandon where I was their choral director.

Troy: Was that at the high school?

Rudy: Yeah, Vincent Massey High School in Brandon. I was a choral director. I actually taught a little guitar course. I had a definite advantage in that I spent four years at Rosthern Junior College which is the daughter school to this one. I knew what it was like; I knew what to expect even though it was 10 to 15 years after I had graduated. I understood the whole concept of singing and making music because RJC was exactly the same way as MCI: music was a high level feature of the school. I understood touring, repertoire, and stage productions because we did them there. It’s almost as if I simply transplanted myself into another version of it and kept it going with the advantage of having the training that I had received with one year at CMBC and four years at Brandon. I felt almost as if I had never been anywhere else. It was like the perfect suit: it just fit. I said it before, I was extremely lucky in many ways, maybe luckier than I deserve. We had some really, really good music.

Troy: It’s kind of like it was perfectly planned for you to have that job.

Rudy: It’s almost scary when I think of it because I was looking for a job because Brandon School Division at that time seemed to have an interesting unofficial policy that their music directors would be hired fresh out of college, put on your standard two-year probationary term, and then on the third year they would either say, “Sorry, we’re going to put you on probation for the optional third year” or they would cut the program in the school where you were. They cut the program
where I was. Their music was divisional as they had divisional symphony, divisional bands, and the kids were bused all over the place. The year that I left two of their band people and their orchestra person left out of protest. I was looking for a job and I sent out twenty-one resumes; got no call backs all the way from Brandon to British Columbia. The MCI chairman of the board phoned me, did an interview over the phone, and offered me the job. I’ve said I’ve been unbelievably fortunate; I’d be the first to admit it. I took advantage of it and had fun. I never regretted it. It was worth it even though they didn’t have a pension plan.

Troy: Welcome to the world of private schools.

Rudy: Yes, they do that now. In fact they introduced it I think a year or two before I left, but it didn’t help me a whole heck of a lot.

Troy: Would you like to make any final comments?

Rudy: I’m looking forward to seeing how this all comes together.

Troy: Me too, so whatever happens there will be a transcript and I’m hoping to get those done by the end of this summer.

Rudy: Sure.

Troy: Thank you very much for your time.

Rudy: It was fun. Old people like to reminisce.

Troy: I love this, I absolutely do love this.

Rudy: It also helped me in remembering. One time the band piece was based on the theme song from the TV show Hogan’s Heroes. I prepared it for a Sängerfest, the big show in June. (The principal) wasn’t sure if it was being politically correct
because of the German background of our people, but he smiled anyway. We played it and the audience and the kids seemed to get a kick out of it. It wasn’t a big deal, but the principal did raise a question. He wasn’t sure if it was appropriate or not.

Troy: It was kind of a cultural sensitivity issue?

Rudy: Yeah, we said before, if we perform we would be conscious of what we are doing, for whom, and why. We covered everything.
Troy: What does your school look for in a music educator?

Darryl: Our school program has had as its core strength choral music and that is true as long as we’ve done music for just over a hundred years. We have looked for candidates with experience, strength, gifts, and interests in choral music. I could mark shifts in the last 30 years or so from what is a very traditional, formal, four-part, church choir choral world to a more musically diverse skill set when looking for music educators now in order to try and capture a broader range of interests. If I think of the first half of the 20th century, the middle of the 20th century, right up through maybe as far as to the mid-80s, the school relied on a fairly strong, surviving sort of culture of choral music and choir singing in churches. Various regions in Manitoba had multi-community, multi-church Sängerfests as part of their church calendar and if you were a Mennonite kid in a Mennonite church, school or not, you were going to be part of a choir event somewhere. I think our schools relied on that culture and picked its music directors with that sort of starting point in mind.

By now, and in the most recent 20 years, the place of choral music in our churches has diminished significantly. It’s not gone, but it’s significantly
diminished. Kids’ musical interests, opportunities, and their leisure interests and opportunities are much more diverse than they were. Where my parents would have been part of a church choir because it’s the only time and mode by which they could find social interaction with their peers, it’s the last thing that is needed for social interaction with peers now for students. We have looked for people with a range of musical interests and skill as players and then where we have been able to, hire charisma in the teacher candidates that present themselves.

Troy: That’s somebody that brings some life to the program.

Darryl: Life to the program, engages kids, and makes it fun. We try to find the real life Pied Pipers of the world.

Troy: Can you remember some of the past music teachers that have been here?

Darryl: I know most of them personally, not as a singer in their choirs, but I have had a personal interaction with I think everyone from the fifties until now which is remarkable because that exceeds my lifetime. The music director from the earliest part of that era, the fifties and sixties, grew old in this community long after his education career. I knew him as an elderly senior citizen in our congregation who was interested in music. I studied under one and have seen a number of others since then. They have some common characteristics: an appreciation for the profile of music in Mennonite heritage, an interest in classical forms of choral and other types of music, skill as players of multiple instruments, and people of strong commitment to the church. Music was easily, naturally, and authentically a mode of their worship and a place for worship to integrate with work very easily. I have known a number of those and for some of them, I could
begin to describe them as individuals. It wouldn’t necessarily have broad strokes. In the last four music people who have been on our staff, and I am thinking of the music director not necessarily minor supporting roles, but sort of the lead personality. I can describe them. It’s a small school so it’s often a department of one. There would have been graduate work in the academic careers of all of them. In Rick’s case, he’s on the threshold of it. He has multiple undergraduate degrees, but no graduate work though he’s headed that direction. In the case of two of them, they went on to pursue music education at an advanced level beyond high school, at a university or college level, and I think that just reflected their interests in drawing out of the people they work with what they could. You can get more from college kids. You can go further, higher, deeper, stronger, and more technical.

Troy: They’re just following their own interests?

Darryl: Yeah, they are following their own interests. Rick Heppner Mueller is a very skillful integrator of classical forms and modern, contemporary forms. He can appropriately interweave themed secular music into worship repertoire. He’s found ways, good ways to sing Crosby, Stills, and Nash stuff in church services. It’s really quite remarkable in my view. He’s got a ton of charisma. It’s the glue for all the parts and certainly the way he works. It’s probably not fair to make direct comparisons because individual styles are different, but if he separates himself, that might be the greatest strength that separates him from some of his recent contemporaries here. We’ve had very good technical and musical people, but Rick’s just got a ton of charisma as a teacher.
Troy: Yeah, the Pied Piper aspect.

Darryl: Exactly, yeah.

Troy: You had mentioned secular if there is such a thing, do you want to say more about that?

Darryl: I think of the dichotomy, and I think it’s a false one, between secular and sacred music in a variety of contexts. Pop music has contemporary Christian bands and the other stuff that the world’s radio stations play. As a listener of music, I am drawn to compelling music and I like meaningful lyrics if there are lyrics. I don’t think the power of God or the Holy Spirit is able to be harnessed into Christian music and barred from secular music, so in that setting I see an overlap and I don’t see meaning in separating them. If a style of music is undesirable to an individual as a matter of taste, I won’t quarrel much. If the music has lyrics which degrade the human spirit, the human experience, or the Divine, that’s its own problem and it’s not the problem of the music. I would prefer to blur the lines. In the same manner with choral music or other contemporary music arranged for a choral setting or a jazz group setting, the same holds for me. If the music is compelling, I want to listen to it, sing it, play it, and if its lyrics give it life, then I am interested in it. If scripture is true and life has one source, then wherever I encounter real and true Life with a capital L, I’m on sacred ground. I would discard the simple categories of Christian music or sacred music and secular music.
Troy: I’m just going to throw out a statement and see if you want to react to it or respond to it. There isn’t anything that is theologically neutral. As far as music goes or arts or academics, do you think there’s some truth in that statement?

Darryl: There’s no theologically neutral ground. I would agree and then be compelled to explain what I mean in a variety of contexts right. I waste your time here with silent battery power. I think the pursuit of whether it’s theological neutral ground, amoral neutral ground, or ethical neutral ground is a futile chase because I think whatever we do, whoever we are, or whoever we become begs the question, “Why do you do this? For what purpose is this done? By what spirit did this come to be?” I just don’t see a neutral source for anything like that.

Troy: The teleological aspect?

Darryl: Yes, very good, exactly, and that leads its way into everything and serves to explain for me the intersection of the secular and the sacred to the extent it seems necessary to have categories like that.

Troy: Sometimes they’re false dichotomies?

Darryl: Exactly.

Troy: Would you want to talk about any of the past music teachers?

Darryl: Rick Heppner Mueller is the current music director. He’s been here since 1997 if I’m right. For three years previous to Rick was a gentleman named Ian Loeppky who went from here to do Master’s and Ph.D. work and is currently teaching and conducting at the University of Northern Alabama. Before that was a gentleman named James Janzen who was here for a number of years. He and I intersected only one year as staff colleagues and he went from here to a college program in
Alberta, Prairie Bible Institute which is ceasing its choral program at the end of this school year. He had a stronger orchestral, instrumental skill set than Rick does. Rick has led our band program at times and he would say badly and reluctantly. I don’t think I’m speaking behind his back when I say that. He was better than he said he was and he enjoyed it even less than he said he did. But James was stronger in a traditional high school band programming. He had a number of woodwind and brass instruments that he could play quite well. I knew him as a traditionalist with respect to sort of the classics and in choral and performance music. He was not afraid of or allergic to contemporary music, he just preferred classical music. It struck a more academic tone and I think he appreciated that. That sort of reflects my description of his work.

Before that there were a couple of others who were here briefly and they would have included Dave Matthies who went from here to a university program in Lethbridge, Alberta and at this point is not in music. Bob Wiebe was here briefly, that’s Tim’s brother. Like his entire family, Bob is a very accomplished musician, but education wasn’t his field and so he’s not in education. It’s not that he left music or went to a different music field, he’s a musician I think by hobby and pastime, but not by vocation anymore.

Rudy Krahn was before that and he would have been the music director when I was a student here in the early eighties. His education career continues and he shifted focus a little bit from musical arts to dramatic arts after leaving MCI. He is a pretty good musician I would say. I’m not qualified to say that, to make that assessment, but what I would have experienced as a student in his

408
choirs, auditioned and voluntary, was a person of musical skill and a wide range of musical interests. He loved kids at least as much as he loved music and so found himself in the intersection of those two interests. He did quite well. He was less compelled to do music competition, festivals, or sort of achievement-oriented stuff as he was interested in doing worshipful and participatory musical experiences for students. I think the kids sang well for him in that way.

There would have been a few on shorter stints before that. Henry Engbrecht was here briefly before forging a long and illustrious career at the university level in Manitoba. Neil Zacharias was the one who goes back to the early fifties and sixties who was the elderly sort of choral interest in our congregation. I couldn’t say a single thing about his career as I really didn’t know it. That sort of runs down the list.

Troy: Do you know where there’s any place where I could find out more about any of them?

Darryl: That’s a good question. Our history book would have a little of it in there, but I don’t know that we would have other resources.

Troy: Tim suggested visiting with George.

Darryl: George, he would be a gold mine of information because he would have worked with every one of these guys at some point or another. If he hasn’t worked with them, he has certainly intersected with them. If Henry Engbrecht didn’t do it in Manitoba Mennonite music, George Wiebe did. Either one or both of them were on the scene at one point with General Conference or MC Manitoba congregations. Rick mentioned over lunch Ben Horch and I know you’ve read
some of his stuff, but his connections were Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba.

George Wiebe and Henry Engbrecht were the GCs of the Mennonite music world here.

Troy: That fits more with Gretna?

Darryl: Yes, and Tim’s mother, Esther, is a prolific accompanist and arranger of music. They’ve spent their careers together in this field.

Troy: I will have to look him up. We have covered their backgrounds, educational, religious, and ethnic-wise—Germans from Russia all of them?

Darryl: I think so. That’s not every Mennonite in Manitoba, but it’s a goodly many of them. They came here in the 1870s or the 1920s, and they came from Russia. Yeah.

Troy: Have any of these teachers had a lasting impact on music education here?

Darryl: I think so. I think they inspired subsequent music people. We haven’t had an MCI alumnus come back and lead the program as a teacher in recent years, though that’s bound to happen sooner or later because that’s happened in other content areas or roles in the school. There is a surprising impact, I’m not sure how to quantify it, but music programs in the public schools in this region in southern Manitoba have had a surprising number of MCI graduates come to work in those settings. They were MCI students as high school students, pursued music education at the post secondary level, and then found their ways into choral or music programs in local high schools. I would say that’s sort of a regional effect of the strength of the program here. Currently, Steinbach Regional Secondary School, the biggest high school on the East Reserve by far, and Garden Valley...
Collegiate in Winkler, the biggest one out here, have MCI grads as the heads of their music departments. Strong music people are born out of a strong program here I think.

Troy: One of the things that I am going to be looking at is if there is a difference in traditions that have developed between the two reserves and if they are kind of cross-pollinating. That could explain a lot right there too. It has this kind of global mesh going on.

Darryl: Yeah, I think so. I know it’s true now, because I am aware of some of the personalities involved. I don’t know well enough whether this was the case 30 or 50 years ago. Was there movement back and forth between the two reserves, were people being educated here and returning there? I know they were. Did it have a music impact? We had a society church, Steinbach Mennonite Church was a society church for a long, long time, so many Steinbach kids over the years and area kids came to school here and went back there. Yeah, I know it’s happening now, I’m not sure the extent to which it did historically.

Troy: What is a society church?

Darryl: That’s simply one of the 22 congregations who are a formal part of the organization which owns and supports this school. All but two are Mennonite Church Manitoba congregations. One is a Sommerfeld congregation and another is an MB conference church.

Troy: Would you like to talk about the role of performances at this school?

Darryl: For decades the people in the school and in the school community wouldn’t have used the word performance to describe what was happening when they sang for
an audience: it would have been worship. Those would have been worship services either on a Sunday morning or in a large Sängerfest kind of an event that brought people together under a big tent, in a big hall, in the gym, or the auditorium. They all would have had a very explicit worship element to it. I don’t know if they would have resisted the label “performance,” but they wouldn’t have used that themselves because performance sounds prideful and self-interested. Having said that, we do many similar events now. We still have an event in June called Sängerfest and it’s only our students performing. Sometimes there are musical guests, but it brings the broad constituency together for that event and it’s highly worshipful in its orientation in the way the day is structured. We visit churches on Sunday mornings, but more and more we do concerts which are performances. I would say there’s a transition and an embracing of performance as a rationale for all of the hard work of rehearsal, learning, and putting the parts together. Here’s an opportunity to showcase what has been learned and the reason you learn these things was in order for them to be performed.

Interestingly, I would say that the Mennonite world has experienced a similar transition with respect to athletics. For a long time you couldn’t play sports because that’s what the world did, it’s not what the church did. Slowly, playing a sport was allowed because it was fun, healthy, and that kind of thing, but competition was not a part of it. Sports for intramural makes sense, interscholastic sport didn’t, and then they saw that it could be fun and meaningful as well. Before long, and for a long time now, competition and the game is an
accepted rationale for learning the skills and learning the sport, in addition to whatever merit you might think it has for nurturing character and teamwork and all that kind of thing.

I think a similar thing could be said for the way we view musical performance. Clearly, the worship rationale has been a compelling one for a long, long time, and now singing for fun in recent decades has begun to make sense which sounds counterintuitive. Why wouldn’t it be fun and why shouldn’t it be fun, and if it is fun, then let’s sing together, right? I think it’s recent decades, it’s widely accepted that performance, for the sake of good performance, is a compelling rationale for what we do.

Troy: And there is no change in theological belief.

Darryl: I think the theology that undergirds it is, in large part, the same. I think we used to struggle to remain separate and the most tangible way to make that happen was to maintain a physical separation from the world’s activities if not from the world’s communities. I think there’s as strong a theological impetus to remain separate in belief, in faith, and in understanding, but that separation in a performance setting is not a necessary means to retain a theological separation.

Troy: A performance isn’t something that you’re showing off; it’s an expression of who you are as a Christian community.

Darryl: Yeah, it definitely is an expression of who we are, an expression of or a celebration of God given gifts—nurtured and practiced gifts. It’s not a showing off, we really enjoy the demonstration of gifts and skills and we feel good for those who do it. That would have been seen as prideful in the past. I think we’ve
adopted a more Biblical understanding of the word pride: to acknowledge gifts and their expression by practice is not a prideful statement, it’s a true statement, and it’s something to feel good about. It doesn’t come at the expense of someone else, which is what pride does. Pride comes at another’s expense. Joy and celebration need not. I think we’re in a stronger place theologically than we were when we just thought staying separate accomplished it, but maybe that’s too simple.

Troy: What roles do musical performances have in the community?

Darryl: Our own school performances or music performances more broadly than our school?

Troy: It can be like anything from the impact that it has on just this town or itinerations that you do.

Darryl: We hear over and over again from those who host us that the itinerations do a great deal to keep us connected, keep people connected to the school, and connect people of faith. Those are terrific things to do. We’ve been intentional about sharing our space and our new facility enhances that opportunity significantly. We’ve had opportunities to collaborate with other local musical interests and that’s made us a partner with our region where we were isolated in the past from our region. That’s the striking feature in recent years that performance and performance space has fostered connections with artists, musical organizations, or arts groups in our region wouldn’t have been connected to us in the past. I think it’s a richer experience for it.

Troy: Have the choral ensembles here changed over the years?
Darryl: A little bit, there are smaller auditioned vocal ensembles with a more diverse curriculum than was the case when I was a student 25 years ago. Twenty-five years ago there was an All School Choir, there was an only slightly smaller volunteer choir and one auditioned choir. That auditioned choir was called the Chamber Choir and is still auditioned. In some ways, it’s the feature group, but there are a couple of smaller jazz ensembles like Resonate and Junior Vocal Ensemble that are different than was the case then. There was no instrumental band at the time and now we struggle to put one together, partly because we don’t have a feeder program, but partly a separate quest seems to be a separate question. There are more groups, a greater range of musical repertoire, and curriculum requirements (are more extensive) than was the case 25 years ago and earlier.

Troy: When you were in choir was it that way?

Darryl: I was as a student 1981 to 1985, so those would have been my years as a student in this program. At that time, only the All School Choir and the volunteer choir met during the academic day. At that time the Chamber Choir was an evening activity and it was a co-curricular program. All of these programs have become content, core, and for credit programs. That’s a significant shift. My Chamber Choir rehearsals were Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and for the kids since the late eighties these choirs are in the academic day for credit. They meet a curriculum requirement that the province accredits.

Troy: How has enrollment in choir changed over the years?

Darryl: It’s much the same. We prescribe it and call it Concert Choir now, but it’s essentially an All School Choir with a few exceptions. The Chamber Choir is
roughly the same size as it was previously. It’s a desirable group to achieve and so are the other smaller, auditioned groups. So whether overall school enrollment has been high or low, musical enrollment has been what I would call constant in that it seemed to be desirable and musical kids are interested in it. According to some high school stereotypes, “cool kids” find out that music is part of the definition of “cool” here where it wasn’t necessarily “cool” in their previous setting, so it remains strong.

Troy: You mentioned a little bit on the changes in repertoire over the years, do you want to say anything more on that?

Darryl: I would say that a more contemporary repertoire has been chosen, especially for the prescribed choirs than was the case. In my days as a student, the All School Choir would have prepared arias from the classical periods for a Christmas concert or a Sängerfest concert, and we would have slugged out three or four movements of Haydn, Handel, or maybe Mendelssohn. Now, instead of putting together the oratorio experience for the All School Choir, it’s a variety selection of some classical or other music arranged explicitly for a choral arrangement from a wide range of musical genres. That’s allowed Rick to be the Pied Piper, to keep interest, or to keep cooperation from kids who just would not be there if they were given their druthers. They end up with a fun experience that, if there are enough performances to compel their rehearsal, it ends up being a fun experience. One good example is one of the choirs last year sang a choral arrangement of Earth, Wind, and Fire’s song “September.” Here’s this Motown tune from the seventies being sung by a 140 voice, four-part, voice choir. It sounded great and they had a
ton of fun with it. Maybe we would have done it 25 years ago, but people would have wondered why, and 35 or 45 years ago, not a chance. It would have been unthinkable and I’m glad for that. We joke about it in the staff room and other places, but we’re far enough from the Russian Revolution to have stepped away from a deeply held notion that if it’s fun it must be sinful. Thank goodness we have because if drudgery is the surest sign of faith, I’m not sure I want it. I think that shift is probably is a theological shift, not just a worldview shift, and it is a welcomed thing in our music program. Give kids a chance to enjoy it. Once they’re over the barriers that may exist about whether or not music is fun, then they’ll also find that those classics are fun too in a different way and for different reasons.

The shift in repertoire has been important. What I commend Rick for is that he’s managed to do that diversity without having one decision denigrate a previous one. It’s not that classical music or classically organized choral music is stuffy, old, boring, or lousy. It’s just that there’s so much more we have permission to do now that’s also fun and it’s different, so let’s do a range of it. It appeals to kids and would appeal to me too.

Troy: That was talking about choral music. Do you want to say anything about instrumental music?

Darryl: In our case, instrumental music is a struggle and this is an academic programming question really. The nature of our school draws kids from a great many regions and so there isn’t any way to set up a balance of instruments, moving through the years of schooling. We find ourselves some years with nine trumpets and no
clarinets and there’s nothing we can do about that except reshuffle instruments at the grade nine or 10 level which has some built-in resistance from kids. We’ve struggled with that. At the same time, instrumental music instructors might say we haven’t tried to overcome that with the same rigor that we have worked out our choral program and that’s a fair criticism. When resources are limited, you make decisions, and go with a certain direction. That’s certainly true to our context. Throughout that time we’ve had individual students and teachers with real strength in one or more instruments, but that’s tended to be either a sideline or a personal interest. It hasn’t become an encompassing sort of school effort. The size of our school suggests that you would have to choose one or the other. I’m not sure if you would or wouldn’t, but that’s where we find ourselves.

Troy: Maybe this is a little bit askew, but the instrumental program has nothing to do with the traditional status of instruments among Mennonites. It’s more like in choir, everybody has a voice, but in band you have to think about instruments and the costs with that.

Darryl: Yeah, you’ll sing naturally, but will you learn an instrument on your own naturally? I don’t know. Lots of people do, but everyone can sing, and Rick says, “I can teach, give me three months, and we can teach anyone to make something like music with their voice.” Three months isn’t enough to begin to make music with an instrument if you’re starting from zero, so the playing field’s not level.

Troy: I have asked this next question I think already so you can pass if you want to. Has music education had an impact on the community?
Darryl: Yeah, significantly. It has sustained us, strengthened certain areas of music that’s community-wide, and I think is distinct. It’s not unique to Mennonite people, but corral a hundred Mennonite kids anywhere and they will be able to sing something for you. That isn’t necessarily the case in other cultures.

Troy: Please describe the following aspects of music education at your school and how it has changed over the years. The feeder schools, have the schools where the students are coming from changed over the years?

Darryl: I would say they’re fairly consistent over recent decades.

Troy: How about enrollment? Has enrollment changed in the music program over the years?

Darryl: No, within our program I would say we’ve grown the program so more kids have the opportunity to participate. It was a demand area years ago and it remains a demand area.

Troy: Is that in the auditioned groups as well?

Darryl: Yes.

Troy: Do you have anything to say about the curriculum of the music program?

Darryl: By diversifying to the programs and adding different groups, we’ve encompassed a greater range of curriculum requirements. The vocal jazz curriculum has demands in it or components to it that the other choral programs don’t, so it’s become diverse.

Troy: How about as far as doing what you want to do, do you have plenty of autonomy?
Darryl: I think so. We have an audience who support our overall program and we want to nurture, but that’s no different than any musical group and their audience. I’m comfortable to say that we have a strong level of autonomy in that regard.

Troy: What about scheduling?

Darryl: The place of music in our schedule has increased in prominence, time, and quantity in the last 20 years. Those choirs have become courses in a more formal way than they were and have a daytime timetable where many of the schools in our region who would have an auditioned Chamber Choir like we do, even in a public school setting, would timetable that outside of the regular day. It would be the 7:30 to 8:30 kind of thing, before the school day starts, lunch hour, or something like that.

Troy: How about funding for the program?

Darryl: It has been pretty consistent throughout, stable.

Troy: You already mentioned the choral program, that’s all been expanded. What about the instrumental program?

Darryl: There is a program where there wasn’t one 25 years ago, though it’s fledgling.

Troy: Are there any general music classes offered here?

Darryl: No.

Troy: It’s strictly secondary curriculum?

Darryl: Yeah.

Troy: What about the facilities?

Darryl: That has taken a giant leap forward in the last five to 10 years.

Troy: Is there anything you want to say about equipment that you have?
Darryl: We have more instruments like pianos, audio, and recording equipment that go
with the hall. This a step forward.

Troy: What do you want to see next with the music program?

Darryl: I see it becoming a greater draw for enrollment than has been the case in the past
because I think public schools in our region are finding it more difficult to do it
well. If families or kids are willing to make a choice, there is one. Having said
that, it’s a choice where clearly our strength would be choral music or musical
theater, so I see that in the future, near and distant future. I would like to see that
our music program grows its reputation as one that sustains what has been a
strength in Mennonite choral music, diversifies its mode of expression, and
becomes noteworthy for doing so. If our program could not only be seen, but
grown and perceived as one that preserves the traditions of the past and flourishes
those gifts in a broader more diverse range of expressions in the future. That
would be a real nice statement to be able to make about it.

Troy: Do you want to speculate why choral music has done well here?

Darryl: We’ve stubbornly retained it as a part of our program and then put it in the hands
of good people. I think that’s why. There’s a subtle sidebar that speaks to this
that’s not uniquely music, but is a component in a great many of the families or
kids who choose MCI as their school. We’ve got a school culture that’s friendlier
than lots of other schools where you have to fit into the social pressures that exist
in the lives of high school kids. If you can’t be an athlete, a banger, or a gangster,
and if you can’t fit into one of those categories out there, then there isn’t a place
for kids to just be themselves. We are really on to a culture that allows kids to be

421
themselves here more safely. It’s not risk free, life never is, but kids can be themselves here more safely than they’ve been able to be in many other places. The complexity of factors to make that statement true are enormous, no doubt. There are kids in the schools and communities where kids come from, who can be themselves, and do well, and all that kind of thing.

We have a lot of kids come through our doors seeking an opportunity to be themselves for the first time in a long time or to enjoy school for the first time in a long time. They often come in the door not feeling like a world beater, but feeling like the world’s beaten them a little bit. What they find out here is that although some of those conventions remain, athletes hang out and musicians hang out together, but the groups mix a lot more than they would have experienced in their home community or in their school at home. I can quite comfortably tell you that I hear others say that as often, and I observe it regularly. They come in the door, look around for a few weeks, and realize, “Hockey players can be in the auditioned choir.” Not only do they not wonder why, they expect that hockey players are auditioning for the choirs. Suddenly everything’s possible. We just tell people this is what we do here, we sing here. That’s one of the things we do, we do it for fun, we do it well, we do it for worship, we do it as an expression of thanks to God, and it fits into the definition of cool. Suddenly kids find out that the definition of cool that’s imposed on them from outside doesn’t have the power that they thought it had or that they had given to it. As a result, we have kids who achieve well in all kinds of programs that surprise people.
There are a ton of examples, but before my role as principal, athletics and phys-ed was my domain. I can recall a very specific conversation with an athletic director in a public school in our region. He was a good teacher and a good guy. I had no quarrel with him on any level, but that year, the student who happened to be elected student council president in our school was from his community. He knew this kid as an elementary and middle school student, would not have believed the kid would even run for a student council position, much less be elected by his peers as student council president. That’s one example that illustrates what I think we have going here. So singing is fully integrated into the definition of what’s cool around here, and that might be the biggest obstacle to overcome.

Good people made it work even better, and I am really thankful for that. To me, it really does demonstrate what’s true about the fact that people are created with gifts in them, and if their social surrounding is not squashing those gifts or the expression of those gifts, nearly everyone in the world is going to surprise you. Give people a chance to surprise you and they will. I’m thankful for that all the time and if it sounds like pride, I’m guilty. That’s a strong component to the ongoing strength of our choral program.

Troy: How do the guiding principles or the mission statement of the school impact the program?

Darryl: Very directly and explicitly. We’ve done well to keep our mission statement prominent in all of our work. When we say that we want to nurture, our mission statement says we want to nurture all of the gifts that God has given us: physical,
emotional, aesthetic, academic, and spiritual. We take that seriously. Our mission statement also says we want to invite and give kids a chance to make (themselves) disciples of Christ in an invitational way. The music is selected with that in mind and the spirit with which it’s instructed has that prominently in mind. I would say it’s a very strong impact.

Troy: Would you like to share any memorable stories?

Darryl: I don’t have one leap to mind anyway.

Troy: Would you like to make any final comments?

Darryl: Final comments, I bet I would just repeat myself.

Troy: Thank you so very much for your time.

Darryl: Glad to do it.
Appendix G

George Wiebe Interview

George Wiebe, D MUS, 28 May 2008 at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg

Troy: Could you tell me a little bit about your educational background?

George: My formal musical studies really started at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC). This college was amalgamated with Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in 2000 to become Canadian Mennonite University. Before the amalgamation took place, MBBC changed their name from Mennonite Brethren Bible College to Concord College and existed under that name for about a decade or so. I attended MBBC when Ben and Esther Horch were still teaching there. I think you have seen the recent biography on Ben and Esther.

Troy: I’ve heard about the book, but I haven’t seen it yet.

George: Oh you haven’t. If I would have known that I would have brought it with me.

Troy: Peter Letkemann did it, didn’t he?

George: Yeah, it’s a very good biography and a great gift to the Mennonite world and beyond. I had attended CMBC for three years as a theology major. We called it Christian Education then and took a few basic music courses that were offered then. I had a real craving for further study when I saw what was going on at MBBC across the river. I knew Ben Horch personally and greatly admired his
person and work. After I graduated from CMBC, I took one year at Mennonite Brethren Bible College and took all the courses I could.

During that year I was there, the person who was teaching at CMBC resigned or was let go and they needed a replacement. The CMBC Board invited me to step in and assumed my wife Esther would help. Esther is a gifted and well-trained musician. She started her musical training as a child. I said I would need to take off time in the summer to continue my musical education. Of course they wanted to see that, and that’s how I got hired after one year of studies at MBBC. It’s unheard of today to hire that way, but the board was concerned that the choral singing would be alive here and the promotion of good church music which then was understood as a way to promote the chorale singing in the churches, the German chorale. That was their big concern. With that mandate, I said we would give it a try. I taught at CMBC ever since that time until I retired. Fortunately I was able to continue my studies through private teachers. I have degrees that are in some ways equivalent to bachelor degrees in performance and theory from the University of Toronto. I didn’t have to attend class; I could take those courses privately and write exams. I worked singing into my curriculum and I did several voice exams. My goal was to attend a university with an excellent music program. I connected with musicians like Elvera Voth and Walter Jost in the U.S. Elvera told me about Robert Shaw, and my friend, Walter Jost from Bethel College, informed me about the six-week choral workshop that Robert Shaw and Julius Herford were offering each summer at San Diego. I participated in two of these inspiring choral art seminars. I took six week courses
with a man by the name of Julius Herford. Those were wonderful. I had only
heard records of that.

My first exposure to the work of Robert Shaw was hearing his famous first
recording of traditional Christmas carols. I had never heard singing like that.
That sound haunted me until I experienced it first hand at San Diego State
College. We analyzed and rehearsed works like *St. Matthew Passion* every day.
Analysis with Julius Herford was the best! It was inspiring and thoroughly
enlightening. Robert Shaw’s rehearsals were remarkable.

My life was changed and I never was the same after that. After the second
workshop in San Diego, I began a Master’s degree in Church Music at the
University of Southern California, Los Angeles under Dr. Charles Hirt. He was
very well known among some Mennonite conductors and singers. He conducted
the inter-Mennonite high school choirs in Iowa in the early 1970s. USC was a
very good school. It had a good church music department and I enrolled in it.
After completing my master’s degree, I continued teaching at CMBC. When my
first full sabbatical came up, I asked for leave to go to Detmold, Germany for
more specialized training in conducting technique. I also got to sing in the very
fine *Westfälische Kantorei* under its celebrated founder and conductor, Dr.
Wilhelm Ehmann. He was very inspiring, a kind of the Robert Shaw of Germany
in some ways in terms of how he approached music.

If you look in your library in the University of North Dakota, you might
see a book called *Choral Directing* by Wilhelm Ehmann. He’s made choir tours
within the United States and Europe. I had the privilege and the joy of translating
that book. Before we left Germany after the 1964-65 sabbatical leave, Wilhelm Ehmann asked me if I would like to translate his book, *Die Chorführung* for Augsburg publishing company. I accepted the challenge which became a labor of love during the next few years. At 43, I was due for another sabbatical. It is easy to sort of just kind of paddle water unless you have some extra ordinary stimuli especially in a small school like this where you’re the only choral director. I followed my strong desire to go for a doctoral degree at a highly recognized university. I heard Julius Herford was heading up the fine choral graduate program at Indiana University in Bloomington. I applied, auditioned successfully, and completed my doctoral degree in choral directing. I was close to 50 by the time I got everything finished, but I have never regretted this most rigorous and rewarding venture. That kept me going right to the end of my teaching career and further.

When I retired at age 65, we followed an invitation to Curitiba, Brazil to work with the Mennonites there. We organized a 100-voice oratorio choir and did two performances of Mendelssohn *St. Paul*. The singers there were not used to such demanding rehearsal, but with well-organized and focused practices they did well. The Curitiba Symphony was provided gratis by the mayor of Curitiba. Curitiba has a little over a million inhabitants. The mayor’s only condition for providing the orchestra was that we do two performances of Mendelssohn’s *Paulus*.

We came back and Esther had three years yet to teach before her retirement. When she completed her three years, we accepted an invitation to
teach and make music with Mennonites in Paraguay. Over a total of three and a
half years we performed four oratorios: Mendelssohn’s *St. Paul*, Handel’s
*Messiah*, Haydn’s *Creation*, and Heinrich Schütz’s *Die Weihnachtshistorie (The
Christmas Story)*.

It’s been a very full and rich life. That’s about as selfish of me as I can report. I was most fortunate to sing under and study with some of the finest
choral conductors in the world. Our second last sabbatical consisted of a teaching
exchange arrangement with Professor Leonard Enns from Conrad Grebel College
in Waterloo, Ontario. Leonard came to teach at CMBC while Esther and I
covered some of Enns’s work at Conrad Grebel.

During the summer of 1983, Esther and I went to Westminster Choir
College for several weeks to take workshops in the field of our interest (she with
Alice Parker in choral arranging and I went to sing with Shaw). I hadn’t sung
with him for 29 years. It was during one of the breaks when he looked at me and
said, “Haven’t we seen each other before?”

“Yes, we had,” I said, “29 years ago in San Diego.”

“Where are you from?”

I said, “Winnipeg.”

He asked, “Isn’t that where Howard Swan conducted a Mennonite seminar
choir?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Well, Howard told me wonderful things about the Mennonite singing you
have over there and when are you going to ask me?”
I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

“Let’s meet over noon sometime,” said Robert, “to discuss basic arrangements.”

We met briefly over a noon hour to discuss the musical works to be done, the date, and financial terms. In February of 1985, the world’s choral king walked into this small, modest Bible College to a waiting choir of 277 singers from across Canada and several States. It was an evenly balanced choir with 70 tenors! A choir like this had never before been assembled in Winnipeg to do the Brahms Requiem and Bach’s “Christ lag in Todesbanden” (the latter with a 60-voice choir). Shaw raved about it! He was excited and I was scared to death because of the high expectations he always had from his singers. However, he was most kind, complimentary and full of humor. After Shaw we invited Helmuth Rilling of Stuttgart, Germany. He goes to Oregon every year and has workshops. He has done that for 30 years. He’s a great Bach specialist. We’ve had him do two major oratorios, Mendelssohn’s Elijah and also Haydn’s Creation.

Sometime after Shaw’s visit in 1985, he phoned me one morning and told me he had been invited to conduct a major work at the World Federation of Choirs in Toronto. The festival lasted a month, and they had asked him to be their guest conductor. He said, “If I can do the work of my choice with the choir of my choice, I’m interested.” The work was Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, the choir was the Mennonite Festival Chorus, and the orchestra was the Toronto Symphony. The choir was prepared by long-time colleague William Baerg and
myself. The singers were auditioned more stringently than for the Brahms 
*Requiem*. They were asked to sing excerpts from the fast moving “Et Vitam 
Venturi” fugue. That was awfully fast to sing that.

We got funds and had 180 Mennonites from all across Canada from 
British Columbia to Ontario. Bill Baerg rehearsed 60 percent of the singers (BC 
to Manitoba) for about a week while I went to Ontario and rehearsed the other 40 
percent over there in Ontario. We started rehearsals with some trepidation but 
ended up with a fabulous experience. This mountaintop experience brought home 
even more the realization of my strong passion for great choral music.

Meanwhile, my interest in hymnody has always been very strong and I’ve 
done a lot in that area. I’ve been on four hymnbook committees: two German 
*Gesangbücher* and two English hymnals. The latest hymnal in which Esther and I 
participated as resource people was the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten in Paraguay* 
(2007). It was created and published by the Mennonite church in Paraguay. We 
also did a lot of the actual work of textual and musical editing. We spent three 
years of quiet but intense and very enjoyable work in the formation of this 
*Gesangbuch*. I wish I could show you the book. It’s a beautiful book and was 
printed in Germany. This was the first *Gesangbuch* that the Mennonites of 
Paraguay created and published. Until 2007, they always used hymnals produced 
in North America and Germany. Now they use American personnel to help them, 
but we work with their committee.

Troy: You and Esther helped them do the first one for the church in Paraguay?
George: Yeah, Esther was deeply involved because she writes excellent harmonies. She wrote harmonizations for 28 hymns. She was good in overseeing the theoretical and musical aspects of the songs while I worked more with the textual aspects.

Troy: Where all have you worked?

George: Basically just at CMBC with the exception of special work assignments during sabbatical leaves. During one sabbatical I worked in Germany with Mennonites that had just returned from Russia. They were called Umsiedler. They loved to sing. Umsiedler—Siedler would be settlers, re-settlers. They claimed that their roots were in Germany. Some of their singing was pretty straightforward and lacked artistry, but it certainly didn’t lack the commitment. I had been asked to work for nine weeks with their choir directors and choirs because my Low and High German was quite fluent, and I was thoroughly fluent with their Ziffern system for reading music.

Troy: Did you ever do anything at MCI?

George: No, nothing beyond a song festival or two. I never taught there. My former students have and the most illustrious one whose name you probably should have too is Henry Engbrecht. He just retired from the University of Manitoba, but he’s done outstanding work here in the whole province of Manitoba. He started his conducting career at MCI. You’ll hear much about him from others.

Troy: Where does he live?

George: He lives here in Winnipeg and is a very amiable fellow. He just finished a performance of Handel’s Messiah with an excellent small choir called Canzona. He also conducts the Faith and Life Choir. I conducted that choir for 13 years.
until we went to Paraguay. Did you get to that program which they gave recently?

Troy: Yes.

George: I am glad you’ve seen him in action.

Troy: I never got to visit with him, but I did get to hear him.

George: He may not have all of the best singers in the Male Choir that he would like to have, but they’re still a good choir. Rick Mueller is the tenor soloist there. You have heard Rick’s choir. When I was a student at MCI we didn’t have anywhere near the standards of singing which we hear from their choirs today. We sang with great enthusiasm and a good command of the German language, had mature voices and so on, but we didn’t have the leaders that could have us sing with that finesse and on such a level as they are now. You probably won’t have much difficulty in getting information from them as Gretna has had a longer history. That school started in about 1890. It’s the oldest, private, Mennonite school in Canada. Steinbach must have started in the 1940s, 1950s, or somewhere in there. There’s quite a difference there.

Troy: When did you attend MCI?

George: I attended the MCI from 1943 to 1945. I was there for grade 11 and 12. I graduated in 1945. I’m supposed to go there tomorrow and talk to the grade 9 students because I have a grandson in grade 9, Tim’s boy.

Troy: You’re visiting with the grade 9 students. Do you know what you are going to talk about?

George: Yeah, I am going to talk about Gretna and MCI the way I knew it.
Troy: Will you share a little bit about that?

George: It may not be relevant to your topic. I just have to talk a bit about the way the school looked then. It was a different building. We had a white house; it was a three story white house. I don’t know, if you walked around and looked at some of the photos of the first school that was built it was a square box, but it had an elegance about it. That box-shaped building housed all the classrooms and the larger portion of the boys’ dormitories; the second and third floors were dormitory sections. This stately three-story building was situated at almost the exact spot where Buhler Hall stands now. You’ve seen that area. The school was run with very strong Prussian principles: The school was run on strict disciplinarian principles with many fixed rules. They were very strong on disciplines and it is much more relaxed now than it was then. I think I can tell them something about that. The sports programs at that time were all in house and were organized by the students. We didn’t have a sports teacher or someone who had the initiative. They would organize their own sports, but there were no intramural sports. It was for fun, for exercise, and we just needed to do something else than schoolwork.

We learned German very well. All religion coursers were taught in German.

Troy: Was all the singing done in German then?

George: Yeah, I remember maybe two or three English songs that we sang, otherwise the musical repertoire was all German. I can’t believe now when I think back, but the pro German stance was so strong at that time largely because it was right during
the time of the Hitler regime. Our principal happened to be a very strong pro
Hitler, pro-Nazi person\(^5\). We just didn’t know better at that time.
I enjoyed singing in the school choir at that time. Some conductors inspired me
more than others, but that’s beside the point, that’s always the case.

Troy: Do you remember some of your teachers?

George: Oh yes, yeah.

Troy: Could you mention a few of them?

George: Well, there was the principal Gerhardt Peters, who came from Russia and
represented the typical strictness of Mennonite teachers in Russia. He would
expect the guys to take off their cap when they met a teacher on the street. He
was probably the strictest of the lot. Paul Schaefer came to MCI a little later in
the 1940s. He was a wonderful teacher. He was a real gentleman and encouraged
me to teach at age 19 when I wanted to test myself for any teaching ability I might
have to find out whether I wanted to become a teacher or not. At that time they
allowed people to teach for a year right after high school without having any
teacher training because they were so short of teachers due to the war. They
called it *permit teaching*. I taught on a special permit and I was teaching in
northern Manitoba out in the sticks! I was instructed to go and visit the regional
school inspector in Roblin, Manitoba for orientation in the morning and go to his
place for breakfast which I did. The inspector handed me the curriculum: each

\(^5\) The presence of the German army, albeit of the Nazi regime, in the ravaged Mennonite communities in
Russia following the Communist revolution did briefly bring stability to a region suffering from atrocities
and anarchy. Thus, the reports that came back to Canadian Mennonites gave the impression that Hitler was
standing up for the rights of German speaking people. The reaction is understandable given the severity of
the hardships Mennonites in Russia were experiencing and the limited information available.
course for each grade was in a little, softcover paper booklet. That was my outline, the outline material of the textbooks.

“Just follow that,” I was told. Inspector Ewanchuck then asked me who my favorite teacher had been.

I replied, “Paul Schaefer in Gretna.”

“Good, teach like him,” he said.

That was the extent of my teacher’s training.

Troy: Did it work?

George: It worked in some areas. When the inspector came he liked what I was doing in music. Apparently the report said that’s what seemed to be most natural for me. I didn’t even know how to conduct a choir; I just somehow got it going. It was not at a great level at all. The students were what we then called half-breeds: half French and half Indian people or half Mennonite and half Indian. There was a kind of a lost tribe of Mennonites there, and they had embraced a religious cult called Swedenborgianism. They moved there, isolated themselves, and some intermarried. They were very hospitable and actually gave me a very nice time. We call them half breeds, later on that was changed to Canadian French or French Canadian. The kids were very good to work with. After a year of permit teaching, I decided to choose teaching as my career. I took one year of teacher’s training (then referred to as Normal School training) in Vancouver, BC. The next year I was 21. I taught in the Coverdale Junior High in the Fraser Valley. During that year I decided to attend a Bible College and applied to go to CMBC. CMBC was not at the location where it is now but was situated in a wealthy section of the
city (515 Wellington Crescent.). It was an elegant, three-storey stone mansion. The student body was very small but that’s where I received my Biblical and theological education, along with some music. This is where faculty and students discovered my strong musical inclinations and encouraged me to go into choral work.

Troy: So it was your calling?

George: I had the feeling that I would be less qualified to go into singing because of some of my six brothers sang much better than I did. We all had good voices in our family. We could form a quartet or other grouping and achieve instant harmony. We did a lot of quartet singing in those days. That’s where we learned to listen to each other by putting our heads together and sustaining a chord until it blended beautifully. We loved imitating nationally known quartets like the Fuller Quartet or the west coast quartet known as The Good Ship Grace or the Janz Brothers Quartet. We got a big bang of sounding like some other quartet that we weren’t.

Troy: Do you remember anything along the lines of choral festivals growing up?

George: Oh yeah. They called them Sängerfeste and we thrived on them. Too bad I don’t have a picture with me of the man who was a genius at organizing Sängerfests and getting people to sing. His name was K.H. Neufeld (known as K. H. for short) and was a kind of legend among the Canadian Mennonites. He had an unusual talent for acting and impersonation—possibly Hollywood caliber, vaudeville talent. When he walked down the aisle of packed pews and a packed choir loft, everyone watched him, mesmerized with anticipation and excitement. Often choirs were insufficiently rehearsed, but K. H. could still make a Sängerfest
come off with aplomb, and people thought it was a fantastic success. He knew how to work up the climaxes at the expense of stylistic and musical aspects. The details would all fall in, but the climaxes would come off for sure. K. H. got people to sing who otherwise would never come to choir: that was his genius. He couldn’t take them very far musically. Others, like Ben Horch, achieved higher musical standards. K. H. sure could get them started and that’s what we needed in those days. K. H. was like the evangelist coming to conduct revival meetings. Singers experienced something like musical and even religious renewal. People just loved to sing with him and do those songs.

Troy: That’s one of the things I’m interested in, if there’s some connection between those festivals and directors workshops and what happens now in the school education among music programs in Mennonite schools. Do you think there’s any connection between there?

George: I think so, but it would be hard to measure. At that time it wasn’t a problem to get young people to come and sing in a choir, especially if you had an exciting guest conductor. Most of the singers that sang in the Sängerfest continued to sing with their regular conductor, thus ensuring the ongoing cultivation of choral singing. When they got to a school like Gretna or Steinbach, they were ready to sing. It was an honor then to be in a choir that sang better than their church choir at home. The school choir that rehearsed regularly would offer them more challenging repertoire, and then take it on the road and take it on tour. In that respect, we had it very good here because students came here generally very, very well motivated to sing. They wanted to sing.
Troy: Do you mean when they got to college?

George: Yeah, to CMBC. I don’t know where Steinbach is now chorally, I haven’t heard, but you heard where Gretna was. That’s a feat. Rick Mueller is a person who is able to get the young people to love what they’re doing and it’s an honor to sing in that choir. His students may not be singing at all in any church choir at home, so what he’s doing in a way is a more challenging task than it was 20 or 30 years ago when they came with choral backgrounds from the church choirs. It is happening in all the private schools. You should do a study about private schools. There’s another Mennonite Brethren private school and two of them here. There’s Westgate Collegiate, supported by Mennonite Church Canada congregations and Mennonite Brethren Collegiate. They both have excellent choir programs. They’re neck and neck with Gretna and Rosthern has a fine choir program. The large British Columbia private school, Mennonite Educational Institute, has had excellent choir programs.

Troy: Do you want to say more about repertoire? I know you said text was important to you. What are some of the considerations with music and aesthetics?

George: Simply said, a good piece of music must have a respectable text, good craftsmanship, and also a fair amount of real inspiration. It also has a sense of form and structure where it will leave a sensitive listener with a sense of something good, honest, beautiful, and enduring. The average listeners might not like it that much on the first hearing, but they still sense that there is something that’s actually good. There are also those people who are satisfied with music which gives them goose bumps that last for about three seconds, then they’re
ready for the next number, and they get another set of goose pimples. It’s frothy stuff. Sometimes that music can be very challenging to do well. Technically, it may even be a challenge to bring it off well, but the piece won’t wear well in the long run. You don’t do it after 20 years. It hasn’t a lot to say at the time, but 20 years later they’ve got something else. It all has to do with truth. I’m not anyone to articulate my aesthetic sense, insights, sense for music, but it is as succinct as I know. Music has to leave you with a sense of reality, of truth, and something that’s good—the way Paul talks about it in *Philippians*: “All things which are lovely, true, of good report, think on these things.” That was Ben Horch’s guiding verse for his music making as well as for his life.

Troy: Do you think music-wise, there are any fundamental changes to the music in southern Manitoba as far as what’s being performed in relation to the heritage and the tradition of music making?

George: Yeah, the churches would we say that the young people’s performing groups are bringing in the music that’s out there that the Christian music industry is pushing. I’m not saying it’s all bad at all, I’m not a purist that way, but what I’ve always listened for is whether something communicates to me that feels sincere or is it just changed to another key to sell it, or whether it was arranged to make it sell. That makes it very uncomfortable for a trained musician to listen to. At rock bottom there is still a sense we must keep on somehow reminding ourselves where our roots are and I’m glad you could be at that concert, that Faith and Life concert because it reflected the grass root dimension: the kind of hymns and arrangements that were sung. They did new music too, but always in tandem with
that which has been true for us. That would be typical where most of the older set wants to be.

Troy: How has music changed over the years? Do you want to say anything more about changes over the years or do you want to go on to another question?

George: Changes over the years. Are you thinking of any particular changes?

Troy: I am thinking of things like training among music teachers at the schools or you talked a little bit about the choral experiences that people now versus people during the heyday of the choral festivals had, is there anything else to provide a holistic picture of what was going on? Is there anything else to mention?

George: Yeah, the opportunity for great choral experiences are as good a measure in Manitoba as they ever were, except it’s not happening through the churches, it’s happening through the schools. I think (it is similar in) the secular schools as in the Christian schools. I do think Christian schools in some ways have an edge on secular schools because they’re more free to do the Christian repertoire and there is the association with religious faith. They have that as a motivating factor, but the things that happen here nowadays where choirs from other provinces come together and different conductors conduct, that didn’t happen in the same way 40 years ago. We kept it in house, but now all of that has changed. That’s very encouraging.

Troy: The conductors are more in house now?

George: No, I would say they were more in house at that time. They’re more open to do things together with other choirs. I think Henry Engbrecht has been quite instrumental in moving it in that direction because he was the director of the
Manitoba Choral Federation for many years, worked on that committee, and was a leader in other capacities as well. One time he just come up and exclaimed, “George, do you believe it? There are a thousand registered choirs in Manitoba alone!” A lot of them are led by his former conducting students from the University of Manitoba, so the idea of a conducting course in a college or university wasn’t always taken for granted. We started a conducting program at CMBC, and Henry was one of our first students. That’s a story in itself, but not for your thesis.

I was teaching here at CMBC, had been three years, and then I was asked if I would come and speak to the final Sängerfest. They call it a Sängerfest where the students presented their closing choral concert. I was supposed to say something about musical possibilities or musical challenges and the possibilities among the Mennonites in Canada. That’s where the topic pretty well resolved itself in, so I worked away at that one. I decided to report what I already knew was going on, and who the people were that gave their unique contribution to it, and what was needed at this time if we wanted to keep that. That’s basically the formula, so I gave that with some passion, and I think by that time it was in English. That was the last year it must have been. This was in a building that was on the campus, they don’t have it anymore, where it was something like a huge rink: an all-purpose building with a dirt floor where they changed it into an ice rink. It was very clean, but a little bit of a big granary.

Troy: Was it a Quonset or something?
George: Yeah, and I almost felt like I was a Bible preacher or something because it was a big holding floor. After the speech was over I saw this young man coming down the aisle. It was like the people coming to the front were seeking for salvation or something. He had that look, his head was bowed, he was almost in tears, and he introduced himself. He said, “I’m Henry Engbrecht, and you’ve spoken to me. This hit me as I’ve had longings to do something like this.” He told me he had been advised not to go into music, but go to college and study literature or something, but don’t go for music. They would tell him he couldn’t make a living that way. I invited him to come and see me sometime and consider enrolling in CMBC, and I told him we will help you as much as we can. He was one of my first music students. I taught him everything I knew about conducting. There were a few others with him in the class. Conducting can be taught in a methodological way, can be analyzed, and you can find your own style within the basic technical framework. He got the basis there and the idea was perpetuated. When he went to University of Manitoba, he worked up a very fine conducting program at that point and has trained hundreds of conducting students. One never knows what’s going to happen when you say yes to something you know.

Troy: That encounter influenced many of the choral conductors throughout the province then?

George: Yeah, he influenced those that came through the University of Manitoba and then we had all kinds of people coming through CMBC year after year: students who went on to take their doctoral work. One of my former students is working in the choral department at the University of Western Ontario in London. I better
not even start this because they’re all over the place. A good thing is they went on; they didn’t stop with CMBC they went on and they’ve probably most forgotten me by now. They caught the vision, that’s enough.

Troy: If you want to mention a few of them, that’s fine if there’s some that stand out in your mind.

George: Gerald Neufeld is a very fine conductor. He’s at the University of Western Ontario. He’s been also at the University of Guelph.

   Leonard Enns is a very strong composer who also conducts very well. He did a double doctoral major in composition and conducting, but I would say maybe his forte probably is composition. I don’t know if you’ve seen any of his compositions, it’s pretty rare stuff. He’s had it aired by some of Canada’s finest choirs and on CBC and so on. He’s had a number of commission works. He did a double major in composition and conducting.

   Glenn Klassen chose to do his doctoral work in instrumental conducting. He now conducts the Lethbridge Symphony and one in the States, Michigan. It’s near professional, but it’s more of a very, very fine community orchestra so he’s traveled between the two. David Sawatzky, recent doctoral graduate, is doing excellent work at Providence College and with the Pembina Trails Voices choral organization in Winnipeg.

   I had a nephew by the name of David Matthies who is extremely gifted. He got his doctor degree and started as a choral conductor. He switched over to instrumental conducting because he was very good with orchestras too. He had the MCI choir one year and people couldn’t recognize what had happened to it.
Tim Taves, who’s directing the MBCI choirs, came through here and Vic Pankratz who has the Westgate choir came through here. They’ve all gone on and they’ll say “No, we don’t conduct like George anymore.” That’s fine, but they had their start here: they had their basis here. I tried to give them a very good grounding in conducting technique in what they call the Kurt Thomas School of Conducting which I studied in Detmold, Germany. That’s been the basic groundwork here and still is. Rudy Schellenberg who followed me also studied there and was grounded in that technique as was my former colleague, Bill Baerg.

Troy: What is the school again?

George: Well we call it the Thomas School because it was Kurt Thomas who created that methodology of conducting. There is a translation of one of his books on choral conducting that most university libraries have, but it only takes part of three books that he’s written and combines it into one. I feel you got short shifted a little bit. In the summer of 1969, we invited Kurt Thomas to Winnipeg to lead a four-week conducting and choral seminar for conductors and singers. I myself had not studied with Kurt Thomas before but became thoroughly grounded in his methodology through two of his students who were professors at Detmold. One was Martin Stefani. He conducted with a stick and it was like watching a circus act when he did things with a stick. He could conduct the most complicated music, but he wouldn’t miss a cue anywhere. It (the stick) got in the way of the music as far as I’m concerned, but it showed it could be done.

Alexander Wagner left the stick alone and just conducted with his beautiful hands. Students said, “Don’t worry if you don’t get to study with
Thomas yourself,” by that time Thomas was at another school, “Ali Wagner is more Kurt Thomas than Kurt Thomas himself.” You got all the possibilities of subdivision and of showing with you your hands exactly where the end comes and the “t” or the “s.” It looks beautiful when it’s all done; you just have to be careful it’s not in the way of music making. Shaw added very little of that; he made better music than Alexander Wagner did. After learning the technique as much as one can absorb it after 30, beat two against three and this type of thing, but then you still have to say is it getting in the way of my music. Am I thinking more of my conducting patterns than about hearing the music and the way it should go? That’s where Shaw was a wonderful corrector in that way. He would say sometimes, “I think I should still be taking some conducting lessons.” It seemed like sometimes his beats weren’t all that clear, yet somehow we always started together.

Troy: You always started together?

George: Yes, it was felt from this person. That’s eventually what conducting is about, but a good technique makes it so much easier and more efficient. One is always learning, even when I conduct a hymn with a basically unsophisticated congregation. If I have good accompaniment and a good group with me, you’re still always learning. One of the things you learn, especially if the hymns are familiar and you don’t have to beat, is how to initiate. When a song gets going and it’s going well, you’ve felt they have the pulse. They’re feeling the pulse for goodness sake, don’t copy that, let it go. Listen to what’s happening; listen ahead and at one point they’ll need to be reinitiated. A whole congregation can respond
to that after awhile. They get so used to it that they don’t need a lot of come on from George to sing well. They know when they get up there there’s the expectation that they will sing, but if you get up there, and now do this, now do that, you kill singing. The Kurt Thomas method had the possibility of imposing on exactly how it is done. As clean as it was, an orchestra would appreciate seeing a very clear *ritard* at the end of a piece: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and. Or with a stick: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 1. Those are fine, but if you do it all the way through, then you get in the way of the music.

Troy: Do you think there are any schools of thought there as far as choral conducting goes from Prussia and Germany?

George: You know I don’t know what’s going on in Germany today in terms of conducting techniques. Thomas is dead and it is possible he is considered passé by now. I’m aware that in some places his approach isn’t used anymore. The German temperament is that way; sometimes when they go for something they go for it all hog. When they reject it, they reject it whole hog, and go extreme the other way. Right now I don’t know if there are any schools emerging like they were.

The USA is a very good example of very pronounced choral schools. Have you seen that book by Howard Swan and Decker about the six schools of choral singing? It is a brilliant and helpful piece of work. Howard Swan: what a teacher. There’s School F, Robert Shaw, which didn’t deal with tone production, blend, and so on at all. It dealt with things musical and he gets all those things. That’s a very good book. There’s some of the analysis of Julius Herford. You
don’t get his voice and his personality through it, but you get his work. That shows the direction of how American students would side up and do it here in a university setting. Students said, “Well I sang with Williamson” and oh somebody else I from the Christiansen School, the straight tone school, and the blend school. I think that has all evened out. People take information from wherever it works.

Troy: They take the best from the schools of conducting?

George: Well yeah, and try being concerned about doing things musical. I think that’s what has happened in Germany too, but in a school situation, it is very useful for students to have a sound technique so that they have some place to start when they have to take their first choir.

Troy: The only thing on my sheet is do you have any final comments?

George: I don’t think choral singing is ever going to die. There’s too much good and beauty in it which unites people in a very deep, very profound level for it to die. I would almost venture to say people who have played in rock groups together, except those who have travelled and made money together, but even there they sometimes see too much of each other; that intimacy doesn’t always click once they’ve done that. Do they ever come back and remember those good old times? I don’t sense that in the same way. They’ll have something to reminisce, but not the same things that bond. Kids after a choir tour can hardly let go of each other before they go home. Years after, you see them and they’ll say, “Oh remember that tour?” or, “Do you remember that time?” They tell you that was important. I wasn’t even aware of it, but it was (important).
Troy: That’s amazing. What you’re saying sounds very promising.

George: Oh yeah. You’ll feel Engbrecht saying the very same thing; a lot of people. I am so glad for young Rick Mueller. He completed his music degree at CMBC and then went to the U. of Manitoba where he sang with Engbrecht. He’s choosing more Renaissance, Baroque (Handel), and Classic music than when he first started and is bringing them off beautifully. I think he was greatly motivated when he sang with Robert Shaw the last time he was here in 1997 when we did the Schubert Mass in E-flat, the Poulenc Gloria.

Back to the power of music, after the Brahms Requiem performance at the Centennial Concert Hall, people were talking about how they saw symphony players going to choristers and embracing them and vice versa. It was like a religious revival. Shaw phoned me the night he got home from the 1985 performance. He said, “Carolyn and I just wanted to say good night and thank you for the wonderful experience.”

I told him, “Do you know what happened after that? The orchestra and the singers were walking across to each other and embracing each other.” He said, “Isn’t that what’s supposed to happen? Isn’t that what music’s supposed to do?”

Troy: That’s amazing.

George: Yeah, it is. I would say we’ve just been singularly blessed here and there’ve been rough times here too. If you put it all together, it’s been a gift.

Troy: What were some of the rough times?
George: You’ve got them in every teacher’s life. Let’s say a year when you don’t have the kind of singers are needed for a balanced choir. You don’t have enough tenors, all is suffering, you hear it sounds like that, and you can’t change it. Occasionally there are singers who would like to be in the choir because of the status it gives them but don’t have the love and passion for it. Once in a while you have some singers who are hyper critical of the conductor and fellow singers but insist on staying in the choir. Those are hard times.

I think just the responsibility and general wear and tear of running a good choral program can be trying at times. There have also been those times when CMBC got letters from the community criticizing a recent choir concert as being musically too high-brow and wasn’t spiritual enough and that type of thing. Occasionally, there is negative feedback from churches, but there too on the whole, the conference churches have been very supportive.

Troy: What do you think is meant when you hear that, it wasn’t spiritual enough? Was it a nature song or something and that wasn’t considered?

George: Not spiritual enough usually means several things: too much high brow classical music, not enough rousing familiar gospel songs (traditional or contemporary), inclusion of some secular songs, absence of personal testimonies of salvation, etc. CMBC wasn’t known for students readily giving personal faith testimonies. Students wanted to share what they had learned from their Biblical studies and how they experienced the presence of God in their life as a Christian community. If there were very strong, evangelical-minded people that way and they didn’t
hear that because we sang Bach and so on, that wasn’t spiritual; that wasn’t evangelistic.

A pastor whose wife loved to sing in my choir once let it be known that I was doing a lot of harm in our conference by promoting Bach. I wish I would have seen him right there. I would have said, “Look, you know what Billy Graham said? Billy Graham said, ‘The music of Bach has contributed a great deal to keeping a strong moral awareness in our country.’” So much of our musical, cultural, and spiritual mind-sets have been formed by our musical and religious exposure during our growing-up years. We always realized we would be coming into churches that weren’t ready for that and try to adjust the repertoire as best we could to it, but you can’t lean over backwards completely; then you’re not honest with yourself. You present yourself as you are.

Troy: Is there a subtle difference between evangelical and Mennonite music?

George: Yeah, that’s difficult to answer. It depends so much on which school we’re talking about and what kind of directors they have. Mennonites have relatively little of their own composed music that is being used in the congregations. We have been a borrowing, adopting church when it comes to music. We sing other people’s hymns in a way that speaks to us. Most of this music comes to us from the Lutheran chorale tradition, the German pietistic movement, and the British and American hymn traditions including the gospel songs. Through this music, Mennonites express their corporate (communal) faith as over against a more exclusive singing expression.
Troy: When you talked earlier about chorales, were you talking about Lutheran Chorales?

George: Yeah, I was referring to both Lutheran chorales but also had in mind bodies of hymns which, hymnologically speaking, do not classify as genuine chorales. Examples of these hymns would be the large body of German pietistic hymns like “O Power of Love,” “The Lord is King,” and “Take Thou My Hand O Father.”

Since the Mennonite church switched to English, we tend to sing fewer chorales and more British and American hymns including the gospel songs. However, the strong sense of corporate expression of our faith is still there. In so many of the evangelical churches, the tendency is towards a strong individualistic singing expression of a personal relationship with Jesus often without the consciousness of a neighbor on each side doing the same thing. The singing is often very appealing in its fervor and boy, but it seems to lack that communal (congregational) dimension that has been so central to worship for the Mennonites over the centuries. The disciplines and insights gained by singing the rich classics enriches the music we already sing in our congregations. That has always been my basic conviction and philosophy.

Troy: What do you want to say about Gretna?

George: I cannot account for the years before Ewert came there. I don’t know what they sang. They probably sang out of Evangeliums Lieder, translated gospel songs. When Ewert came, he brought in the chorale and I think they must have used that. They used the Gesangbuch mit Noten (1895) as the staple hymnal. It contained familiar chorales like “Großer Gott, wir loben dich” you know:
and Praise to the Lord the Almighty:

“Nun Danket Alle Gott”; you have those few in there, but then you have also mostly gospel songs. In this book Gesangbuch mit Noten, the first one came out in 1890 I believe, you have more chorales and also good translations of standard English hymns by Watts and Wesley, and other fine hymnists. This book was being used in some of the more progressive churches at that time. I recall when I did my master’s, The Hymnody of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, I came across an article in the conference journal. It was called Der Mitarbeiter (The Coworker). This can be checked because they have been kept preserved. We have copies of Der Mitarbeiter in our archives. About 1916, Ewert did an oratorio with his students, King David. That Ewert would perform cantatas said a lot about his progressive spirit. With that kind of cultural and musical idealism, Ewert set a precedent for MCI to follow and expand on. We have to bring these people beyond the gospel song and bring them to appreciate the classics. This is no Honegger King David, but it would be a bit simpler version which somebody wrote; a cantata. It was a little bit different musical form than what they had been used to and apparently with good appeal. That was the mindset he had, to expand. It took a little while before that really flourished, but now it’s there.
Before Henry Engbrecht took on the work at the MCI Gretna, MCI sang a lot of songs that were already done in the church choirs, only better: German anthems by the best composers such as Mendelssohn and tended to be 19th century. More could have been done if they had the right people for it, but Henry Engbrecht came in and I think the first year he was doing a double Bach motet:

\[ \text{\begin{align*}
\text{\textbf{Nun ist die Kraft und das Heil und die}} \\
\text{\textbf{dee ding deo deo deo deo deo deo deo deo deo}}
\end{align*}} \]

It is all choral, only six minutes long, but it’s for two choirs. He did that with a high school choir and showed it could be done: smashing! From then on they sang all kinds of challenging music, but the seeds were sown way back in Ewert’s day. Those things stay. They’re not forgotten somehow.

What was the other thing that came to mind? The introduction of musicals, that’s been around for about 40 years: Gilbert and Sullivan, *On the Town*, *Fiddler on the Room*, and so on. They’ve done all the popular ones. They’ve been enormously popular in Gretna and they’ve done them well, even as small as that school is.

Troy: I regret not being able to see *Singin’ in the Rain*, that’s what they did this year.

George: Yeah.

Troy: Have you seen any of them?

George: Oh yeah, sometimes my own kids were involved and I played a part. My wife wrote a full length musical *Crossroads* for MCI’s 100th anniversary. Did you hear about it?

Troy: I have heard about it. It was in the *Schule Muss Sein*. Was it mentioned in there?
George: Was it there? It shows about the tension between the musical taste of young people and their elders. The work contains a fair amount of rock music. Esther mentioned the other day how she laughed so much because it took a few weeks to learn how to write rock music. She listened to it almost day and night until it was thumping in her ear. While composing I told her, “Esther, this isn’t you.”

She said, “Get out of here or I won’t play a note. I don’t want you to hear a note until you come to Gretna when it’s finished.” She managed to keep her composing out of earshot from me till I heard it in Gretna. It was very well done too.

Troy: Where was that at?

George: It was done right at the MCI for their 100th anniversary. It is called *Crossroads*, but it’s only had one performance. It tells a message of about how the old and new meet; it’s about reconciliation. I’m a bit biased, but I think on the whole, Gretna has been more daring and expansive in their music program than the Steinbach Bible Institute. However, some very good musical leaders have broadened Steinbach Christian High School’s repertoire. This encourages people to support that school. I think Steinbach Bible Institute may have the tendency to do some of the classics and have the gospel songs and the testimonies at the end, instead of trying to come to a more holistic approach. That is typical of the people that support that school, so I can understand that.

Troy: When you’re saying support that school, what do you mean?

George: The people around Steinbach send their kids there and give them money. They’ve done some good repertoire there. Rudy Schellenberg could tell you quite
a bit about it, but try Bill Derksen first. He didn’t stay right to the time of his
ing retirement. He went and taught at Providence Bible College which is an
interdenominational school for the last 10 or 20 years, but his roots are in
Steinbach. When you contact these fellas, they’ll probably be able to refer you to
other people who have something to say on this one.

Troy: Okay. Thank you so very much for meeting with me.

George: I feel so sorry for you because you have to sort all that stuff out now.

Troy: I’ll write up a transcript and then I will email you a copy. You can take a look at
it and see if it meets your approval.

George: It will be right when I read it. Are you familiar with this?

Troy: No I’m not. Is that Liederperlen?

George: Ziffern.

Troy: Ziffern, I’ve read about it.

George:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Drei zwei eins zwei} \quad \text{drei} \quad \text{funk vier drei.} \\
&\text{Funk drei vier drei one three two one.} \\
&\text{Five six sev’n one sev’n six sev’n six five.}
\end{align*}
\]

And so on.

Troy: This is kind of a solfège system.

George: This number system is called Ziffern. It is an amazing methodology that allowed
our choral tradition in Russia to develop. A teacher by the name of Heinrich
Franz developed it there and then it continued to be used in Canada in quite a
number of church choirs up until the mid-1930s and early 1940s when it changed
to notes.

Troy: They would have used this in Gretna then too?

George: I think it may have only been used in the very earliest years of MCI’s existence.

Ewert may have done this.

Troy: To get the notes?

George: That happened at different times. I don’t think the Steinbach community used
Ziffern as much. Ziffern are quite limited in many ways. I don’t think pianists
like it, but being a composer I don’t either. The EMC Kleine Gemeinde folks
adopted the U.S. system of shaped notes as early as 1940. For singers without a
knowledge of music theory, Ziffern is the quickest and easiest way to learn to read
simple music. All singers have to know is what’s my one (tonic). In F major, A
equals three. I’m an A right, a little higher. Count down three, two, one and you
have arrived at the tonic.

\[\text{\textit{Dum}}\quad\text{\textit{bum}}\]

Now you are ready to read.

\[\text{\textit{One eins zwei eins vier funf sechs funf}}\]

It didn’t take too long for the people with good ears to learn to read, so you had
choir members that could read music in a short time. I’ve seen Umsiedler; they
were still using Ziffern in the 1980s when I worked with them. They would either
sing (using *Ziffern*) a part at a time or all four parts simultaneously. The sopranos would sing their notes, the altos would sing theirs, and the conductor would just go. I thought oh my goodness, they might be getting their pitches, but they’re sure not making music. It has some real things against it, but they developed a fairly secure sense of pitch because they had to learn their parts without the aid of a piano or any other instrument.

That’s a whole story in itself. Dr. Peter Letkemann has researched and written on this whole development including the contribution of Heinrich Franz. They should write a novel about him. His name was Heinrich Franz, came from Prussia, and introduced this system for use in Russia. He amalgamated different European systems to accommodate the Mennonite situation. He first introduced *Ziffern* to the children in school as part of their regular curriculum. They sang a chorale in *Ziffern* and then with words every day. He’d write *Ziffern* on the board and taught the children to read and to do the scale first, “Eins zwei eins drei eins vier eins funf eins.” It got them fluent with that and in no time kids would sing. The children learned it very quickly and showed their *Ziffern* books to their parents and song leaders. They brought that home and parents and leaders were sold on it. The *Vorsänger* (song leaders or presenters) learned the correct chorale versions which Franz had brought with him from Prussia, got together to hand write copies of this, and practiced their tunes because they weren’t always agreed what was the right tune. Later on in the 1860s when four parts were added, that was the way into four-part singing and an extraordinary blossoming of choral singing spread wherever Mennonites lived in the Ukraine and Russia. The
development of this is an amazing story. This happened about the same time when shape notes were introduced in the United States. You’re familiar with that?

Troy: Yeah.

George: You got a lot of that in the States and when the Mennonite people began to sing in shape notes. Joseph Funk from Virginia compiled a remarkable collection of shaped note hymns with the melodies in the tenor. It was in an oblong book called *Harmonia Sacra*. That was the American Mennonite way of learning to sing four-part music a cappella. That’s where the church got their key to the wonderful four-part a cappella singing in their congregations. If you have the religious fervor, you have the motivation to learn to sing by shaped notation, that’s what the tradition’s about.

Troy: That combination of drive and commitment, then a means for people to read it, and then the desire to produce vocal sound?

George: I think this is, in a way, the better way because you see the rise and fall of the musical line this way. If you draw a pencil through it you have some idea what the profile of the melody is. The *Ziffern* don’t show you that. They have their singing schools, you know about that history, how they got together and practiced singing shape notes all day. The feature which gave shaped notes a changeless identity was of course that each note of the scale had a different shape. For key signatures, if they knew that the last sharp to the right is a seven, then the next note, the next space, and the next line is a one. You got it and it works for simple music. The last four, the last flat to your right, is always a four. You just go.
When I was about six years old, an older cousin who played the reed organ acquainted me with the white and black notes of the keyboard. Then she showed me a shorthand trick to recognize the lines and spaces and the keys. Then she showed me how to find the tonic in any flat or sharp key: “Das letzte b ist immer eine vier,” (the last B-flat to the right is always a four). I was able to find the tonic (one or doh) singing down the partial scale: four, three, two, one. Then she proceeded to show me how to locate the seventh degree as the sharp most to the right in the key signature with sharps. Easy to find doh from there. This Ziffern book tells you all you need to know about theory for learning to read Ziffern. All you need is a tuning fork or pitch pipe. That’s how I taught myself how to read music when I was a kid because we didn’t have a piano at home. It worked like a charm.

Troy: That’s amazing.

George: Yeah, it is.

Troy: With so many things competing with young people’s attentions these days, I grew up being the accompanist in choir so I didn’t do singing myself. I was always behind the piano and I never developed my sight singing skills. It was kind of tough when I started majoring in music and was expected to read music at sight. That’s neat how you learned how to do that.

George: Yeah.

Troy: Thank you so very much.

George: Oh you’re welcome. It’s a pleasure to share, hopefully something will work.
Appendix H

Timothy Wiebe Interview

Timothy Wiebe, 20 May 2008, at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna

Troy:  What is your occupation?

Tim:  I have taught Mennonite history for 12 or 13 years at this school.  I didn’t teach it
this year and I won’t be teaching it next year, but that’s been one of my areas
along with English and religion.  Those are my three main areas of involvement
here.

Troy:  What is your educational background?

Tim:  I went to Canadian Mennonite Bible College, got a Bachelor of Church Music
there, and then I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from University of
Manitoba.  My major was English and my minor was in music in my education
degree.  I have a Master’s in Theology and I did a fair bit of Ph.D. work.  I didn’t
finish it, but I did some Ph.D. work in theology at the University of Toronto.

Troy:  What is your relationship with Mennonite music education?  What can you say
about it?

Tim:  Personally my involvement has been, I don’t know if peripheral is the right word.
I haven’t taught a lot of music.  There was a three or four year stretch when I was
teaching in Rockwood Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario where I did
some music.  I had a couple of choirs as part of my overall load which was
primarily teaching English. My father is George Wiebe and my mom is Esther Wiebe, so I grew up sort of absorbing a lot of music education by osmosis if you will. I’ve been part of that by virtue of my upbringing and been part of that milieu. My dad, for example, was good friends with Ben Horch whom you’ve probably heard about as part of your research. I think in a sense I studied music, voice, violin, viola, piano, and so on, but I didn’t make music the main focus of my profession. In a sense, I am more an observer than a participant; although, I’ve sung in choirs and all that sort of thing. In terms of the day-to-day education, I’ve been more of an observer than an active participant.

Troy: How long have you been here at this school?

Tim: This is my fifteenth year.

Troy: In those years, what are some of the things that you’ve observed about music?

Tim: I would say in terms of the musicals that we do, at this school especially in the last five or six years, I think we’ve undertaken more ambitious and maybe Rick has filled you in on all that, but more ambitious musicals. I think production values have certainly gone up I would say in the last seven or eight years that I’ve been here. We’ve probably moved toward a greater variety of music, not just sort of “classics,” but we’ve added a fair bit of jazz, some pops, and other more of an international flavor to some of our music, not what might have been considered the classics in you know Mennonite schools of a decade and two ago. I think that has broadened a fair bit.

Troy: So more world influence?

Tim: I would say yeah.
Troy: Is there any influence from Mennonite music from around the world on the music done here or is mostly just Christian music?

Tim: You’ve met Marilyn, so with her here, there would be a fair bit of global, African music for example is one of the things she will often integrate into the chapel service or will work with her own choir on. I would say maybe Spanish music, Central American, Latin American (are also used). There has been a global influence here and I think especially since Marilyn has come on staff. That was three, four, maybe five years ago when she actually became part of the music program beyond private voice and piano teaching.

Troy: You mentioned some of the musicals that have been done here. What are some of the musicals that they’ve done that stand out in your mind here?

Tim: We did Les Mis last year, so that one vocally is probably one of the more challenging ones. We had a Jean Valjean character and Aran Matsuda is his name. He’s a remarkable vocalist. He’s going into studying opera and he had sort of an operatic voice, a huge range already in grade 11. That would be one example of a fairly demanding one that we have done just recently.

Troy: How about musically and thematically, do you know any things you want to say about why that was done?

Tim: I think the theme of judgment versus forgiveness and how those work themselves through (are important). I think it fit well with who we are as a school and the message is there for people to learn from as well. This year we did Singin’ in the Rain and that was more for enjoyment. In that sense, (it was) more of the sort of the classic Broadway musical.
Troy: So just good, clean, family entertainment?

Tim: That’s always a consideration: where’s our audience at and what will they be able to adapt to? A number of years ago, 15 years ago or more, we did one of the Narnia series, and it was well received. There were still some people who felt it was a little bit too on the edge for our institution. At other schools, Rockway for example, they’ve done *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. They’re doing *High School Musical* this year.

Troy: At Rockway?

Tim: Their clientele is at a different place than our constituency in terms of what they would be comfortable with. In our case, we’re at a different place now than we were 15 years ago. People are more progressive or whatever term you want to use, but they’re open to a wider variety I think of musical options partly because some of them have grown up in this kind of context and now they have kids coming here. So there’s a different kind of openness than even 15 or 20 years ago.

Troy: What do you think attributes to that?

Tim: We’re all in a Mennonite context and there’s always that relationship with “the world,” and how you’re going to adapt to that. Different contexts will adapt to it at different speeds. Here it might be a bit slower simply because we’re in more of a rural context and it tends to be politically and religiously more conservative than might be the case than a place like Rockway for example. I think it’s just where a people are at in relationship to their history, where they’re at in relationship to their immediate environment, their culture, and how all of that feeds into the
choices they make about what’s acceptable and what’s not in terms of what kind of musical or drama that they might want to see at a place like this. It’s a fairly wide variety of changes. It’s on the line. It may be somewhat similar to some of the more conservative churches here where they either don’t have instruments or only have recently allowed instruments, let’s say Sommerfelder Mennonite Churches where they’ve only recently allowed some of those changes to happen. That dynamic happens and I think happens on a variety of levels.

Troy: How long have they had instruments here?

Tim: That would depend very much on which flavor of Mennonite you want to investigate.

Troy: At this school?

Tim: At this school I think it goes back 50 or 60 years at least and probably longer. I don’t think there was ever, at least from the leadership, there was never a strong problem with having instruments and so on in worship. I don’t know if you’ve seen our history book.

Troy: Yeah.

Tim: That would be something to check there. I don’t know how much detail would be in there, but that would be something to double check there.

Troy: Are there any other musicals you want to mention that stand out in your mind?

Tim: I’m trying to think of some of the ones we’ve done. I’m not sure how far back to go. We’ve done a couple of commissioned musicals.

Troy: Okay.
Tim: One that my mom wrote and that I wrote the lyrics for in the 1990—it was called *Crossroads* and that was commissioned for the school’s 100th year anniversary. We have done *The Blowing and the Bending* by Juri Bender and that was also a more specifically Mennonite oriented musical and had to do with conscription and World War I and Mennonite participation or non-participation. We have done those sorts as well, the ones that are more specific to Mennonite tradition. We even did *Amahl and the Night Visitors* way back when. I remember that one as well.

Troy: What was that about?

Tim: *Amahl* has to do with a young boy who wants to visit the Christ Child and the three kings whom he meets. They stay at his home and tell him that they’re planning to follow the star. He wants to be part of this too and ends up being healed of his crippled leg as a result of going with the three kings to visit the Christ Child. That was done a long time ago; 30 years or so.

Troy: Do you know any of the music teachers before Rick?

Tim: Before Rick there was Ian Loeppky whom I just knew to talk to. I wasn’t teaching here at the time. James Janzen was before that. He did the *Song of Norway* by Grieg which is a pretty complex musical, pretty involved. That was one of the musicals that he did. Before him was Robert Wiebe, that’s my brother. He was here for two years. Prior to that Rudy Krahn was here for about 11 years. If you go back a few more years, Henry Engbrecht (was here) who just now recently retired from the University of Manitoba. I think he sort of raised the choral standard a fair bit in the five years that he was here and turned out some
pretty superb choirs during his tenure. He went on to teach high school in Winnipeg and then from there to University of Manitoba.

Troy: That takes you back to about 19 . . . ?

Tim: The mid-1960s. Before that, you can check the history book. There was a C. P. Zacharias who was the music teacher for quite a while. I think that was about 20 years or so. The history book will give you the precise dates. Before then I don’t know how specific the music training was. I know that Heinrich Ewert who was MCI’s principal from 1891 to 1894 was kind of a Renaissance man. He enjoyed choral music, but he also earned his master’s degree and studied Hebrew and Greek. He had a fairly broad based education. He was from the Department of Education at Bethel College in the states. I’m not sure when the more specific music teacher specifically teaching music happened. That would be worth following up.

Troy: Of those teachers that you mentioned, did you know any of them in particular?

Tim: I was a student with Rudy Krahn. I sang in his choirs and was in the musicals he directed, so I knew him quite well. He directed *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *The Music Man* the two years that I was there. For a while under his leadership there was a male choir and there was a female choir for a while. I don’t know how long that lasted beyond my time. I graduated here in 1978. I know Henry Engbrecht because I went to school with his son Victor, and Henry was also a student of my dad’s at Canadian Mennonite Bible College so I have connections that way. I’ve sung for him a couple of times, but not that often. I know Henry in
that sense and was here while James Jansen was music director during his four
years.

Troy:  Do you know anything about their educational background?

Tim:  I know Henry spent some time getting a Ph.D. in music in Cincinnati.  I’m not
sure if Henry’s also a grad of this school.  Rudy Krahn went to Rosthern Junior
College and would have studied music under my father-in-law, Bill Krueger who
was at Rosthern in the early 1960s as the music director and then later as vice
principal.  He was there from 1960 to 1966 and Rudy graduated from Rosthern
Junior College in 1964.  He got his music degree from Brandon University which
has traditionally had a strong music program.  I don’t know what it’s like now,
but at the time (it was strong).

Troy:  I have a friend that teaches there.

Tim:  Yeah, it’s had a good reputation.  That was Rudy’s background.  It seems to me
Henry Engbrecht went to Canadian Mennonite Bible College, but I’m not sure of
that but I think he did.  James Jansen, I’m not sure where he got his education.
Rick has been through Westgate and also Canadian Mennonite Bible College.
That’s a fairly popular stream, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, and then sort
of funneling students out to churches and schools once they’ve completed their
music education.  Not so much now, but when my dad was there, there was a
fairly intensive conducting program, so three or four different levels from
beginning to advanced.  Quite a few students now in their early 30s to retired
already, have gone through that conducting program and that music program.

Troy:  Is that what’s now CMU?
Tim: Now CMU. I’m not sure how long CMU’s been around, a little less than 10 years anyway.

Troy: Do you have any stories that you want to tell that you remember from any of those teachers?

Tim: I enjoyed the music here; I would have to say my most formative music experiences though have been with my dad and singing in a variety of choirs with him. The most meaningful one in that context was the year that my dad had us do as CMBC Singers the Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*. We learned it in Hebrew and we found out that one of our tenors actually had a countertenor voice, so we had him singing the part that called for either a boy soprano or a countertenor so we had this fellow who could sing countertenor. We learned the Hebrew, learned the whole work, and one of the things we did that year was sing it in a synagogue. That was really quite an experience to be part of that service; just to feel those connections coming together and working together with another people of faith. That would be one story that I remember.

Troy: When was that?

Tim: That would have been while I was at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, probably 1980 or 1981 maybe. It’s quite some time ago.

Troy: That was just part of your educational experience?

Tim: That was what we were singing that year, among other things, and I hope we pulled it off. I hope our Hebrew made sense.
Troy: As far as music here goes, is there any connection between current practices here at this school in the music program and traditions brought over from Russia? Are there any connections there?

Tim: With some of the hymns that we sing, we still sing some German hymns and Rick usually has the choir sing a couple of German numbers. We sing the *Friedensfürst* at Christmas which is sort of a classic German song. I would say we continue the hymn singing tradition; although, here we’ve mixed that a fair bit with chorus singing which is probably a good thing. I would say the most specific connection would be some of the German songs that we still do. The Russian Mennonites were quite progressive in their attitudes toward music by and large, depending on what specific group you’re talking about. Among Russian Mennonites, instruments were something that was encouraged in the schools and Russia had choirs and also instruments accompanying music. In that broader sense, I suppose we’re continuing that tradition.

Troy: Okay.

Tim: Some of the more conservative groups of Mennonites didn’t have that tradition of instruments in the churches. The four-part singing was there, but not necessarily the instruments. MCI had an influx of Russian Mennonite students in the 1920s and 1930s which kind of changed the face of the school a little bit. Some of these were people who have already graduated from high school or had teacher’s degrees from Russia, but needed to get their English here and then qualify as teachers. They had to re-qualify, but they brought a lot of their influences from Russia, and that all kind of channeled into the school’s life in the 1920’s and
1930’s. G. H. Peters, who was the principal from 1935 to 1948 studied here as a mature student, got his teaching degree or went on to get his teaching degree after studying here, and then became principal.

Troy: The types of Mennonites that would make a school are the same types that would include instruments, a strong music program, and choral singing?

Tim: Yeah.

Troy: They sort of go together?

Tim: Yeah, I think so.

Troy: Because the value of education and just more sophisticated music?

Tim: Yeah, there’s always that, and my dad experienced this a fair bit when he was at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. To what extent do you push the envelope with your constituency and to what extent do you do, for lack of a better term, the easy listening stuff that you know they’re going to enjoy and that they’re not going to have to push too hard? One of the things my dad took on the road with CMBC was several motets by Heinrich Schütz, and people didn’t necessarily embrace it right away. He had a sense that you have to do the folk music and the German songs that the people would like, but you also have to have something that is within their grasp, but something they have to stretch for a bit. Without making it so far out that they just sort of turn it off, there’s always that fine line. I think as an educator that idea of drawing out, the root word of education from the Latin *educare* is to draw out, I think he had a sense that we’ve got to pull the constituency with us and challenge them to move a little bit beyond where they’re maybe comfortable. The education is not just for the students, but it’s for an
entire group of people that you’re working toward. If you’ve looked at some of the Ben Horch book, that is at least some of what he did when he had choirs in Winkler and Morden and had these choirs go to Winnipeg and perform versions of Handel’s *Messiah* which was huge. For them, it was a first and it was a little bit beyond what they could handle, but being able to do it was a real boost for their self-image and for their sense of what they could do as musicians.

Troy:  Do you think during the time Ben was doing his work that those types of choral works and choral works being done by other choirs in Canada, do you think they were doing the same type of Christian repertoire?

Tim:  That’s a good question.

Troy:  Things like Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*?

Tim:  Yeah.  Ben, he did the *Messiah* quite often, I know he did Haydn’s *Creation*, and he did also Stainer’s *Crucifixion*. That was in the late 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and in the 1960’s when the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and Canadian Mennonite Bible College oratorio choirs started. You saw a wider variety of oratorios being done which builds on what Ben had started. He got the interest going among Mennonites in southern Manitoba and then CMBC and MBBC joined forces for the choirs. They put on Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, the *War Requiem* by Benjamin Britten, and *Israel in Egypt*. They did a variety of works that were a bit more challenging; although, they would go back every once and a while to somewhat more familiar ones. *St. Paul* was another one my dad did a number of times as a choral director at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. I don’t really have
(knowledge) comparing it to other institutions, I wouldn’t really be able to answer that.

Troy: From what I’ve read, it sounds like in Canada the choral societies they had their favorites. I’m going to have to research this more, but it seems to me that some of the big ones like Handel’s *Messiah* and different things were popular with the rest of the choirs around the country too.

Tim: That’s probably right. The highlight for Mennonite musicians was about a two decade connection with Robert Shaw. I was part of singing the Brahms’ *Requiem* and the *Christ lag in Todesbanden* and also the *Missa Solemnis*. I was in those two groups, but there were other works that Shaw did with the Mennonite Festival Chorus, which was not the same as the oratorio choirs. It drew from a similar pool of Mennonite singers. In those performances a lot of the training that had gone on for a whole generation coalesced and being able to work with one of the great choral maestros. That was quite a remarkable experience for me.

Troy: What was the connection between Shaw and (the Mennonite choirs)?

Tim: One of the things that was happening was that a lot of Mennonite conductors, my dad among them, would go to workshops. My dad had gone to a number of Shaw workshops and on one occasion Shaw stopped him out of the blue because he recognized him and I think he kind of knew who he was. Shaw said he would like to do a work with the Mennonite choirs sometime. My dad followed up on it and it eventually happened. It was either chance, providential, or however you want to frame it, but it was based on just a brief meeting. Shaw had mentioned this to my dad, he followed it up, Shaw came, and after the invitation the actual
performances happened. It was in January of 1985 that Shaw worked with the Mennonites for the first time.

Troy: Where was that at?

Tim: That was in Winnipeg at the Winnipeg Concert Hall. Most of the rehearsals were at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. Shaw did a wonderful address on the relationship between music and spirituality. I’m not sure, but my dad probably has that somewhere. I hope you’re getting a chance to interview him.

Troy: I hope to. Could you help me get connected with him?

Tim: Sure, he would give you a lot more specifics than I can. He’s 80 years old, but he’s still conducting, still working, and still involved. I can give you the number and email, and I will let him know that you’re around and that you’re interested (in talking to him). I’m sure he’d love to (meet with you). You might want to book an afternoon because once he gets rolling, he’ll very much enjoy it.

Troy: Okay!

Tim: Just so you know, I mean he does have time.

Troy: He’s in Gretna?

Tim: He’s in Winnipeg.

Troy: Thank you.

Tim: I can give him a call today and let him know that you’re in the area and that you’re interested in (meeting). Depending on the parameters of your project and your thesis, he can direct you to any number of other places which you can follow up as you wish. He did music at CMBC from 1954 and for 35 years anyway. He will give you a pretty good insight into that whole phenomenon.

474
Troy: I think eventually it’s going to boil down to a comparison between MCI and then Steinbach Christian High School, so I’d have a West Reserve, East Reserve.

Tim: Okay.

Troy: How have the traditions grown up differently on the two sides or how does each side consider the music traditions of their background?

Tim: Sure.

Troy: It’s all tied together.

Tim: He also was a graduate of this school from 1945, so he would be able to give you more about MCI’s music program in those years. He would have a much better idea of what was going on in that time.

Troy: Thank you. This looks like fun. I’ll just have to learn how to drive in Winnipeg.

Tim: They’re actually quite close to CMU. They’re just one or two miles west, so it shouldn’t be too hard. They can give you directions on how to get there.

Troy: Sounds good. I can look up Henry Engbrecht and a couple of those people.

Tim: Sure, and I think he’ll be a good source to direct you to some other people.

Troy: Thank you very much. That’s something I want to check out.

Tim: Alright. Good, good.

Troy: Do you want to look at my questions and see if there’s anything you would want to talk about?

Tim: I think we’ve pretty much covered them. I guess the one thing I would say as you’re probably finding out, it seems like a focused topic when you talk about music among the Mennonites in southern Manitoba, and then you start to research and then there’s layer after layer that you could probably work with. I think that,
as with any Ph.D. thesis, it’s a matter of focusing it and I think your idea of the East versus West Reserve, I think that could work.

Troy: Right.

Tim: I don’t know how much history, historical background you need on Mennonites in Manitoba. There’s a very good resource I have at home that I could get for you.

Troy: What is the name of it?

Tim: It’s called *Mennonites in Manitoba* by John Friesen. He’s a former CMBC professor. Let me check if we have it on our staff shelf.

Troy: Okay.

Tim: We can lend that to you, it’s no problem. I want to wish you well on your project. I hope that goes well. I think music has probably as much or more than anything else has been the dynamic that has brought Mennonites together in a community that, as you know, has been traditionally good at splintering in various ways. One could argue that the Canadian Mennonite University which now represents Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Brethren groups working together, allowed the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites to work together and sing together 35 or 40 years ago. There was a tradition of working together and I think there was a lot of preparation for the unity that would take place later; although, there were all sorts of nuts and bolts to work out. The music became a point of unity, rather than a point of contention between the two groups. I think, at its best, music has been a way for Mennonites to come together. It can also be a source of contention depending on how you handle all of the dynamics of choruses, hymns, and different types of music. In the academic context that
you’re talking about and certainly with the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools or CAMS, there have been regular choral festivals for at least three decades. Among the Mennonite schools in the United States there has been the Mennonite Secondary Education Council, MSEC has been the name. They have gotten together regularly for choral programs. I think that whole dynamic has been very important in allowing Mennonite kids to experience each other and then bridge gaps between their specific denominational Mennonite types and music has often been one of the big bridge builders.

Troy: Do you think there’s a connection between the choral festivals they had here in the earlier part of the century and the CAMS festivals?

Tim: I’m not quite sure. I remember going to Rosthern in the late 1970s when I was a student here to sing at Rosthern together with Westgate, RJC, and us. There were three of us, and I remember enjoying that very much. That has grown across Canada. I think each group has had a tradition of making music as a school and the next logical step was to have an interschool kind of experience. I think there is a link between the idea of becoming musically secure in your own right and then reaching out and cooperating with other groups.

Troy: Maybe the focus changed a little bit. One was the earlier festivals were for educating choral conductors and learning experience with choirs and maybe the later ones were for bringing people together.

Tim: I think it works on both levels. It’s just education, slightly different, from a slightly different angle in each case.

Troy: I have another question. Is MCI associated with any specific conference?
Tim: No, there’s a chapter in the history book that talks about that. It talks about MCI becoming a *Vereinschule*, or a society school; although, most of our churches would be Mennonite Church Manitoba in terms of their conference affiliation, the actual governing body of the school is a society of whatever it is now 22 or 23 churches who send delegates to board meetings and pay a certain amount per year to help support the school. Some of them are more faithful in doing that than others, so MCI has not been specifically conference-oriented as opposed to a school like Rockway which was, until recently, owned by the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada, MCEC. They were more specifically a conference school in terms of their ownership and MCI has been more of a society school.

Troy: Is there anything else you want to add to what you said?

Tim: I think that pretty much does it.

Troy: I think you covered a wide variety of topics and it sounds like under each one of those areas that you mentioned there are areas where I could dig so that’s going to be fun. Is it okay to contact you if I have more questions?

Tim: Oh sure, anytime.

Troy: Thank you very much for your time.

Tim: I hope this continues to go well for you. I know it’s a big project when you have a thesis work. I can remember my dad doing his and how much work that was. I did a master’s thesis, but not a Ph.D. I remember how much work he had to do to get his done, so I hope that goes well for you.

Troy: Thank you very much.

Tim: Alright.
Troy: Do you have any questions for me?

Tim: Are you Mennonite yourself?

Troy: I was raised General Conference and the church that I grew up in closed, so my parents go to the EMB church now in Lustre, Montana. When I was at Concordia College, I went to St. John’s Episcopal and there was a split in that church and if I go to the Fargo-Moorhead area I go to King of Glory Reformed Episcopal which is the more conservative of the two. When I am in Grand Forks, I go to Wittenberg Lutheran Chapel which is Missouri Synod Lutheran. When I go back home, I go to the EMB church, when I’m in Grand Forks I go to Missouri Synod Lutheran, and when I’m in Fargo I go to King of Glory Reformed Episcopal.

Tim: Alright, ecumenical.

Troy: Well thank you very much for your time.

Tim: All the best and if we could get a copy of your document once it’s done for our library that would be great.

Troy: That’s what one of my goals, kind of my thank you is to get a copy here and a copy for Steinbach.

Tim: Good.
Appendix I

James Fast and Johanna Hildebrand Interview

James Fast and Johanna Hildebrand,
12 June 2008 at Steinbach Christian High School, Steinbach

Troy: Could you tell me a little bit about your educational backgrounds and the institutions that you came from?

James: I graduated with a Bachelor of Church Music from the Steinbach Bible College in 1983, which is this college (and I also went to) the high school here. I spent four years at the University of Manitoba doing my Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Education. I spent four years in Toronto and one year of that at the Opera School. About four years I spent singing for a living—doing opera and oratorio for a living. Since then we moved back to Manitoba. I’ve been teaching voice since 1992 and subbing here at the SCHS for the past eight months or so.

Troy: Is that all you want to say?

James: That’s all I’m going to say.

Troy: How about you?

Johanna: I graduated from MCI and I went to the U of M for a year. I wanted to pursue my minor in Mennonite History so I went to CMU and then I got a Mennonite History minor and then a Choral Conducting major. I went back to the U of M to do my Bachelor’s Degree in Education. That was my formal education. My
informal education has been my parents who are both Mennonite choral conductors. I’ve been conducting with them since I was about 16 doing community stuff. I have also taught violin for years.

Troy: When you got the job here what was the school looking for in a music teacher?

Johanna: Someone who would bring the school to its standard of choral excellence. I’m sure that’s written somewhere. This school has a very good tradition of choral music and band as well. It emphasizes the choral part and I think they wanted to keep the bar high.

Troy: You filled in this year?

James: Yeah.

Troy: As a substitute teacher?

James: Yeah.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: I got sick, and he filled in for me doing all the choral so now he’s actually in charge of choral part.

James: As of this fall.

Troy: You (James) have been here eight months. How long have you (Johanna) been here?

Johanna: Since last September; this will be my second year.

Troy: What kind of repertoire have you done in those years?

Johanna: I love the Alice Parker traditional hymn tunes and stuff like that. We’ve done some Beatles arrangements and a little bit of vocal jazz. That’s more of the high school end. We do a lot of African stuff and with the kids, lots of gospel and
spiritual stuff. We also did some new music last year. That was stuff I did last
year and then James what did you do this year?

James: It was very similar.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: You do the staple high school stuff like the gospel and spiritual and stuff like that.

Troy: If you are going to say percentages of things that you do, like how many gospel
do you do? Do you distinguish between gospel and spiritual?

James: I don’t know, in my mind it seems a bit simple, I just differentiate between
classical repertoire and maybe lighter repertoire.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Maybe that’s the better division.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: You can micromanage something to death, but basically it’s classical and lighter
stuff and lighter could mean anything from a Disney tune to gospel to African.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: They’re such crowd pleasers. The meat and potatoes are the Bach and the
Mozart and stuff, most crowds like that, but I find this crowd likes a lot of the
lighter stuff, not that we stoop at audiences. We also have to look at
programming in the generation right up to me.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: I might not necessarily perform all the Bach pieces in a concert all in a row.

Troy: You try to keep it on the lighter side then?
James: I think that that’s especially true for the concerts. I think like the classical music would happen more in the classroom setting where you’d have time to educate the students.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Whether or not you learn the piece perfectly is not necessarily important at that point. You introduce it to them there, because a school music program unlike math or science or anything else like that, the school music program actually gets put on display twice a year and people’s perceptions of the school are shaped by what happens at those concerts. We have to do concerts which aim for the heart.

Johanna: Yeah, definitely.

James: Totally, so in our last concert now did (we do) anything like really classical did we?

Johanna: Not for band, no. I did a medley of classical pieces; a silly medley. It was something like a crowd pleaser.

James: I was doing a spring concert for the first time, and being a sub, I was very, very concerned that we have a spring concert that sold really easily.

Johanna: Yeah, to do the more classical meat and potatoes you have to be there and establish yourself.

James: Yeah, especially the first time.

Johanna: (It’s important to develop) a rapport with the audience. That’s a huge one in my experience

Troy: The challenge that you both faced was the time that you’ve had to build that relationship with students to do that music.
Johanna: Yeah, when I came I grabbed them with the really fun stuff. The fun stuff gets old. They don’t think that they like the classical stuff, but that’s actually what they do like. They don’t know that they like it.

Troy: Right.

Johanna: You’ve got to grab them with all the rah, rah, rah, and then you have to do the same thing with the audience. The audience takes a bit more time because you have so much chance to establish a rapport with the kids because you’re with them all the time. The audience you see twice a year, so if you come at them with just classical music, they think well . . .

Troy: If you didn’t have to think about that dynamic of working with the students, would you have a preference for the type of music that you would do?

Johanna: There’s some great new music coming out that’s not actually new music, Car Symphony, Snowmobile Symphony, and stuff like that. There’s some really, really (good music) like Eric Whitacre. I would do stuff like that.

Troy: Some of the avant-garde more choral things?

Johanna: Yeah, definitely. I think if I had been here a longer time, that that’s the direction that Kristel, the person who put out those CDs that was here before me did. We do similar music, but her last years here she was getting into more of that avant-garde stuff.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: There’s a bit of it on that CD, you can have.

Troy: Do you want me to return these to you?

Johanna: No, just keep them.
Troy: Are you sure? Thank you very much!

Johanna: You’re welcome.

Troy: When you’re doing music, does it relate to the mission of the school?

Johanna: It’s hard teaching in a Christian school. I think it’s the poor math teacher having to teach from a Christian perspective like that. I think it’s easier for us to put God and a God focus in music. It’s hard for me personally thinking spring concert, Christmas concert, all these deadlines. I’m also a new teacher, so I think maybe in 10 years I’ll think a little bit more from a Christian perspective, but right now I’m like, oh my gosh, we have to learn notes.

Troy: When did you graduate from college?

Johanna: Two years ago.

Troy: Before then it was high school for you?

Johanna: No, no, no, I’ve been in college or university for seven years. I did seven years, and through university I taught choir.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: Teaching choir in a school setting is sort of weird. I mean I consider myself a teacher, but it’s not the same as the other teachers because you’re running a rehearsal. You’re rehearsing rather than some people run it as a teacher. I run it as a conductor.

James: Yeah, because in the end, you still have to show the school off at Christmas time and spring concert.

Johanna: Yeah.
James: In the back of your mind your goal always is will I use this piece in spring concert. If so, you better learn it.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Or if I’m dabbling with this other piece that may not be a spring concert piece, how much time do we want to spend with this other piece? You’re always looking at the calendar and that’s the way I felt this year.

Troy: Ummhmm.

James: So maybe (it will be different) after 10 years of doing it like you mentioned.

Johanna: Yeah, exactly.

Troy: Are there traditional favorites as far as music is done here?

Johanna: “Hallelujah Chorus.”

James: Oh that’s a good one.

Johanna: That’s a very Mennonite thing. I don’t know about in the States, but I know MCI does it, oh I don’t know about MBCI, but Westgate, we do it. You can invite the audience to come up and most people can do it by memory—except page 6 and page 7.

Troy: You talked a little bit about concerts, do you do tours or anything like that?

James: Yeah, the Chamber Choir does a tour every year. This past year the Chamber Choir went to Vancouver. We sang at the Heritage Festival and also at a Kiwanis Festival. That’s about a week-long tour.

Troy: What is the Heritage Festival?

James: It’s a large festival; well you know more about it ’cause you dealt with them.
Johanna: Yeah. It’s an international festival; they’re all over the world. It’s a premade festival where you pay your money and then they will organize fun things for you to do, your meals, your accommodation, and then you get to sing at the festival. It is high quality, but it’s a festival package. We haven’t always done those. We did that this year just because I had to arrange it from when I was on sick leave and it was an easy thing to do.

James: It worked.

Johanna: It’s a good festival, but last year we went to Calgary. We did another festival, but it wasn’t a package thing, and I organized all of that. We go every year. They’ve gone to New York, Calgary, Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Ottawa during the last five years.

Troy: Do you ever do anything locally?

James: At Christmas time we did the caroling at the Centre.

Johanna: At the Centre, yeah, and the old folks home which I took kids to do.

James: Old folks home. Was there a Safeway thing as well?

Johanna: Yeah, so we do go around the community, but in Steinbach there’s much choral music. We have so many choirs in Steinbach that I don’t feel the need to go do outreach like that because people in Steinbach have so many concerts to go to.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: We don’t need to go out to churches.

Troy: Do you perform in churches? Is that kind of a recruitment tool or is it kind of a service for the contributing members?

James & Johanna: Yeah.
Troy: School.

Johanna: Yeah, everything’s recruitment and everything is service.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: This is different. I know you’re not doing MCI, but I know at MCI they did so many Sunday mornings as recruitment. I would say we’re a bit different. I think our Sunday morning is a bit more service-based: sort of like a, “You send your kids here, we thank you.”

James: Ummhmm.

Johanna: That’s how I see it and that’s the difference between the (schools).

Troy: So one is more recruitment oriented?

Johanna: Ummhmm, in my experience, at MCI.

Troy: Okay.

James: MCI was more equipped to do it because lots of the kids live on campus.

Johanna: They live there.

James: So they’ve nowhere to go. Here, there’s no kids living on campus, so then it’s harder to collect them on Sunday morning.

Troy: Ummhmm.

James: You have to have it worked out someway the night before or meet them.

Johanna: Oh it’s much easier to do anything when you live at school.

Troy: So the rural atmosphere is an asset over there?

Johanna: I would say so, especially for musical. You have musical rehearsal every night from 6:00 ’til 10:00 because you’re not going to go anywhere.

James: Yeah.
Johanna: You can just go to the co-op and the grain elevator because there’s nothing else to do.

Troy: Here you’ve got the competition of the town?

James: Yeah, here’s cheerleading class, I mean piano lessons, and stuff yeah.

Troy: Do they offer private lessons like piano lessons at this school?

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: Like the Bible college has?

James: It’s a conservatory.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Students here can do the piano, voice, guitar perhaps at the conservatory.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: Do you get a chance to work with the students privately for lessons or anything?

Johanna: For me, I troubleshoot. For instance, my one band was not as good, so I had to bring each section in every lunch hour. It’s more for me troubleshooting or someone’s having trouble singing.

Troy: Okay. Do you do any musical theater here?

Johanna: Not a class, but we do musicals. We didn’t do it this year or last year, but they did The Mikado and the year before Charlie Brown.

James: Charlie Brown.

Johanna: And The Mikado the year before I think.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: We’ll do one next year.
James: The plan is typically that one is done every two years, but because of the turnover of music people here for a variety of reasons, it’s very hard for a first year music person to even to (think) about doing a music theater piece.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Although I might have to change that protocol. I may have to do one just because it needs to be done.

Johanna: This is a huge music program. Last year, I had seven choirs and four bands. It was that ridiculous, and then to do that, and a musical, it’s a lot to ask for a first year (teacher).

Troy: They’ll have two teachers next year?

Johanna: No.

James: I’ll do choir and band next year.

Troy: So that’s a lot on one set of shoulders?

Johanna: It really is, but I think it’s doable; I did it last year. You just have to balance energy or be more laid back. Energy.

James: Or be really organized.

Johanna: Or be really organized.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: Yeah, that’s not my (strength).

Troy: What are you doing next year?

Johanna: I don’t know. I got cancer and I have to give my voice a rest.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: So I don’t know.
Troy: You do two concerts a year?

Johanna: Two formal ones, but then there’s ChoralFest and various competitions.

James: The Optimist Festival.

Johanna: Optimist Festival, and so they perform.

Troy: Okay. Had that been pretty steady over the years? How about the choral ensembles? Do you know how those have changed over the years?

Johanna: I don’t know if they have. This school’s very interesting. I think about 90% of our school is in choir, which is really cool. Grades 7 to 9 is mandatory, so they have different required, but in grades 10 to 12, most people are in choir.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: It is wonderful, voluntarily, and then there’s one auditioned ensemble which is the touring one.

Troy: Okay.

James: I attended high school here and graduated in 1980. I did not include that in my first preamble, but I was here from 1978 to 1980 and in the choirs. I was probably in the first high school choir when I was in grade 10 in 1978. That was the first type of choir that actually started to happen.

Johanna: Really?

James: Yeah.

Troy: What did they have before?

James: I think it was something way more tangible. Rudy Schellenberg was one.

Johanna: Oh, here?
James: Yeah, in high school, but I recall then that there was just a high school choir grades 10 through 12. There was no junior high here and we did a complete Christmas concert and a complete spring concert. That Christmas concert we must have done grades 10, 11, and 12 pieces.

Johanna: Wow.

James: So my perception is, I could be wrong, but the choir back then read better because we had chapel five days a week and we sang hymns.

Johanna: Yup.

James: So people knew how to sing harmony and read notes. In my opinion the choirs 30 years ago, read notes better. We have to do a lot more banging.

Johanna: Oh it’s incredible. Even graduating from MCI I could read anything and all my friends (could read music) too because we grew up in churches that have hymns. These people go to churches, most of them that sing praise and worship and stuff that’s on the screen, so they’re not used to that. You’ll probably find it different. One’s not better than the other, it’s just when you’re in music class and then they can’t sight read, it’s just a different. I was so surprised when I came. I was floored that (they couldn’t read music).

James: You had to rehearse Christmas carols.

Johanna: Yeah, we had to rehearse Christmas carols, how can you not sing this stuff?

But, if you don’t grow up in a church with singing hymns.

James: It’s a tradeoff because students now sing music that’s off the wall praise and worship. It’s much more spontaneous.

Johanna: Ummhmm.
James: More improvisatory, perhaps, so you learn to sing from the gut.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: You sort of just make it up as you go, which is good because you have your freethinking musical ideas, but on the other hand, you put a bunch of notes in front of these guys and it’s like they’re reading Greek.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: So it’s a tradeoff.

Johanna: It’s a different tone because one way is more poppy. We have a lot of pop singers and the other way is the choral tradition. It depends how you want to run your choir or some jazz vocal ensemble. If you’re learning by rote, that’s perfect, but if you want to do “Alice Parker Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal,” it’s a little bit more of a challenge.

Troy: Do the students have a strong sense of that four-part choral tradition anymore?

Johanna: Not here. The churches who send their kids here don’t do that.

Troy: So a lot of that’s linked more to the education that used to happen at the church?

Johanna: Oh yeah.

James: Yeah.

Troy: And in the chapel?

Johanna: Completely.

Troy: Is the church providing musical leadership and that’s what used to influence the culture in the school then?

Johanna: Totally.
Troy: That kind of comes back to the mission of the school and the values of the school doesn’t it?

Johanna: Yeah, and the values of this school will reflect the churches who are supporting them which aren’t the General Conference, hymn singing churches.

Troy: This school, is it more Kleine Gemeinde background?

Johanna: No. Some people, but

James: If you say that a lot of students come from the north.

Johanna: Oh yeah.

James: I would say if you had a conservative scale, and 10 was really conservative and 1 was very liberal, I bet the school would be around 6 or 7 on the scale.

Johanna: Yeah, definitely.

James: Yeah, easily that, but conservative with a praise and worship angle.

Johanna: When you hear praise and worship and rock bands, you don’t think conservative, but if you look at the doctrine then yeah.

Troy: So is it the contemporary Evangelical influence?

Johanna: A hundred percent.

Troy: Is there a difference between the contemporary Evangelical mindset to music and a Mennonite mindset to music?

Johanna: I think a lot of these kids wouldn’t consider themselves Mennonite.

James: No.

Johanna: They don’t.

James: The Mennonite moniker is being watered down—bad or good. It’s being watered down to something that’s more, well Willow Creekish.
James: The churches are all going that way. You have students that are used to that Willow Creek Church experience, maybe even a bit of USA Evangelicalism. It is not nearly as extreme in the USA like the really hard, right-wing stuff.

Johanna: Like the Pentecostal?

James: Yeah, but there’s a bit of that. You can get of sense of that when the students pray sometimes—the God speak they use.

Johanna: (They are) prayer warriors.

James: The Mennonite thing is becoming less and less.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: As far as the music literacy, where is that?

Johanna: I don’t know where you are going to take it, but if I remained here, I would like to keep the Alice Parker hymns.

James: Oh, absolutely.

Johanna: That’s probably where you’re going to go.

James: No, my weak spot, if anything, is getting into that new avant-garde stuff.

Johanna: Okay.

James: Which I will do. I will be glad to do it, to learn how to do it, but in the end I still want people to be as musically literate as possible.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: Does the Evangelical Free Church influence have any influence on the type of music done here?

Johanna: No, I never felt pressure from above. Maybe there was pressure and I just ignored it, but we are our own. We can make our own decisions.
James: Yeah, the grade 9 and 10 choir sang a piece called “Farmer Tan.”

Troy: Ummhmm.

James: There’s one line where it says, “when I go swimming with brown young women,”

I thought maybe someone’s going to catch that and send an email to the principal,
but it was such a quick line, it just went by quickly, and I haven’t heard anything
on that. You still have to watch.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: Whereas, if you were at a public school like the high school in town, you can
probably get away with it.

Johanna: Oh yeah, totally.

James: So we (come up to watch) ourselves just a little bit, or have that eye opened just to
be sure.

Johanna: The music teacher before me did “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” and
apparently she got flack for it.

James: With the band right?

Johanna: For the band.

James: For the pep band or something.

Johanna: I don’t know; I wasn’t there. That could have been her personality, but there
was something to the ring about it was Christmas time and there was (non-
Christian music). All those issues go around.

James: The leftovers of that came up after this last Christmas concert when the grade
sevens played . . .

Johanna: Jingle Bells.
James: It’s a five note tune.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: It’s easy to play. Emery the principal was saying, “You know I’m going to get phone calls now again,” but I don’t think he did. What other Christmas carol can you play with a beginning band that has five notes and that doesn’t go into weird keys?

Johanna: Yeah, exactly.

Troy: You’ve got the pedagogical considerations of the repertoire?

James: Oh yeah.

Troy: The pedagogical, the aesthetics, level of the students, what they’re interested in, and then there’s kind of the theological influence?

Johanna: Yeah, but I was thinking last year I did a whole bunch of African pieces and some nonsense like Adiemus.

Troy: Yeah.

Johanna: There are nonsense words, words that people think are religious, but they are not. They are nonsense, but the audience thinks, “Oh African, it’s Christian, it’s gospel.” It’s not; it was translated mother and father of dancing [chuckling], but they don’t know, so it’s a way that I got around needing to do Christian.

James: Foreign language [laughing].

Johanna: I was thinking that or sing nonsense. People think, that must be Latin. They don’t know.

James: Speaking in tongues [laughing].
Troy: Do you get in trouble if you do something in Latin, like it’s not German or something to that effect?

Johanna: No. Kristel did “Ave Maria” and had flack for that, which I think was stupid.

Johanna: But that’s not because it’s Catholic and stuff. We don’t pray to the Virgin Mary.

Troy: That’s funny because I’m filling in over at the Grand Forks Air Force Base playing for the Mass this Sunday.

Johanna: Oh yeah, yeah.

Troy: I do a little freelancing myself and am going out of my own tradition a little bit.

Johanna: I don’t know, I just don’t think you can teach an art course without looking at all the paintings of the Virgin Mary.

James: Yeah.

Johanna: But then again, I don’t know if it reflects the school or if it reflects some parents. In a public school you don’t want to get parents angry for this, that, (and other things).

James: You can’t please everybody.

Johanna: No you can’t.

James: I don’t think one would revamp a whole program just because one parent called.

Johanna: No, for sure.

James: I think that if you have a conversation with that parent, you can always placate them.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: You can send them a box of chocolates or something.
Johanna: There is one thing about the whole Christian music that I think churches do dictate. Last year at the end of the year staff meeting, this could have been because of some people complaining about how we always listen to music in class. I try to educate them. You know The Real Group, Rajaton, and all those sort of vocal jazzy stuff. Part of when I was teaching, I would try to get them to listen to cool music that wasn’t this crap. A lot of it’s not Christian and I don’t know if it was because of that or because of the churches, but the principal said that if you listen to music in class, it has to be Christian. That’s what we had at the staff meeting. I don’t know if that came from above, but you were asking about the church’s influence, that could be.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: I don’t follow that rule because I think as a music teacher it’s my job to educate from all aspects. We don’t listen to “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” but that was something that came to mind.

Troy: It’s just for the sake of this is the music that’s out there and you’re creating a complete picture.

Johanna: Yeah, that’s what I wanted to do, but then that’s difficult when you have the churches, or the principal, whoever saying you can only listen to Christian music.

Troy: Is that getting down to a philosophy of music education or a philosophy?

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: A philosophy of Christian education?

Johanna: Because we’re Christian, do we have to be unidimensional. Is that the right word? One dimensional.
Troy: How about the ensembles themselves? Have the band ensembles changed over the years or have they always been here?

James: Band has always been.

Johanna: We have such a strong choral tradition, but not as strong band tradition. I think our bands are decent, but some of the schools in the city are just competition and everyone’s in band. That’s certainly not the case here.

Troy: The reason for being in band—it’s not for competition. What is the purpose for band here?

Johanna: That’s a good question. I think that we have a band just because we do. I know Emery the principal and I talked about this. You can’t not have a band, but that’s not a reason to have it. I do think that we need to go in the direction of why do we have a band?

Troy: Not just because the province says you have to or something like that?

Johanna: Yeah, exactly.

James: The school may not realize it, but the band helps for music literacy.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: That’s the one place where you actually see notes and you play the tangible.

(They) play, and for someone who’s a monotone and can’t sing, they can blow a saxophone.

Johanna: Yeah.

James: You’re not bound by your (abilities), if you are fairly unmusical and play in the band. In a junior high band you can still make the notes and play. You may not be the world’s best clarinetist or world’s best saxophone player, but from a pure
mechanical machine level, music can be made and students experience the whole ensemble thing. It’s a different bird than in a choir.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: The important thing is participation in music in a community.

James: Yeah, They actually see notes and they’re forced to obey the notes; whereas in choir, you have people who learn by rote way more.

Johanna: I don’t know why the band program is so small. Maybe it’s just because it started out and it’s something that’s not great. Year after year, (students don’t) want to be in band because this, and this, and this, and then you have to practice. It’s not like the choir.

Troy: It has a plateau where you’ve reached and you can’t get over the hump to take it to the next level?

Johanna: Maybe you just need someone (that has a passion for band). For the last several years this school has hired choral people. I’m a choral person, you’re a choral person, and we do band, but that’s certainly not my passion. I can fake it, but it’s not true. I know that is the same thing at MCI. Their bands are just (okay). I can say that because I went there. You know that Rick’s the best; he’s a fabulous teacher, but . . .

Troy: Is it kind of like: I’ve got give a flute lesson; quick, look through the book; this is how you put a flute together or something?

Johanna: That was me last year. I learned violin. I don’t know how it works now, but . . .

. . .

501
Troy: I know my own experience from teaching. You have so many years from your methods classes to teaching and then it’s like, oh how do you do these instruments again? How are we doing on time for you two?

Johanna: I have about five more minutes. I need to be somewhere at twelve.

Troy: Do you want to talk about your philosophy of music education at all or do you think you covered that?

Johanna: I can do it in one sentence: that everyone can sing, at least badly, and it’s singing for a community and communities about (how) you know everything, so there you go.

Troy: What helps establish that philosophy? Or where, maybe what and where?

Johanna: I think my parents, growing up. That’s all I did.

Troy: Okay.

James: Yeah, the people doing the same thing at the same time, community. I guess the whole cause and effect of rehearsing something, going through the grunt work, learning it, performing it, and the audience going, “Wow!” The kids realize that was worth it.

Johanna: Yeah, it’s a metaphor for life too.

James: Yeah.

Troy: So the process orientation rather than the product?

James: Yeah.

Johanna: Yeah. That’s different because some people’s philosophy is the product. The spring concert and, yes you have to come into that, but I know I’m more process. I don’t know.
James: Yeah totally, because when I rehearse a choir, I rehearse very methodically, and I let them know what the goal is even something like these 10 measures. Our goal is this, this, and this. Let’s learn this now. I run rehearsals that are fairly well organized—fairly disciplined rehearsals where I don’t let people get sidetracked. Overtime, they would learn right? So when someone comes in grade seven and goes on through grade twelve, they will have had in theory five years of rehearsal with me, and they will know when they come to my class that they have to focus, but that takes time because right now the culture says music class is for . . .

Johanna: Birds.

James: Yeah, and . . .

Johanna: Credit course.

James: Yeah, free credit, easy credit, and (that means) you can talk throughout. We’re not the only school that has to battle that.

James: Yeah.

Troy: There’s another thing I was going to ask you about. Has your teaching been influenced by things like Kodály, Orff, or Dalcroze? Any of those things?

Johanna: That’s not me. That’s more elementary I’d say, which I’m not trained in.

James: No, when I was in elementary school we didn’t do those kind of things.

Troy: Okay.

James: I was not exposed to that.

Troy: That’s just one of the things I was checking on. How about music education and the impact on the community? The impact that what you do here has on the
community. Does the school help in the churches at all? Do they bring in any of those things you teach to that situation?

James: I don’t know.

Johanna: I don’t know if there’s that need. We don’t grab that.

Troy: At MCI where it’s kind of a closed circuit with the students and the school being the community?

James: This is the package right there.

Troy: Here you’ve got the school, you’ve got the town, and you’ve got the surrounding community where students come from and so there’s not that closed circuit as far as the church informing the community what goes on in the choral classroom and the choral classroom going back to the community. This school is more diverse.

James: The school becomes its own unique little microcosm and it’s a complete package from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day. At MCI of course, the school, even during the evenings (is active) because everyone is there so there is a bigger force at work even off hours. Here, everybody goes to back to their home.

Troy: If you were going to describe this like the status of the music program, where are your students coming from in general? You mentioned Blumenort, I suppose (some of the students come from the) elementary schools here in town. Do you know or do you have ideas on some of the percentages of where you get students from?

James: I wouldn’t know that.

Johanna: (We get) lots from Blumenort.

Troy: Okay.
Johanna: They’re sort of all over.

James: Yeah.

James: Some students have an hour bus ride that they have to do, while some just pedal the bike for five minutes.

Johanna: The elementaries don’t feed this school, it’s the churches. I’m trying to think of an example like at MCI if you go to this certain school you just sort of go to MCI. But here, most of the elementary students just go to the junior high, except if they go to these specific churches, then they’ll come to SCHS.

Troy: Ummmhhmm.

Johanna: That’s how I understand it.

Troy: As far as enrollment, has that been holding pretty steady in the music program?

Johanna: As the student (numbers) climb, the choral numbers climb. The school (numbers) are steadily climbing.

Troy: Do you have a correlation?

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: The enrollment of school increases and it correlates with what goes on in music?

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: Curriculum-wise? Will you talk a little bit about curriculum?

Johanna: They’re coming out with a new a curriculum. Next year is it going to be out and I don’t go with the curriculum because (that’s for) teachers.

Troy: Is that the Draft Manitoba Curriculum?

Johanna: I think it’s from 1983, so it is the current one for Manitoba, right?

James: Yeah.
Johanna: No, I absolutely don’t follow it.

Troy: So as a framework, you don’t (use it) you’re more into the music and getting things—

Johanna: Yeah, because it’s ridiculous like doing all that theory, all that history, and all that blah, blah, blah. You can teach that with the repertoire. They don’t have to know when Beethoven was born and Bach and stuff. They can learn that in elementary. I would like to teach theory as it pertains to the music, but some people separate it. That’s a difference in your teaching style.

Troy: That’s a priority you have to make when you have deadlines with concerts.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: I’ve experienced that too with the national standards and different things.

Johanna: Right, right, right.

Troy: There is the need for the high school to have their concerts.

Johanna: Right, yeah exactly.

Troy: Like you said, mixing it in with the repertoire that you’re doing.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: In a way you are probably doing more than you think you are.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: That is what I would guess.

Johanna: Right, but I know the teacher before me did so much theory. She would do about a theory sheet every other week. That’s her, that’s what she did, but I could never get organized enough to do that.
Troy: How about autonomy, can you do pretty much what you want as far as music goes? Is there anything that you cannot do?

Johanna: For instance I wanted to do a Bobby McFerrin “The Lord is My Shepherd” and then it uses instead of “He makes me lie down” it’s “She makes me lie down” and it’s so beautiful, but we couldn’t do that. God can’t be a woman at SCHS, not yet. You can’t do things that are out there.

Troy: Yeah.

Johanna: I think, do you disagree?

James: I’ve never tried it, but I suppose if they didn’t want God to be “She,” I would just make it a “He” for the concert.

Johanna: Yeah, well maybe. [All: Laughing]

Troy: Was it to stretch people theologically or to stretch them aesthetically?

Johanna: That was for me, I wanted to do it because it’s aesthetically pleasing. It’s beautiful, well written, and all those things, but I don’t want to put God as a woman.

Troy: Okay, so you’re not like a liberal, theological?

Johanna: I don’t want to fight for that.

Troy: Okay.

Johanna: [Jokingly] I think God is a woman.

Troy: [Laughing] For the record, it was just for aesthetic reasons.

Johanna: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Troy: Is there anything more you want to say about that?

Johanna: No, I could be wrong. Maybe they would be ready for that, but I don’t think so.
Troy: Okay.

James: I think you qualify it when you say, “Can you suspend disbelief for me just for a few moments? I don’t mean to trouble you with this, but in this case, God is She.

If you don’t like it, come talk to me afterwards.” The people would just . . .

Johanna: Yeah.

James: A lot of them have been bothered and some might and then . . .

Johanna: And then (I can tell them to) “direct your comments to the principal”

[laughing].

Troy: Okay, there would be lots of ideas to explore with the choir then definitely.

Johanna: Yeah.

Troy: Why did he choose this language and all that business?

James: You have to run.

Johanna: I should go.

Troy: Okay, would it be okay if I emailed you if I had further questions if you had to go? Could I get your email?

Johanna: Sure.
Appendix J

Elroy Friesen Interview

Elroy Friesen, DMA, 7 July 2008 at University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

Troy: Could you maybe tell me a little about your own academic background?

Elroy: Yep, I went to Fort Garry School Division. From kindergarten to grade one, I had Brenda Harvey as a music teacher. She is now a retired music teacher, but she’s living in Victoria. I was in general from grade two to grade nine and had Cindy Raxter, Brenda Harvey, and Marian Williams. Marian Enns was my strings teacher and I took cello in grade four to grade nine there. I took piano lessons with Lydia Wiebe starting in grade two and I did that through my first year in college, and started cello with her son Thomas Wiebe, who now teaches at Western, starting in grade five or grade six for a couple of years. From grades ten to twelve, I was at Vincent Massey Collegiate just down Pembina here with Willow Wade. I think in my grade twelve year they started the choir, so I was part of the very first choir. She still teaches there actually. I did two years at Steinbach Bible College. I did two years of a three year Bachelor of Church Music, but I decided during the second year to pick and choose what I wanted to do, and then came here because it wasn’t going to transfer anyway. I had Rudy Schellenberg as my conductor the first year and Jake Klassen during my second. I don’t know if you know that name?
Troy: Not yet.

Elroy: There’s another educator.

Troy: Jake Klassen?

Elroy: Jake is part of the Klassen clan here in Winnipeg. I don’t know if you (know) John and Bertha Klassen. I don’t know if you’ve come across those names? They were involved in CMU and he was a high school educator at MBCI for years.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: This is his brother, Jake who’s a composer and publisher. He runs his own publishing company, or did. I forget what his wife’s name is right now, but they are in North Kildonan someplace.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Jake Klassen and his wife, she is in there; I can’t remember her name.

Troy: He used to teach where?

Elroy: He used to teach at SBC in the college, but there was always a connection between the two. He was there at the same time as Doreen Klassen, Rudy Schellenberg, Warren Hart, and Terry Grieger. There was often overlap.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Yeah, in fact I think he was there when I taught. I came here in 1990 and I was a voice major, but I continued my piano lessons with Sydney McGinnis at the same time and voice with Mel Braun. I sang in University Singers with Henry the first year. Stravinsky’s Les Noces was the big work that we did that got me totally excited about choral music, so I chose a secondary choral track and then my
second teachable was instrumental. I did a double music (major), so that was a five year program because that’s integrated—music and education. You get two degrees in five years. That’s not a music education degree; it’s a Bachelor of Music and a Bachelor of Education, you get two.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: It’s still that way actually, which is a good thing because then you can go off in many tangents. Universities go, “Oh, you have a Bachelor of Education,” or, “Oh, you have a Bachelor of Music.” That’s partly how I got hired here because I had the education side of things too, so with that I graduated in 1995 and started teaching on a specials certificate at SCHS because their person had quit at Christmas. They cancelled music classes for the month of January and the first two weeks of February. I finished my student teaching here on Friday in the middle of February and started there on Monday. That’s the way to start—cold turkey, it was good. I had to teach Geography as well as choir and band, so it was very, very interesting doing all that.

I was there five and a half years and during that time I also taught in the college and they ended up hiring someone to do band. I think that’s how it worked or I gave up my geography or something happened like that so I just had music between the college and the high school. As far as the high school goes, we toured Minneapolis and Toronto during that time. They hadn’t done tours I don’t think before (that time). We got triple gold at the national competition and then in my last year or in my second to last year, we did a trip to England as well.
That was new territory for that school. They hadn’t done that kind of touring before.

Then I approached Linden Christian School, a Baptist school here in Winnipeg that I had worked as a substitute. Phyllis Cook was their principal and they needed someone to fill in music, so they hired me. She liked me and liked what I’d done with the kids in that time. They were pretty chaotic music classes that I walked into and so that was fun.

I approached her after I quit here because I knew I wanted to start a community choir in Winnipeg and I didn’t want to do the commute back and forth anymore. I just brought her my recommendation saying I wanted to start a choral program. We started fulltime. Grades six, seven and eight were mandatory choir. Grades nine to twelve were voluntary. That soon became a grade nine and ten choir and a grade eleven and twelve choir. I built a program there and I think I was there only three years: I can’t quite remember if I was there three or four years.

Troy: What’s the location right now?

Elroy: Linden Christian School is in Grant Memorial Baptist Church. It’s on the corner of Waverly and Wilkes.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: They had a good high school band program that was growing, great instructors, and a great choral program that is well established now and doing really well. They have singing now from K to twelve. They have a good program. I think I must have done three years fulltime and then I think I went part-time. I was there
70 percent. I must have done two years fulltime and one year part-time I think. I had started Prairie Voices in the meantime.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I must have conducted Prairie Voices four years, so I was at Linden Christian three years. I can’t make my dates work out. Maybe I conducted them five years. Prairie Voices paid me more because it was taking a lot of time and I went less at Linden Christian School. I went down to 70 percent time and in the following year I resigned so that I could do my master’s here while still conducting Prairie Voices as part of my income. I did my master’s here in a year in choral conducting and then went to University of Illinois and did two years of doctoral studies and now am working on dissertation. It’s stuck in the mud. It’s stuck because I’m working here too much. This is taking all my time. That’s probably about it education-wise.

Troy: Do you belong to any professional organizations?

Elroy: Yeah, ACDA, and A triple C [ACCC], and Manitoba Choral Association.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I think that’s it right now.

Troy: What is the A triple C?

Elroy: ACCC is Association of Canadian Choral Conductors.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: It’s the Canadian equivalent of ACDA.

Troy: Okay.
Elroy: Now it has a new name: Association of Canadian Choral Communities. The new name will allow us to get more funding so we changed it just this last meeting.

Yeah.

Troy: Very practical. Okay.

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: What role do the organizations play in your teaching? Do you go to the conferences or are you involved in other ways with conferences?

Elroy: Actually I did become a member also of International Federation of Choral Musicians Choral Conductors—IFCM. That’s the international one, so I’m going to World Choral Symposium in Denmark next week. I go to ACDA in Fargo. I don’t go every year, but every two years I’m there at the conferences. I’m also involved in the Manitoba Choral Association. That is more about what I can give to the province. I value being organized and having the choral community organized here in Manitoba, but I am not getting professional development out of it necessarily. I see it more as what can I give to music educators in the province: what can I do?

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Certainly in ACDA and ACCC I get lots of (development).

Troy: Sure, so there’s kind of a loop there as far as this group supports you as far as your development goes and then you give that back in the province?

Elroy: Manitoba Choral Association is very supportive of what I do, so don’t get me wrong on that; it’s just professional development-wise, let’s say it doesn’t feed
necessarily. I feel that I’m there to give, to help with that (organization) on that side.

Troy: Sure, and then you mentioned you were involved with Prairie Voices at one time. Are you involved with anything else in the music activities? I’m thinking now when you were at Steinbach were you involved with music outside of the school?

Elroy: I was a member of EastMan Choral Association which is a branch of Manitoba Choral Association.

Troy: Ummhmm.

Elroy: I was part of the committee with Millie Hildebrand and Robert Neufeld who is now our executive director of Manitoba Choral Association. Are you meeting with Millie Hildebrand?

Troy: No.

Elroy: Does this only affect SCHS?

Troy: SCHS and MCI.

Elroy: Millie Hildebrand has taught voice at SCHS for years.

Troy: Okay, the voice teacher.

Elroy: She was a voice teacher. Sheila Ardies was there, Ruth Oommen, and Millie Hildebrand. Millie Hildebrand was really fantastic, and she had come back from two years of teaching in Romania. It’s Ed and Millie Hildebrand with a “d” at the end not a “t”.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: He was the teacher before Kristel at SRSS for twenty some years. Millie is just a kingpin and she was very helpful at SCHS with the voice teaching.
Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Her daughter, Johanna you talked to and Johanna went to MCI, right.

Troy: Right.

Elroy: Millie certainly would have history beyond her daughter to be able to see the two schools.

Troy: Right, okay.

Elroy: I have a feeling Millie’s probably a graduate of MCI, I would guess actually.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: So through EastMan I got my first non-school gig and they asked me to do a junior high honor choir, a one day thing. Henry Engbrecht was brought in to do high school and I they brought me in as guest conductor for the grades 7, 8, and 9 choir. They brought in two elementary specialists for grade 5 and for grade 6, so that was just a one day workshop. You work your tail off from nine when they walk in never having seen the music until the concert in the evening at seven o’clock. It was very successful and through that I spearheaded my professional gig. Do you have enough tape there?

Troy: Yeah, I was just checking to make sure it’s rolling [laughing].

Elroy: My professional gigging started in Manitoba, and since then I’ve done every region’s youth choir, day workshops, festivals, and everything. It’s from there your name spreads and so I do a lot of stuff across Canada now.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Thanks to EastMan, they got me going. It was in my second year of teaching they gave me this gig and Millie was the one to push that; I know that. It was
successful. Millie and I taught the preparatory choir here for one year; she started it up. It was a youth choir I think for grades 9 to grade 12; I’m not sure.

Troy: At the University of Manitoba?

Elroy: Yeah, in the preparatory division here. It has since folded; that choir branch doesn’t exist here unfortunately, and then she had to come aboard. Millie was thinking of leaving the choir, so we did a one year tag team. We did every other week I think, but the driving was crazy. Both Millie and I quit that following year and I think they gave it to someone else. I knew I wanted to move to the cities and start Prairie Voices.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That’s how that sort of came about.

Troy: Prairie Voices was already going and then you moved here?

Elroy: No, I moved here and started it. We moved here in the summer. In fact, we were already in our house by graduation so I drove back to the school for graduation. I had the idea to do this, but it wasn’t getting off the ground until I met two of Anna Hildebrand’s graduates who knew me from Steinbach in the shopping mall. I said, “Hey, I’m thinking of starting this choir.”

They said, “Yes, we want to sing.” Because they had graduated, they had no place to sing. We got together for brunch a week later, contacted every good singer we knew who wasn’t in a choir roughly between the ages of 18 and 25, and got a little group together. That was how it started.

Troy: Amazing.

Elroy: It was perfect; really good. The rest is history.
Troy: Is it still going?

Elroy: It’s still going. Kristel came in as assistant conductor in my master’s year here. She had taken over my job at SCHS and she’s very talented. She’s a great soprano, so I had her sing soprano, and be assistant conductor. She took it over when I left, so that was a good transition.

Troy: Good, it sounds that way; good move.

Elroy: Yeah, it worked well.

Troy: When SCHS hired you, what were they looking for in a music teacher?

Elroy: They needed a Mennonite Christian basically, well not even a Mennonite, they needed an Evangelical Christian.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: They were pretty desperate because they were stuck in the middle of the year, so I was actually approached by a board member who knew that things were getting rough there. There’s a whole political story. There was a lot of crap (going on). I was quite oblivious; although, I got the story after I was hired. When I went in I didn’t know any occurrence of that. Although that was my dream job; I always thought when I went through college “Oh, that would be exactly where I want to teach,” because I had visions of what could be done with those kids.

I was approached during exam break in my last year here. A board member who was also studying here at the same time and getting his education degree saw me and said, “Oh, Elroy when do you graduate?” He knew that things were not working, and it looked like it was going to be a termination or a resignation at Christmas time. They were looking for someone, but they couldn’t
be picky. They were a private school that paid substantially less than public school teaching, really a lot less. It was still the mindset that you work here almost as a missionary. It was a mission to work at that place. The high school certainly has changed. I don’t think the college is being paid well yet, not compared to the university. (To be hired, you) needed to be a committed Evangelical Christian and a Mennonite was good. I think that’s what they were looking for.

Troy: Were they specifically looking for somebody that could do choir and band?

Elroy: Yeah, that’s always been the thing and then usually something else. (I also taught) grade 10 geography.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I told my class when I walked in, “The last geography class I took was in grade 10.”

Troy: Wow.

Elroy: I wasn’t a brilliant geography student; although, I loved teaching it. I think we had a lot more fun in my class than I had when I was taking it; that’s for sure.

Troy: That’s how it works sometimes.

Elroy: Yes exactly.

Troy: I wound up teaching language arts my first year.

Elroy: You take what you can get.

Troy: You were at Steinbach for about five and a half years?

Elroy: Five and a half, yeah.

Troy: Do you remember what year it was when you started?

Troy: What kind of repertoire did you do?

Elroy: The choir was really very weak when I got there. I went to their Christmas concert and they sang “Let There Be Peace” on Earth in unison lighting candles. It was terribly unison. It was a last minute ditch attempt to put something together. I think that was the only thing that choir sang. I was shocked because I had one really good student teaching assignment and I knew high school choirs could do way more than that. The audience still seemed to appreciate it which was (. . .) in my mind.

Two weeks after I had started there was an open house (to recruit students) for the next year and typically you feature music groups. I knew I (had) two weeks (to prepare), so I started off with “Singabahambayo;” an African folk song. I think that’s the only thing we got ready; that “Singabahambayo.” I had them in solid bright colored tops and jeans. We added some percussion and we sang. The place was packed because all the parents were curious to see what this new choir would sound like under a new director in two weeks. I remember starting with African and I don’t know what else I would’ve done. My repertoire choosing got much better as we went, but there would have been gospel; I would have stayed away from anything that was classical or traditional for the most part. I have a feeling I did some contemporary stuff (pop) and a lot of African. That would’ve been a basis for a lot that I did. I did Sid Robinovitch stuff and I did René . . .

Troy: What kind of stuff?
Elroy: I did stuff like Sid Robinovitch (Manitoba composer), I guess a “Ta Tikee Tei” piece which is a lot of speaking. I know that I did René Clausen: “All that has Life and Breath Praise Ye the Lord.”

Troy: Yes.

Elroy: That was when we were getting a little more sophisticated though. I can find a tape that I can give you.

Troy: I have heard one of the CDs from when you were conducting there.

Elroy: I think I only made one. Was it black?

Troy: Yes.

Elroy: With the silver? You have to realize that was my third or fourth year teaching.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That was building, but would have been typical repertoire; whatever’s on that.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That would be pretty typical.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I can’t remember what’s on that anymore. I just know that I’d probably be cringing if I listened to it now.

Troy: (It is a) work in progress: victories are never permanent in music.

Elroy: That’s right.

Troy: You always have to work at them.

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: How did the repertoire compare to the mission of the school? How does it relate to the mission?
Elroy: I was a brand new teacher you know.

Troy: Yeah.

Elroy: These are things I probably wouldn’t have thought about. The first year is survival. I don’t know how much of my thoughts were already informed back then, but it needed to be quality. It did not need to be like this whole business of distinguishing between sacred and secular or Christian and non-Christian, even back then. I’m very much, “You know what, no. We sing good quality music,” and that can be worship whether it’s sacred text or a secular text. This business of Christian music and non-Christian music irritates me. Obviously, there are extremes.

Troy: Yeah.

Elroy: I was challenged one time by a parent when my student teacher had chosen a women’s only medley of 1950s doo wop tunes. There was one piece, “Oh we had bah, dum, dum.” I hadn’t listened to the words, (but when I did, I realized) no this really isn’t appropriate; we canned it so I was caught up short. Some things are not appropriate.

I did sacred and secular, even back then I would really be turned off by cheesy texts. If it was a little bit cheesy Christian text, that didn’t fly for me. It was like, “Oh, we just can’t sing this.” Now when I choose, it’s based on text. I’m analyzing new octavos and (determining) who wrote it. We’re not singing this text. This isn’t worth it. It doesn’t matter how good music is. We were not singing proselytizing music.

Troy: Ummhmm.
Elroy: When I’d go to a church we sang stuff like Rene Clausen’s “All that Hath Life and Breath,” Barbara Baker’s arrangement of “The Storm is Passing Over,” or stuff like that. It wasn’t even necessarily fitting specifically to a church service; although, appropriate for church because a lot of our music would be worship music. Everywhere I go, even if I’m working in public school division honor choirs, most of my repertoire ends up being sacred because there’s more meat in the text to get into, and I’m very comfortable explaining to Jews, Muslims, atheists, Christians, Mennonites, or Pentecostals. I’d find common ground as long as there’s truth in the text.

Troy: Yeah.

Elroy: That means it might be more than Biblical. There might be other texts I would consider as well that have truth in them. My goal isn’t: you’re all going to sing Christian texts. My goal is: have a great musical experience and that means they have to have good texts with good music. That stuff at the high school level is for honor choir. When I really want to get stuff, it is going to be a gospel piece, a spiritual which comes out of the slavery tradition, a psalm setting, or something where it will be the Kyrie text. I have found that I’m able to present it in a way that it’s not an issue at all because it’s quality. Whereas, I’ve been in warrant when I do a workshop for Winnipeg School Division Number 1 that there’s with one particular school where a certain group of people is going to be up in arms if you have anything Christian in it. That wasn’t an issue. They loved the repertoire because they knew it was fantastic repertoire. I think it’s got to be quality
repertoire, so I was never someone to fit into the mold of the Evangelical: what we sing is to preach.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That was not the case at all, but it has stopped me from doing certain repertoire. Certain things aren’t appropriate or may be opening a can of worms that isn’t important enough for me to support to have to spend this time. I may think it’s fine to do, but I don’t want to have to try and explain that to an administrator. It’s just not worth it. So it’s stuff that I’ve just left.

Even here at university I know that I have kids out of Evangelical traditions that come here and I don’t want them uncomfortable in what we sing in choir. That’s happened where they’ve had to sing. I know there are times when we’re going to have to sing texts that are a little out there, that might be too “New Agey,” or that might bring in what they see as false doctrine. They have to deal with that sometimes, but I’m so aware here of what I pick. It’s not so much for me as it is for some of my more conservative students.

Troy: Okay. There are some things that you won’t do and will do. How about did you ever do any music that went along with the musical heritage of the community?

Elroy: Nope, I don’t think so.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Now I would because I have developed an appreciation, but you have to realize that the Evangelical Mennonites are a completely different stream than General Conference. General Conference is coming from years of history of singing choral music four parts. The EMC conference and the EMMC conference is
coming from a tradition of having pulled out of the General Conference because it was too worldly. There’s no history of musical training in my family tree at all that I know of; whereas, in wife’s family, her mom was General Conference, there’s a concert violinist and different things all the way down. Her father’s heritage was a very conservative EMC pastor: rings were taken off, no dancing, none of the Mennonite circle games. When I’d go visit my grandparents’ church there was no piano, the men sat on one side, and the women on the other. There was four-part harmony singing, but not of high quality. When I think back they didn’t make beautiful sounds. It was very out of tune singing, but they did sing four-part; I remember that. Now I would certainly be more aware of and appreciate that, but I didn’t appreciate that as a youngster and as a young teacher. I can’t say that I did anything along that line.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I’d say the tradition in the Evangelical conference was the tradition of the contemporary worship starting. We did that in high school and I trained worship teams and stuff like that. In that way, the new cutting edge in worship, we did a lot of that.

Troy: Okay, for the instrumentation on that, was it a band?

Elroy: Yeah, that wasn’t so much as the big choir as it would be with what was called the Worship Band at that time. A lot of them were the choir kids, but they all were the choir kids who were involved in that.

Troy: Okay. Did you do performances at chapel services and that kind of a thing?
Elroy: The worship team would lead the worship for chapel. That became a regular thing almost once a week. It was often with college (SBC students). Things were changing when I was there. If we were together with the college, we would take turns: the high school versus the college team would lead or sometimes together. We’d occasionally do a choral chapel, but that was a rare thing. We would redo the Christmas concerts for each other, especially during the years when I was teaching college and high school. Not all of the students would have seen or heard the performance so we would do it in the chapel, but that was a rare thing there.

Troy: What kind of role did performances play at SCHS? First of all, how often did they occur and what was its primary purpose in the community?

Elroy: I teach performance-based curriculum, so everything was geared towards the performance, and along the way they happen to learn a lot about choral music and choral singing. It was to perform it, so we would sing at the open house, graduation, and at Christmas. At Christmas time we would also go and sing at the old folks’ home and we at the credit union which meant you’d be broadcast on AM 1250. We would drive into the city for ChoralFests and that’s how we got recommended to nationals. We would always do a tour of some sort and that would include many performances along the way. We got into the habit of doing dessert concerts as well to fundraise for these trips. Everything was connected that way, and we would do many church services in the year. We would go out a few times a semester to church services and that was essentially recruiting or to
sing in these students’ churches. We always went to where we had students from, and we would take our turns. We did quite a bit of performing.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Yeah, we did quite a bit of performing, more than when I came to the Linden Christian School because there was an expectation based on the college model of deputation—going out and showing the community what you’re doing at the school so that more kids would come and that you get the community support.

Troy: Sure, the public relations aspect of it.

Elroy: Yeah. That was definitely a part of it.

Troy: Were there feeder churches instead of feeder schools?

Elroy: Yeah. Those are very active, healthy churches with huge youth groups, so we didn’t go into the schools, we went into the churches.

Troy: On Sunday mornings?

Elroy: Sunday mornings, yeah. It was the choir on Sunday morning.

Troy: Do you know how many of those a year you did?

Elroy: I’m guessing maybe four to six, somewhere in there.

Troy: Per year?

Elroy: Per year, and that’s a long time. When I took them with college, I was gone every other Sunday, so I really don’t know. There was also the worship team. Maybe the choir only went once or twice a semester. I think that’s what happened with the high school choir.

Troy: You were taking the college choir out?

Elroy: I would take the college choir out too.
Troy: Okay. I can see how over the year those kind of meddled together.

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: How about music theater?

Elroy: We did a show every year, except for the year that we went to England when we took a year off. The year I came partway through February they did the drama *Anne of Green Gables* and so I was just involved with the makeup. The next year we did *Where’s Charley*? I essentially led the music and taught the chorus. I think I did the choreography for that too actually. The next year we did *Annie* and then I worked with Karla Hildebrandt Kroeker and we actually tag teamed. I taught the music, but she would coach. We coached each other. I taught the music, she the staging, we brought it together, and then I ripped her staging apart thinking that she would do the same thing for my coaching, but she took offense. We had one, really bad night. We talked about it and from then everything was fair game. We really co-directed and worked like a team. I was happy. We did *Annie*, went to England, and my last year we did *My Fair Lady* which was really fantastic. I’ve never hit that level of performance with a high school group since then. That was sort of the pinnacle of musical theater there.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: By the way, the first year when I did *Where’s Charley*? we still had to change things. I don’t know if you know the plot line, but she’s supposed to be drinking wine and getting tipsy. We had to have her drinking tea and going crazy. This is where we had to tweak things. Miss Hannigan couldn’t be drunk. She had to just
be like out of control, hormones raging crazy, and she could never have a bottle in her hand because that would not have worked in the community.

With *My Fair Lady*, there was something that they did that was allowed. I’m trying to think what it was. I think there’s a scene where they drink alcohol or sipped something. I can’t remember what it is and it was allowed. We still got two letters: “How could da dah ta dah ta dah?,” but everyone else was fine. It was interesting because there was a transition that happened. If they would do *Where’s Charley?* now, I think it would be alright. Well, I don’t know? Actually, they’re more conservative now than where they were before. I don’t know where they’re at with that exactly, but we wouldn’t do drunken scenes in musicals.

Troy: Okay. As far as changes over the years with that, would you have any speculation as far as when you were able to do things and when you were not able to do things? Do you think they’ve become more conservative?

Elroy: I don’t know because I haven’t seen anything since then. I worked under three principals, the third one being Randy Dueck, and he was amazing. He would be the most liberal in his personal views. He was a fantastic, on-fire Evangelical Christian, but not fundamental. Alcohol wouldn’t be an issue for him and different things; although, he knew what he had to do and how to balance within the community. I think that the conservativeness of the school follows the principal and how they are able to lead their community of parents.

Troy: Could you describe, at least in the context of SCHS, what liberal would be in that context?
Elroy: Liberal parents would be okay with wine with the meal, but a conservative would be a complete abstainer and may be raising their kids to say that all drinking is wrong. Dress and how to dress would be another. The liberals would be alright with you wearing makeup with their ears pierced, and then you have your conservatives who wouldn’t approve of that.

We had parents that raised a stink about the teaching of *Lord of the Flies*. Basically it was one of those things they just read little bits and pieces and went, “Ahhh, we can’t!” Randy Dueck and Karla Hildebrand Kroeker had to sit down with the parents and say this is the most thought-provoking (and) best theology teaching your child is going to get. This secular book teaches so much about the fall of mankind and how we go. Those parents turned a hundred and eighty degrees and said absolutely, but they had started a letter writing and gotten signatures to take the book out. Karla Hildebrand Kroeker went and said this is the most profound book for me to teach to your grade twelve. So there’s that kind of thing can come up. You don’t want to throw out all conservatism because there’s some stuff that you know is healthy, but a more open world view (would be better) in some cases.

Troy: How about choral ensembles? Did they change over the years while you were there?

Elroy: The choir grew so much. It was originally a grade 9 to 12 choir, then we split that into 9, 10, 11, and 12. That was one development. We did the same thing with band because we had ninth graders playing with twelfth graders, and the ninth graders played the same level of repertoire for four years. They got better at their
part, but that was it. You can only go so hard when you’ve got beginner flute players with advanced saxophones.

Troy: Right.

Elroy: We split the main choir. In fact, I think I had a grade 9 choir, grade 10 choir, and a (mixed) grades 11 and 12 choir. We had a Chamber Choir because the choral program grew and the pool I had to select from was much better, so the Chamber Choir went way up in quality. It was a very high end group by the time I left there, so it was more of a quality thing.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: We were getting longer rehearsal times, more tours, and all of those kinds of things. We got good uniforms and got them dressed a little more hip and with it on stage.

Troy: What kind of things did you do for dress?

Elroy: We started off with the traditional white and black. It didn’t take long and we were doing the total black and dressy black. We gave more guidelines for how things were to look, but I think we never did every one exactly the same.

Troy: They were different for each concert?

Elroy: No, I would just say everyone has to be in black. Ladies had to be in full length skirts or long pants and it had to be three-quarter’s length sleeve or longer, but they got their own outfits. It’s not like the American choirs where they all go to the robing companies or the dress companies and get identical dresses. We never did that. In fact, that’s not really done in Canada, at least not done in Manitoba, that whole perfectly matched choir. There are very few choirs that do that here.
Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That’s an American thing I guess, especially the long gowns and the choir robes. There’s one high school I know of that does robes and one that does dresses. My daughter’s in one where they all have matching dresses.

Troy: How about the instrumental ensembles, did they change while you were there?

Elroy: Yeah, I started a jazz band and the worship team while I was there. We did the split of grades 9 and 10 band and grades 11 and 12 band. That was huge because I could then push the grades 11 and 12 much further. They wanted to stay because they actually got to do harder music so that was key.

Troy: Did the students ever go to any camps or anything and pick up music there? Did that go into the music that went into chapel or anything?

Elroy: The whole culture of contemporary music is changing. I don’t even know where it comes from because one will say, “Oh, there’s a cool new song at camp this summer.”

Someone will say, “I just got it on the new Michael W. Smith worship CD,” and it will be the same song. I don’t know how that developed exactly, but it’s very much the same places. Back in my time it was Integrity Hosanna that released new worship recordings once a month and so churches would do that. Hillsongs out of Australia also started releasing (new music), so there’s a myriad of these things.

Troy: As far as philosophy of music education, you said you were performance-oriented, so was your philosophy geared towards that?
Elroy: I’m a performer and so both schools know that I was a performer. I mean, I’m an educator, but the (important) thing was the performance, so there may be people who disagree with that but Manitoba is pretty much based that way. We’re pretty performance oriented for the most part and there’s lots of great educating happening through that process.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That may change in the coming years. There’s some new thoughts coming up in Manitoba.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: That’s why I think I was always itching to get on to the next thing, so I tried moving from Steinbach to Winnipeg and then I realized that what I wanted to do was move into higher performance essentially. Next year I’m not teaching the choral techniques class, but am focused on performance. I was happy to let someone else take that because I’m really interested in the performance side of it.

Troy: Do you have a specific teaching or a specific philosophy of music that you have or is that just pretty much it?

Elroy: I use performance, and because I want a great performance, I want to have good tone. I want a great performance, so they have to understand the text. They have to know the text and they have to know about text stress. Because I want a good performance, they need to know the history of the composer and how that fits in. Everything for me goes towards the performance stage.

At the high school level I’m also keen on everyone singing; I didn’t cut people in other choirs, but I also always have a select group because I think it’s
not fair to always teach to the lowest common denominator and that the bright musicians need a chance to make music at a very high level. That builds your other choir as well and there are people who say, “Oh, that’s not fair.” I explain to people who are starting a program that when I started at Linden, I started off with an auditioned choir as well. There was the big choir and I immediately had a select group. The first year I already chose the best voices, and I really think that’s the way to do it to build a choral program because you want kids striving in the lower choir to get up there. Your more advanced students come in and they are instructors then within the choir right. You have to make sure attitudes are in a healthy place, but I think that’s a good way to go.

Troy:  Okay.

Elroy:  That means I needed to teach sight reading because I don’t want to pound every note. So, I teach sight reading, but not because I have a set amount of sight reading stuff that I want to do, it’s because I want them to read music faster than they’re doing.

Troy:  Do they learn like key signatures and all that through?

Elroy:  I have to say very little theory and enough that they need. In instrumental music you need quite a bit more. You can get away with less in choral and still be very successful. A lot of my students were in band as well, so they’re getting it both ways. I treat them like musicians, use Italian terms, and if there’s a question mark on someone’s face, I tell them what it means and we just keep going. We talk about tonic and dominant as well as tuning the chord. They learn whatever theory they need for that point in that music. My thinking is that the people who are
going to go on to music education and performance will have to be taking private
lessons as well. Almost without fail, that’s what happens with the people who are
coming into this faculty. We take approximately 65 new students each year. If
they don’t have the theory skills they’ll have to take a year of Preliminary Theory
before they can hit Theory 1. They start with whole notes if they have to. I didn’t
ever feel it was my job to make sure that they were at university entrance as a
class. Does that make sense?

Troy: Yeah.

Elroy: That’s different than what you would see in the States.

Troy: You weren’t trying to make music theorists out of them?

Elroy: No and it’s amazing how many went on to music despite that. There are a
number here from both of the programs.

Troy: Learning was always holistic. Was it always through the music?

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: That fit with what the school wanted?

Elroy: They aren’t professional musicians in either place. The school wants to see
fantastic performing. What impresses the administrator is not that the kids know
their key signatures, but when the parents are all talking about how fantastic the
choral concert was. Then you get funding to do stuff, permission to do new
things, and you get more class time. That’s how it works in my opinion. You
have got to have the program to be able to teach and so you have to be able to
produce amazing concerts that capture the audience’s imagination. That gets the
principal excited about what you’re doing.
Troy: And also gets the parents (excited).

Elroy: Yeah, it must be; hence, performance is important. What can I say?

Troy: How about has your teaching been influenced by anything like the teaching philosophies of Orff, Kodály, or Dalcroze?

Elroy: No, not at all. What’s it been influenced by, I don’t know?

Troy: Has it just been professional organizations?

Elroy: Yeah. Personality plays so much of a role in high school music education and so there are music educators out there who can run a fantastic music program without being as performance driven as I was. It’s the fit of the personality with the skill set that they bring.

I think one of my advantages in coming in was my experience working at camp. You’ve got a hundred kids in front of you, it’s a rainy day, and it’s supposed to be their big great special activity day. How do you make them have a blast for three hours inside? That’s when you have to get creative. You have to get them eating out of your hand doing this kind of stuff. All of my experience working with youth and doing that kind of stuff that just fit right in to conducting. I can get the choir to do what I want them to do. I can build a relationship with them in thirty seconds and I can have them eating out of my hand doing exactly what I want. That’s because I’ve had to do that. I’ve done that for so many years as a camp director and as a camp counselor.

I had a fantastic piano, cello, and voice background. I had very poor choral experience except for the one year here. I had one year that was good with Rudy Schellenberg in Steinbach and one year that was not quite so enjoyable for
me with Jake Klassen. I had one fantastic year with Henry and then after that I
got hired by Hymn Sing which was part-time work, but it was fulltime pay. I
couldn’t be in Singers and be in Hymn Sing at the same time, so I chose the
money. That was just hymns, but I learned a lot about choral detail there. I got
fired up while working with Henry on new music because I did the Stravinsky and
we did some other new things. I loved the new music and thought it was the best
thing. I also sang with Henry and in his community choir, Canzona. I got my
Bach fill there. I bring my personality on one hand and my desire to perform as
pianist, singer, and cellist. Now I have this new instrument, but have very little
experience on it.

I was influenced more by other choirs, Kokopelli out of Edmonton and
any choir that did great repertoire that performed in a more communicative way.
I like anything that was just a little edgy, just a little out there: that was what
grabbed my interest.

I went to all of the ACDA conferences—one every two years since I
graduated, all across Canada. I have been to ACDA, to the World Choral
Symposium in Minneapolis. I learned by watching. That’s where it is and again,
it’s performance.

Troy: This maybe backtracking a little bit, but when you teach sight singing, do you just
use solfège syllables?

Elroy: No.

Troy: What do you use?

Elroy: Solfège does not work for high school.
Troy: What do you use?

Elroy: If you want to sing something atonal, it doesn’t work. Even with my university students. The last professor here taught solfège. They cannot solfège Poulenc. I teach it by interval and I use the Nancy Telfer Sight-Singing series where they learn tonic, dominant, and mediant. Everything is based on that. If the basic sight reader has tonic, dominant, and mediant, I can do pretty much anything with them. For example, with my high school and even my beginner university women’s chorus, I’m always tuning the fifth. I want to make sure that they hear so they become aware of that very quickly. The sight singing helps them. They have to sing nonsense words in two parts and they have to just learn to read music. Do you know that series?

Troy: I’m familiar with the name Nancy Telfer.

Elroy: There’s Book 1 and Book 2 of Nancy Telfer Sight-Singing and it is good for grades 3 up to adult. The words are a little silly and I just told my high school students, “If you can sight-sing it perfectly for me we can go on to the next one. Well you’re stuck, then you sing silly words.” I’m much more (concerned) about the degree of the scale.

I’ve found that of the students I’ve taught, only a very few solfègers really solfège. There’s one girl who is a missionary kid from the Philippines who joined me. She couldn’t sight-sing the excerpt I gave her on the test, but she could solfège it for me which is fine.

That seems like a huge, unnecessary trouble in a way. When our students go into basic skills, they’re frustrated with solfège. They can sight-sing the piece,
but they can’t solfège it because now they have to learn another language to do it.

My best sight readers are my pianists because they’ve got that figured out versus my singers. I just want them to have the necessary skills, so I usually refer things back to the keyboard when I’m teaching.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I guess if in our country we actually taught solfège K through 12 it would be different, but what happens when you get to band? If I tell them to play concert B-flat, you’re not talking solfège; now we’re talking notes. They’re coming through that system and it doesn’t make sense to me to put solfège into band. They come here during their first year of theory and now they’re labeling things tonic/dominant—1, 4, 5. They’re not labeling them in solfège, so it seems like everything is using numbers and note names except for their sight reading class which is using solfège. That doesn’t make sense to me, so I’m not a supporter of solfège.

Troy: Do you just pick a vowel sound and go on that when you’re having them tune?

Elroy: Yeah, or whatever word we happen to be on. Yes, I’ll often have them “doo” to line up or “ee” to line up the vowel.

Troy: When you were at Steinbach did the music education that you did there have an impact on the community?

Elroy: Yeah, because it was producing stronger singers who participated in the Eastman Youth Choir which made that group stronger. I think it also gave the Regional some competition. It used to be the Regional would just blow Steinbach Christian out of the water because SCHS was this terrible little group of 30 kids that
sounded terrible. Eventually everyone sat up and said, “Oh, now good choral training is happening there as well.” They had been on a slippery slope since Rudy had been there, but the quality had gotten better again.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: I think it was good to have another strong choir in the community.

Troy: Did that ever have impact on any music in the churches do you know?

Elroy: I wouldn’t say the choral. I would say the worship team instruction that we did had an impact.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: They took their skills they learned and it went straight back into the churches.

Troy: Okay. How about the status of music education at SCHS? How did the numbers of students enrolled in the school compare to the number of students in choir?

Elroy: The ratio went up considerably when I got there. It was almost one hundred percent involvement when I left. I don’t know where it’s at now. It was also a drawing card when I was there. Definitely people came for the music program. There were many students who came to study music.

Troy: Did they come from surrounding areas like Blumenort and that kind of thing?

Elroy: As far away as Vita, New Bothwell, Niverville. There were lots of people from Niverville. We actually started getting some of the French communities sending students from Sainte Anne; although, I don’t know if that was being drawn by music. Things were happening at SCHS and so it had a positive reputation. It had a frumpy (reputation) for a while before I started teaching there. The change wasn’t because I was there. I was part of that, but there was a new hiring of
young staff with new ideas willing to try stuff and a new administrator. I have to say Randy Dueck turned that place totally around. He’s someone you actually should be interviewing.

Troy: Randy Dueck.

Elroy: He brought this school through humungous transition and he is now vice superintendent for Hanover School Division. He is easy to get a hold of and he was Emery Plett’s predecessor.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: Emery was vice principal for him at the time, so I think Randy would also have an outside view because he taught in Hanover and then he came over to the Christian high school. He saw what I was doing and had his opinions on what I was doing. He really liked what I was doing. He will have a very good outside view of what was happening there I think.

Troy: Curriculum-wise it was performance oriented. Enrollment went up when you were there. Was there autonomy for doing the music you wanted to do?

Elroy: That changed with administrators. I had just pretty much did what I thought was necessary with the first administrator, but it was his last year. He retired after the four months or five months of me teaching there. I didn’t feel restricted; I did what I thought was appropriate for that setting.

Troy: How about your schedule? How many hours a week and number of times did you meet in a week?

Elroy: I got great length of time there, but it had to grow. I don’t remember lengths of times anymore, but I know everyone was amazed on how much time I had. You
do practice at lunch and you do practice after school. I don’t know if I ever did before school. I must have. The regular credited choirs were in the schedule and that was unusual for a lot of Manitoba schools. A lot of them are teaching their credited concert choir at lunch time.

Troy: That says something about the status of music to those communities.

Elroy: Yeah, MCI, Winkler, and Altona too. I think it’s all southeastern Manitoba where choir is pretty solid right across the board.

Troy: Do you think that had influence from the communities, on the value of music?

Elroy: I don’t know. I don’t know the history. I really just dropped into Steinbach for five and a half years and pulled out. I wouldn’t know how that developed.

Troy: Okay, I was just wondering if there was a relationship between Mennonite communities and then the status of music in the school setting.

Elroy: I don’t know if it’s Mennonite schools or church. In southeastern Manitoba, that would mostly be Mennonite schools, but there’s a value of music as it can be used in worship. I don’t know because it’s certainly a huge difference between those rural communities versus Winnipeg. Maybe it’s because the administrators and the superintendents get it. I don’t know.

Troy: Were you able to get what you needed? Did you have enough funding?

Elroy: Yeah. I’ve never had a budget as healthy as that one. I had $10,000 a year for music purchases, having pianos tuned, and those kinds of things.

Troy: That was in 1995 or so?

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: Funding was good.
Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: You talked about the choral program already. How about the instrumental program?

Elroy: It was weak because very few kids came with instrumental background and so we started almost all of them in grade 9.

Troy: Okay.

Elroy: We had just a few who had come with experience and I wonder if that’s changing. We’ve got a lot of home schooled kids where parents have already chosen not to have their kids in public school or they home schooled them for junior high. Now SCHS has a junior high, so now it’s changing because now they can start teaching band in grade 7. In fact they might even make it mandatory; I don’t know. By the time they get to high school you can actually have a band that can play, whereas I just had this hodgepodge of people.

I had someone who had played. They had done four weeks in Sainte Anne on the flute and now they’re in grade 10 they can pick it up again. You can because I need a flute, but it sounded pretty bad. It wasn’t very strong because there wasn’t a history. Now there’s much more of a history there.

Troy: There are a lot of things that are outside of your control.

Elroy: Yeah. I guess that’s probably true. I didn’t have expensive instruments for the students to play. They had to provide their own. I didn’t have great percussion. We needed new timpani. We ended up buying used timpani, but that was always a frustration. We were always needing music stands, needing this, and there was no band room, so you set up and take down. We were on the chapel stage for
band class. That was a frustration. That one still hasn’t gotten really a proper spot in the school curriculum I don’t think.

Troy: It comes back to dollars to build and all that.

Elroy: Yeah.

Troy: Did you have a good music library when you were there?

Elroy: Yeah. It was huge. It was the best I had because it was all from the college. You could see them by era and it was good quality repertoire because they just kept adding quantities of music and then they had a good filing system. There were certain filing cabinets that were packed full of brand new music that I would never do. There is cheesy church anthems—too cheesy for even the college to sing on their deputations. It was just really bad quality. For the most part I had years of fantastic choral music collected. We owned every spiritual by Dawson and Hairston. There’s Latin madrigals and we had lots of good repertoire.

Troy: Was there anything else that you would like to say about the status of music at the school?

Elroy: We had a good room to rehearse in. It was a little bit narrow, but it was a good room. It’s the best choral room I’ve had in all my teaching. It’s better than what I have here at university, but it’s not great. Some of that Mennonite stinginess of not building a really nice space that has affected that school. They now have a relatively new building and it’s quite nice, but I have a feeling the choral room is still the same.

Troy: They put in an air conditioner.
Elroy: Yeah, it’s too bad we don’t get the funding the way a college would get in the states. We just don’t get that kind of funding. If you go to Collegeville to St. John’s there with Axel Theimer, he’s got an amazing choral space. There’s not one like that here in Manitoba, that’s too bad and is a frustration.

Troy: That’s kind of a provincial thing.

Elroy: Alberta’s got piles of cash right.

Troy: With the oil?

Elroy: With oil, there are piles of government money, piles of funding, and private money to be found. We’re not very good at finding money here yet. We’re working on it. There’s lots of projects on the go now, but it’s a long, long process.

Troy: There are three quick questions left. Is that okay?

Elroy: Yeah, that’s great.

Troy: What do you think the outlook is for the future regarding the music program?

You’ve maybe talked a little bit about those things and I realize you’ve been out of there a long way. Would you like to comment on that?

Elroy: On where they should be going?

Troy: The future regarding the music program.

Elroy: It’s still strong, partly because their administrator is a tenor, has sung in choirs all his life, and played trombone. He values it as do many of the teachers there as well as the community.

Troy: Right. Would you like to share any memorable stories from when you were there, either from the tours or the classroom?
Elroy: There’s not a specific incident, but just in general. The students at Steinbach Christian High School did not come from wealthy homes. These were kids who got up at five in the morning and did their chores in the barn to pay for their tuition. You saw some really nice cars on the parking lot, usually that’d been the teachers. The boys who did own nice cars worked night and day on the farm and earned their car. I always felt like I was working with kids who valued what they were getting. It wasn’t an expectation that they would get a good choral program. Some risers needed to be cleaned up. I asked once, “Can I have some volunteers to clean up the risers?” Almost every hand went up. At Steinbach, they worked their tails off to pay that tuition; they sacrificed things to be there, and so they valued what they got. I have to say I had very, very positive, very positive experiences with the students. I did not leave SCHS easily, and I only left because it wasn’t in Winnipeg basically. I needed to be in a bigger city. There were fantastic people to work with at SCHS in a really great community.

Troy: Okay. Do you have anything else you want to comment on?

Elroy: No.

Troy: Okay, thank you very, very much.

Elroy: You’re welcome.
Appendix K

Henry Hiebert Interview

Henry Hiebert, 12 June 2008 at Home, Steinbach

Henry: My dad played at barn dances a lot until he became a Christian and then he stopped. It is very interesting: he never touched the violin again and we didn’t know that he was a good violinist. Later on we discovered that was what he had been doing, so we got him a violin. We didn’t realize how well he played and he just put it away. I grew up in the family where we did a lot of this. Music that was my background. I don’t know if you’re interested in that type of thing, but that’s where my music interest came from.

Troy: It came from your dad playing?

Henry: Yeah, from our home. I started with guitar: I played and taught guitar. When I went to Bible college and went into classical music, they were surprised that I played guitar and piano accordion. They said, “You’re a Christian and you played guitar?” That was a shame to play instruments like that.

Troy: When was that?

Henry: That was in the late 1950s. You play piano, organ, violin, and things like that, but not guitar and piano accordion. That was very interesting. At any rate, I was in Bible school here where I privately studied voice, piano, and so on.
We had a voice teacher who came to the school. He directed the choir, but he also was a good voice teacher. A number of us studied voice and he started up an organization called Sacred Music Society that was composed of his voice students from Steinbach Bible and from Winnipeg Bible Institute. That’s where we basically came from and I became the president of that organization because he asked me to be the president. That was quality music and really raised my interest more and more into music. I ended up studying music more seriously, but not with the idea that I was going to be in music. I was going to be a missionary because that’s what I had signed up for in the West Indies. That was my plan, but while I was studying at Goshen College I got a call from Steinbach Bible College and they asked if I would come and teach music. When you go to the minutes of the Bible College you will see that they’re all wrong. The guy who wrote the minutes said they hired me to teach something like public speaking. I did teach public speaking, but that was not what they hired me to do. At any rate, I came in 1959) and I taught voice. I had somebody teach piano and included that into the program. I also taught elementary music theory. That was something the school had done for a while, so I took that course and expanded it a little bit; taught elementary theory.

Troy: So that was beginning of music theory for college students?

Henry: Yeah. At that time every student had to sing in the choir: high school and college students. Then I set up an audition choir: the A Cappella Choir. That was started there in 1959 and we had about 30 students. The A Cappella Choir then traveled, did lots of concerts, and so on. We really started moving with the music. At the
end of that year we discussed the whole thing of the direction of the school and I had suggested to the board, and various people at the school that we needed to meet the needs of the people. One of the professors was from the Bible college and was over at Elkhart at the seminary at the time teaching there. He was a good friend and a good man. We got together often and I told him we need to do something. He said to write something about the direction the school should go. I explained that the Bible Institute was not going to function long if we’re not going to really meet the needs of the people. We have to move on to a college level. So in 1960, three of us set up the college program: Ben Heppner, Ben Eids, and I.

A major in sacred music began in 1960. The three of us set up the program and that was accepted by the board. We had a Christian education major, a missions major, pastoral major, and a sacred music major. That’s when the music program began; in 1960. The school, of course, wasn’t prepared for music.

If you go up to the school and you go up into the high school office, you’ll see there’s a staircase going down and beside the staircase there’s a door of a little room under the stair. That’s where they kept all kinds of brooms and cleaning supplies; and that’s where they put the piano for me to teach music. That was the music program; that room under the stairs. They really looked down on music very, very much and I think you need to know this for the history because the school was very much part of this history.
SBC is very different. This area in the east is very different from the area in the west you will notice because this area was very much what we call Kleine Gemeinde. I don’t come from the Kleine Gemeinde: I come from the Bergthaler which is different. The Bergthaler came into Canada in the 1870s. My great grandfather was the one who started this whole thing, Bishop Gerhard Wiebe was my great grandfather and he started the whole movement. The Kleine Gemeinde were a smaller group that came along with them, but I would say in these areas of education, they went ahead a little more over on the East Reserve. For example harmony singing was out and Reimer who started Kleine Gemeinde was really down on music. They had a history of music as being worldly.

Instruments were absolutely great sin. As late as 1968 or 1969 I was asked to come to Blumenort to speak to a church. They wanted to introduce a piano and organ, and asked if I would come and speak to the congregation about the theological aspect of it. At any rate, that gives you a little bit of an idea.

Troy: Okay.

Henry: You need this background to understand what this school is about.

Troy: Sure.

Henry: The Evangelical Mennonite Conference, EMC churches, are not my background. My wife’s mother’s background is that, but her other background comes from the Bergthaler. At any rate, I drifted into the EMC; the Kleine Gemeinde. They call it EMC in Steinbach and when we came, there were no instruments there because they didn’t allow that. I came from an instrumental background, so I got involved with choir and things over there. I introduced instrumental music into the first

550
EMC church through Steinbach: I was responsible to some extent. I became choir
director and when I became choir director we needed instruments. Prior to that, I
was superintendent of the senior high Sunday school and we needed an
instrument. The first instrument that was introduced in this area into the EMC
churches (was) done by this character. I took a pump organ and I brought that up
into the department. What I did was put a vacuum cleaner on the inside of the
pumps, and had my wife’s sister, who was also teaching under me in the
department, play the organ. She was a good pianist, so she played the organ. It’s
not that people didn’t privately have pianos, but in the church it was not allowed.
I introduced that back around maybe 1951. Someplace in there that’s where that
came in and the pump organ was the first instrument.

That gave people a little bit of courage, so later on a few years later one of
the businessmen had a wedding or something in the church and so they brought a
piano in. That was the second one, but that piano was covered with a blanket.
My brother-in-law was choir director and the piano stood there. I said, “Are you
going to use the piano?”

He said, “No we can’t, the church first has to give us permission.” So we
put a blanket over it so as not to create problems. At any rate, we started using
the piano, but the other churches got very upset that we were using a piano.
That’s how music came into our church.

The background of this school started as a Mennonite Brethren school.
There was a revival among the EMC churches and what happened was they
became stronger and stronger in the school and as they became stronger, the
Mennonite Brethren moved out.
They just sort of moved out and what happened then was that it was basically
almost completely former Kleine Gemeinde EMC students and staff that were
there. The core of this school was that, so music wasn’t very high: it was very
low. You get the background of that school, but priority for music was very low.
There was a little bit, but to really get to train people and so on that didn’t happen
until I came along and did this. I said we need to train people so that they would
be able to help churches and so on. I made a whole list of what we needed to do
and that was the basis and the philosophy under which the music program was
started.

I started the music program that way and set up the courses I felt we
needed to do that. We had private practical studies in voice, piano, and strings.
We didn’t have professors on staff and I was the only one actually on staff
teaching voice when we came. I got private teachers in the area all the way up to
Winnipeg and I would send students to these various teachers.

Troy: Was that outside of the school day?

Henry: Yeah, outside of the school day, except I had a sister-in-law who was a student at
one point and she was a pianist, so I had her teach piano in school, but much of
this was outside of the school hours. At any rate I did that and I kept the
elementary music theory that everybody in school had to take it anyway. I went
on and did harmony, composition, and music history. I taught hymnology and
then during the second year I changed the A Cappella Choir into the Chorale. I
changed to that and the students had to audition. I taught choral conducting and
general conducting. This is an overview of the courses that I set up; basically the
standard courses of music.

Troy: Is there particular conducting method or text that you used?

Henry: Here’s one.

Troy: The Gehrkens?

Henry: Yeah, I studied conducting under various people.

Troy: Essentials in Conducting.

Henry: Yeah, and Goshen, and in University of Minnesota I studied under Robert Shaw
as well.

Troy: You did study under him!

Henry: Yeah,

Troy: When was that?

Henry: At the University of Minnesota. It was summer school: I will never forget that! I
studied music interpretation. We went through the music interpretation of
Handel’s Messiah. I first got to know Robert Shaw when I was at Goshen
College. I was on a committee there and suggested that we get Robert Shaw in
for a concert. At any rate, I wrote an article on it about Robert Shaw and first got
to know him in Minneapolis at the University of Minnesota where I studied with
him. I experienced Robert Shaw and his work and I also sang under him. When
we got Robert Shaw to Indiana, I wrote an article in the college paper about Shaw
and the others said, “That’s foolish: don’t believe that.”
Robert Shaw came with his chorale and small orchestra to the auditorium that seated about 5,000 people. He told us:

Handel’s Messiah or any music has to have its high points and it has to keep working to a climax. This is how you work to a climax, you come to a climax, it must not climax in between. It must have high points, in between keep going, and then it has to come to a final climax. It’s not one song and another song and another song, it’s one flowing composition from the first note on until the intermission; one flow.

We were ready to learn from him. It happened just like he said: the first climax, then the second one started on the next higher step, and finally when the Amen was finished you should have heard that audience! They applauded for twenty minutes.

Troy: Wow, that’s amazing.

Henry: It absolutely blew you away! I had the experience of singing under men like this; so I learned conducting under a man like that. I try to give that to the students here in my studies. Conducting is very, very important and is much more than just beating time. That is what I worked on.

Troy: What role did the text play in determining where the climax was?

Henry: That is a problem and why you analyze the choral music to determine if it is good choral music or isn’t. So much of the music goes bump, bump, bump, all along. There is no climax anywhere. Some of these classical pieces have a lot of intelligence that goes beyond just writing melodies. I don’t believe that anybody can write music because it’s way beyond that. It’s just like not everybody’s a
poet. You can’t just put words together and put a little music to it. That’s what I see is happening and it is demolishing music. The quality is going downhill and I’m very sorry to see that happening. When I go and listen to programs, oftentimes I’m not very impressed.

That basically gives you a quick overview. I was there working in this department for six years until 1965, then I took a sabbatical, and went back to Goshen College. There were some things I wanted to finish and that is when I went into English and psychology. I added those degrees, administration, and also my education certificate. I didn’t study education before, so I did my education certificate for public school teaching as well, and when I was there I had several offers. They wanted me to come back, but I had an offer to teach at the University of Goshen College where they offered me a professorship in the English department and I could also finish my Ph.D. at the University of Denver. In the meantime I had two calls from Winkler, Manitoba. Winkler needed combined orchestra and choir director in the school there in the high school. Winkler talked to the Department of Education and they suggested me. They wrote me and invited me to come. The day I was offered the professorship at Goshen the phone rang and it was the Western School Division from Morden that called. They said, “We are looking for a music teacher, choir director, and an English teacher. We talked to the Department of Education and they said we should call you and not write.” That was the phone call on the same day and I had to choose between this, that, and a few other schools in the U.S.
I chose Morden because they offered a better deal and when I arrived in Morden, Winkler called and said, “We understand you are in Morden, but would you come and direct the orchestra?” I did choir and English in Morden and orchestra in Winkler. The next year when they opened the new school I moved over into Winkler and taught the choirs and the orchestra there. I was at Winkler for four years directing the orchestra and choir. I had a lot of stuff like that.

I went to University of Manitoba to finish a Master’s in Music and I studied all the instruments of the orchestra because I thought that was important so that I would better understand the orchestra. While I was doing that I was doing community choirs and a lot of things like that in the area. That’s when I was asked to come to Blumenort to speak to the church there and how music and theology connected. That’s sort of a background of this.

Troy: That’s all good stuff. So when you got the job (at Winkler) you also taught at Morden for a year?

Henry: Yeah.

Troy: Then you went to Winkler?

Henry: Yeah, I already did the orchestra there.

Troy: You did the orchestra and they were also looking for a choir teacher?

Henry: That orchestra had been started by Emmanuel Horch. I don’t know if you’ve heard about the Horchs? They were tremendous music people.

Troy: I’ve heard about Ben.

Henry: Emmanuel is his is brother. Mel Horch was the principal in the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra. As a matter of fact, I studied violin with Mel Horch while I
was teaching here. I studied violin with him and I was the first one ever to have a choir perform Handel’s *Messiah* in Steinbach. I used my church choir and I used the school choruses. That’s the first time I introduced the organ into the churches. We rented an organ, put it in, and the church decided to keep it.

In 1965 when I was studying violin with Mel Horch, I did Handel’s *Messiah* again at the community level. I had my church choir there with the community choir and we had a great big choir; about 150. The Mennonite Symphony Orchestra had collapsed, so Mel asked me to resurrect the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra to accompany the performance of Handel’s *Messiah*. He got the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra together for the last time and we did Handel’s *Messiah* to a full house.

Troy: Where did you hold the performance?

Henry: In Steinbach in the Regional gymnasium.

Troy: In the high school?

Henry: Yeah, in the high school gym. That was the only time ever that Handel’s *Messiah* or anything like that was done by local people here. Henry Engbrecht came here later and directed a choir to do that, but that was not from local people, but with musicians from Winnipeg and other places. This choir was strictly local. That was different and it was important.

Troy: Sure.

Henry: The people were very skeptical. I tried to get the local churches involved and they said, “Well if you can get Ben Horch to direct it and Victor Martens or Peter Koslowsky to do solos, then we would be interested in having our choirs join
you.” The choir members came anyway: it was very interesting how that happened. There’s a lot of pride in some of the groups: that spirit was very much there.

Troy: Kind of the haves and the have-nots?

Henry: Oh yes. The group that came in the 1870s from Ukraine to immigrate here were the low-bodies. The ones that came in the 1920s were the high guys. I noticed you’re going to work with Mennonite Collegiate Institute as well.

Troy: Correct.

Henry: The Mennonite Collegiate Institute was started by a great uncle of mine. It was not started by the people that came in the 1920s, but they take the credit that they have done it: it’s their school. There’s always been this type of thing: it’s their school and it’s not true.

Troy: The people from the 1920s, are those the ones called the Rußländer?

Henry: Yeah, exactly. It’s very interesting, they were that way out in Ukraine already because the mother colony, known as the Chortitzer Colony, became very wealthy and very uppity. The colonies grew. More and more of their children didn’t have land and so on, and so they started other colonies, but they looked down on their children over there that had moved out like the Bergthal Colony. The other colonies out there felt like they were better than others and that carried on here as well.

There were some reasons because some of these colonies didn’t see education as a good thing, so there was that type of thing. There was even a rift between the East and the West. My great-grandfather appointed the bishop over
there because he couldn’t run everything. That bishop deceived him because he was for higher education, but my great-grandfather was not.

Troy: The one that was over at MCI?

Henry: Yeah, he helped start the MCI.

Troy: Okay.

Henry: He and a number of my uncles went and graduated from MCI. There was already a rift even within one group, so it’s a very complex thing.

Troy: Yeah, it seems no matter how much I read about it I still can’t keep it straight because of how it goes back and forth.

Henry: What is your background if I may ask?

Troy: My background was General Conference. That church closed a couple of years ago and so one side of my dad’s family was General Conference the other side was EMB. After the General Conference in the area closed, my family started going to the EMB.

Henry: Okay, and the EMB in Steinbach came out of Kleine Gemeinde. They didn’t like the narrowness, so they came out. That was the first EMB here. Many of the EMB came from the Kleine Gemeinde and the Bergthaler which were the first groups that came. So just a very private question, you spell it T-o-a-v-s?

Troy: Correct.

Henry: Was that ever a different spelling?

Troy: Yes, it used to be T-o-e-w-s.

Henry: That’s what I told my wife. I said, “No I don’t believe it.” She also comes from the Toews.
Troy: Okay.

Henry: She also has that in her blood.

Troy: Yeah, my great grandfather changed it.

Henry: Various people have changed their spellings.

Troy: Mostly it was to keep the mail straight.

Henry: Yeah.

Troy: There were so many in one area.

Henry: Oh, exactly. This is what figured, I figured you must have a background like this because why would you be interested in this if you weren’t Ukrainian coming in here.

Troy: It’s something my advisor is interested in and she’s not from a Mennonite background, but from Pennsylvania. It’s research that’s close to her home, so it’s something she suggested and I decided to take it up.

Henry: Absolutely. The different levels like this are in progression and so on. It is Mr. Reimer who started Kleine Gemeinde. He was totally against instrumental music and believed it was a sin. I grew up totally different. I grew up in Randolph and from Bergthal background. I was very, very different. There is no relationship in the area of the music. The churches didn’t have music with instruments. They didn’t sing harmony and all that. You couldn’t have radios or anything in your homes with the Kleine Gemeinde.

Troy: Could you talk a little bit about the rationale behind that?
Henry: Reimer taught that instruments were a sin and they were worldly. That was the rationale. Instruments were the world, that was a sin, and there’s nothing there beyond that. That is strictly its’ basis.

Troy: He taught that those things needed to be separate?

Henry: Yeah, that was it. Radio was wrong and I know we struggled with television in the EMC here in town during the early 1950s. Some of the ministers would go to the homes. My younger brother lived in Winnipeg and he had a television. Some of the ministers would come tell them they should not have televisions. They weren’t members, but the ministers would tell them, “As a Christian you can’t have a television.” That was in the 1950s or the early ’60s. There are lots of things in life that could twist you around. I watch very little television because there isn’t much there that’s worth watching: it’s pornography.

It is just like there’s a lot of music that I don’t touch because it doesn’t touch me. I studied the psychology and did quite a bit of study in abnormal psychology as well as the whole psychology of music. I did my case study at PT General Hospital since I was in Chicago. There were 5000 patients there and that’s where I did my case work in abnormal psychology. I studied how music affects the psychic, I lost the research. During the early 1960’s the University of Chicago did research on the psychology of music. In this specific research, they put two students, a male and female who were strangers to one another, in a room with no windows and a couch. They piped music into the room and video recorded the couple. At first they piped in classical music and the couple was sitting at either end of the couch, listening to the music. They changed the music
to rock and slowly turned up the volume. The couple moved closer and closer together and all of the sudden, they started necking: these were total strangers!

The music was changed back to classical and they stopped necking.

Troy: That was at the University of Chicago?

Henry: Yeah, the University of Chicago. I had all the research and shared it with my students when I was teaching here about the psychology of music. I’ve lost it with all the moving.

My work as an administrator has taken me too many places; teaching here and at the University of Prince Edward Island in Edmonton for some years. All of that has moved me around; I’ve lost some of this stuff. At any rate, I tried this when I taught the choir over at Winkler. I had a number of choirs there and one of the teachers desperately wanted to lead a choir. He wasn’t a musician really, but he thought he was. I told him he could have the grades 9 and 10 chorale. He led that choir, but that was a fairly large choir. It was about a month and a half later he came into the staff room and says, “If I have to teach that choir any longer I’m quitting, I’m retiring, resigning from teaching, or I’m leaving the school!”

I said, “What are you talking about?”

He said, “You should just see those students, they’re just horrible!”

I’ve never had discipline problems in choir or music; never. The orchestra met Tuesday evenings and for the four full years I didn’t have one problem. I said, “There’s something wrong here.” I went to the area where they were rehearsing and the choir was sitting on the risers in chairs. They were not in a good shape, so I thought I’m going to try this music thing on them and see what
happens. I had a tape recording, played some rock music, turned the volume up a little higher, and those bleachers almost crashed! Then I turned it down to normal volume and as I turned it down (the behaviors) got less and less. They sat and listened. It’s amazing! I’m sure you’ve read about what happened in Abbotsford where the church floor crashed.

Troy: I haven’t heard about this. What happened?

Henry: About a month ago one of the Mennonite Brethren churches had a band in the evening doing a concert. It got so wild the whole floor of the church crashed to the basement!

Troy: Wow. Was everybody okay?

Henry: Oh no! Nobody was killed, but a number of people were injured, and they are afraid they’re now going to get lawsuits. It was a well-built church, but this had nothing to do with the strength of the church. The band even tried to quiet them down and told them they shouldn’t jump so hard. They just jumped and jumped and jumped until the whole thing just kaboom! It was a big church and it just crashed down to the basement!

Troy: Wow!

Henry: If people say music has no effect on them, they are wrong. That’s what I try to teach in school: music is an emotional thing and it affects you very much. That’s one of the philosophies I try and bring across: music is so vital in life. If you would take music away you would have a very miserable and dull life.

That was my reason for being in the music there, but something happened. The music program went very well. Something happened when I left and there
were several reasons why I didn’t come back to the college here. I should go back a little bit. I moved from that little closet under the stairs. The school had a fairly large workshop and I persuaded the administration so that I could renovate that into the music department. That’s what I did in the summer. I renovated the whole workshop into the music department with practice rooms, a choral room, and so on. That was the music department until I left in 1965.

Troy: Okay.

Henry: There was a new administration that came during the year I was gone. They changed the three year program we had developed into a two-year Bible program and reversed what we had done. That resulted in students going right out the door.

Troy: They did a major change?

Henry: They did a major thing that was detrimental to the school. Winnipeg Bible College was a small school until then, and people chose it because Winnipeg Bible College got better and SBC went down in their academic thinking. People just went over there instead and they went to Caronport. They went to schools like that and didn’t come here. As a result, when I was asked to come back I said, “No. I do not agree with the major change you’ve made. We worked hard to set up those programs. We worked hard to keep going and moving. As a matter of fact, I just recommended to one of the former professors who was over in Elkhart there, that SBC go under accreditation with Brandon University because our programs were recognized all over in universities in the United States. I think it’s time we do this. We’re being recognized all over. I’ve been recognized for my
work at the University of Minnesota, Goshen College, and at other universities. I also did something at the University of North Dakota. We’re being recognized, so we should get accreditation.”

This is the problem with Manitoba and Saskatchewan because the government keeps everything under control. The government will not allow private schools like that to offer credit with degrees that they recognize. It has to be through the provincial universities and that is why Canadian Bible College moved from Regina to Calgary; because all their degrees had to be offered through University of Saskatoon or the University of Saskatchewan. We’ve suffered the same thing here right to this day. I suggested we get together with the University of Brandon, but instead of moving that way, the school moved in another direction. Okay, but I’m not coming back because that’s not where I’m at. I’ll not touch it. So that’s basically one of the reasons I didn’t come back as I didn’t agree with the philosophy.

They hired Bill Derksen a little later. I think it was about two years later after I left. He was my first music student; the first graduate from the very first group. He didn’t want to go into music originally. That’s quite an interesting story. He’s a very talented man who plays violin. I didn’t know his background, but he took voice from me. I asked him one day what he was studying and he indicated Christian Education. I encouraged him to study music because he was a natural musician. I told him I would get him a violin teacher since he already played the fiddle. He did decide to go.

565
I didn’t know what bothered him about playing music until a year ago. They were celebrating the Derksen family over at Providence and he gave his testimony there. He didn’t know I was in the audience. He said that he had played in a worldly band when they lived in Saskatchewan. They moved (from Saskatchewan), he became a Christian, and he decided to never touched music again because it was of the world. He said, “Until I came to Bible school and then Mr. Hiebert, the teacher there, put me back into music. I couldn’t get him off my back, so I went back into music.” That was funny. Later on he went up to the front and he found out I was there. “You were here!” he said, “Oh, I’m sorry, forgive me forgive me.” I just laughed.

I didn’t realize that, but now I understood my dad. He had started with barn dances and those barn dances were very sinful: the sex and the drinking was so awful that he wanted nothing to do with barn dances again or with music that he associated with the dances. That’s the background of a lot of the music that indirectly relates to some of this over here where people have said: “No, I’ll have nothing to do with music,”; “I won’t have anything to do with music,”; “Music is the worst area to be in,”; or “Don’t take music.” Some people believe if you take music, you are lowly. I even felt this at Goshen College. If you were in the music department, you didn’t quite measure up academically. I measured up much more when I worked in psychology and English.

This is not really part of the real issues that count in life. I found this all along in my music: my professor and voice teacher told me that. He was a very good voice teacher and he was not a Mennonite. He said, “Ya know Henry,
you’re a musician and you’re choosing a field where you’ll always be looked down upon.” He said I will be in church or other places and people will say, “Oh, he’s just a music man, he doesn’t really know much.” He explained that this is how others will look down on you. That’s exactly how it worked. Others didn’t think I knew much; just a choir director or something like that. He isn’t really much. It’s sad, but that’s how you are perceived if you’re a music major; nothing. Now that you have asked the questions, I think that has played a part in a lot of things.

Troy: This is great. When you were teaching at the Bible college, were you teaching high school at the same time?

Henry: Oh yes, high school and college were together.

Troy: They were together.

Henry: There was one board, under one administration with the college and the high school. We were only the upper high school grades at that time. The lower grades came in quite a bit later. At that time, it was only grades 10, 11, and 12. A lot of the high school was there for the purpose that people could go on to higher education. Many of them wanted to go on to be school teachers.

Troy: When you had the music classes, (did) the college students and the high school students have separate classes?

Henry: What happened was the high school students could take the course if they wanted to as an elective so it was really for the college. They could only take it as an elective, but I had students taking hymnology, harmony, and music history as electives in the high school department. That’s how they took them. More and
more of them were doing this, but that was about the time I left. It would have continued, but I left, and then they didn’t have a music teacher at all. They went to my brother-in-law, who was a choir director of a church and they asked if he would come and direct the choirs. That’s all they had because music was gone. I think it was two years later when Bill Derksen came and he basically did the choirs and that type of thing. He taught violin and I think they hired a voice teacher from outside. They put her in an adjunct type of position, but not really part of the faculty. Bill was there in 1971 and he came to Dauphin and wanted to come and teach music in the Dauphin Regional School. I was in administration there. We had a very fine orchestra there and Bill wanted to come to Dauphin and do that. There wasn’t enough of a program in music in the school for that, so he went to Niverville I think and was there a little bit. Next he went to Providence in Winnipeg and Providence and later on became the chairman of the department.

Troy: He was the chair of the music department at Providence?

Henry: Yeah, he became the chairman after Thiessen left. Thiessen was chairman first.

Troy: That’s chairman of the music department?

Henry: Yeah, when Thiessen resigned, then he became the Chairman of Providence. Thiessen came here to teach at SBC. Then they hired Lee Roy Bartel and he and Rudy Schellenberg then came up in the music department.

I was asked to come back to the school. I was assistant superintendent of the Frontier School Division with an office in Dauphin looking after 10 communities up north. I was completely in administration by that time and they begged me to come and get the school back on the ground because it was almost
dead. Two of our children were attending there and it was almost finished. I came as a public relations man for four years and to get the school back on the ground again.

Troy: What years were those?

Henry: That was 1979 to 1983. The music department at that time was pathetic. There was a choir there. Rudy Schellenberg was a good guy. My kids were in the choirs too. I took these choirs on tours, but they never revived the concentrated program that we had set up that went academically forward, and I don’t think to this day it’s there. They have all kinds of this and that, worship art and so on, but the basics aren’t there anymore.

Troy: What would you consider the basics?

Henry: I think you have to have a good church history and music history. I think that’s so important. I am a classical person and I feel the traditional classic music programs give you the solid foundation to move in many areas. You need a solid footing in theory and then in the various areas you need a solid understanding of what’s going on. You need to know the philosophy of music. You need to study the people that have been involved, not just talk about and name composers. You have to study these people and that’s out the window. You have to know what made Schubert do what he did. You have to know the fundamentals and know what the fundamentals are in some of the classics. You need to know where rhythm and atonality come from. These are the things you need to know. That’s what I taught, what I learned, and studied in the universities. I don’t think that’s there now anymore. The fundamentals aren’t there.
People think anybody can write music. No, I took music composition too. I studied music composition, and we were given very specific things we had be aware of. There were very specific orders of harmony and so on. They had to be included in the pieces being written. You wouldn’t just set down and write a piddle, piddle, piddle.

Henry: I have a niece who was on the *Canadian Idol* this week. She’s known almost worldwide. A fellow in New York caught her on YouTube, told her he would fly her to New York because he wanted to interview her. She’s a good musician: she diddled along what everybody diddled along. I could do that with guitar too and sing. She has no voice training. She’s a vocalist, but 99.99 percent of the vocalists have no voice training. They’re not vocalists: they shout and scream, but that’s not music. Anybody can scream and shout, that’s not trained musicianship. I was a vocal soloist. That was my profession and I went into the choral vocal area. I don’t want to say braggingly, but I was compared to the top tenor vocalists in the world. I did a lot of concerts and that’s where they placed me. My voice teacher badly wanted me to be a professional vocalist, but I didn’t do it. He was so angry with me: he wanted to have his life through me. He cut all communications off with me until he died. He wouldn’t even answer my letters, nothing. He was so angry that I didn’t become a professional vocalist because he was going to live a life through me and I refused to do it. I went another direction. I had heart surgery in 2004 and they wrecked my vocal cords, so I can’t sing like I used to do, but I had three and a half octaves range in my voice. So I did a lot of vocal singing.
Troy: Okay.

Henry: That’s where I come from; the classical set. I also from the other set: I wanted to be a cowboy. I wrote my own songs before I had any trained music. I sat on my horse and I produced my cowboy songs. I played guitar, banjo, and the mouth organ. I played of all those instruments and every instrument of the orchestra. It’s not that I’m just a narrow sweat like this, I can understand those things.

Troy: That’s fascinating. You can’t get a lot of those things through school training. It’s things like that you have to have the natural drive to take up.

Henry: I don’t know if I’ve helped you with anything in your doctorate on this.

Troy: I think your comments on repertoire, what’s the foundation, and the effect of music is all good information. You talked a little bit about the background, like the religious and the ethnic. Is there anything more you want to say about the religious and ethnic side of things?

Henry: Music-wise you mean?

Troy: Right.

Henry: I would say that the music in this area in the east on this side of the river was very much looked down upon with the exception of the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren. When they came, then it changed. I went to school in Randolph where there were grades 1 through 8 with grades 9 and 10 done through correspondence. We had Neil Unruh as our teacher: he was a violinist and an MB man. He played with the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra and I loved to hear him play. As a matter of fact, I really appreciated him very much. The MB did have music. The General Conference definitely had music. That could have impacted
this other group too, but they did have music. The Bergthaler had music everywhere except in the church. Otherwise it was everywhere, but it wasn’t often the right music.

Troy: Like the guitar playing, banjo playing, and stuff like that?

Henry: Oh yeah, radios and all that weren’t a problem. That was no problem.

Troy: Okay.

Henry: The real classical music came with the General Conference and the MB. That’s where the classical music came. The violin that my dad played wasn’t classical. He played hymns very well, but it wasn’t that he played the classical music; he didn’t know the classical music. That was what I brought into the school. I don’t think Mr. Dugard brought that in because he was the voice teacher and he directed the choir. They hired him my second year of Bible college.

Troy: How do you spell that?

Henry: Dugard?

Henry: D-u-g-a-r-d. George Dugard, he did a fantastic job of choir and so on. I would say this is where I started in the classical field. He brought in the area of trained voices. There were a number of the young people and people in the community who studied voice from the Bible college. We had a very, very good choir and sang very, very well. He was very strict in how we sang: he was very classical and very strict. Robert Shaw was his idol too.

I know we did a program at one time on CBC at night and wow the results! We traveled to communities all over in Altona and Winkler and the people were just absolutely blown away. The same thing happened in Winnipeg:
the concerts were fantastic. He had a philosophy and said, “You know, you make the
difficult things sound simple and you make the simple things sound difficult.” That’s what we did. We sang a hymn that had to sound top, top, top, and we had to compete with *Messiah*. If we sang a choral work, that had to be sung so that people were just, “oo”.

I remember when we did concerts, people come and say, “What we appreciate is you sang such simple songs,” when we did a complicated choral work. A lot of these people said they would never forget that.

He left that on me and that’s what I tried to implant into my students too. You don’t do things so that people will think it is so hard, so I could never sing that. You do it so well that people don’t know it’s difficult. I didn’t say anything to my church choirs, then I said when you do a hymn you sing it in such a way that this sounds like a classical piece. That was the philosophy he put into us.

Troy: Why do you think he had that philosophy?

Henry: His idea would be that just because this isn’t a big oratorio doesn’t mean that it isn’t a tremendous piece of music. That’s what he did: just because this is an oratorio doesn’t mean that this only for the top notch people to listen to. This is for everyone to digest. That’s what he did and he did a wonderful job of that. Basically that philosophy is what I also tried to teach over and over to students; the philosophy. I still have former students of mine that graduated with a master’s degree with a major leading singing in churches and so on. I hear choirs often and I can tell if the director was one of my students because I see how he’s directing.
Time is so important that you don’t create your own time and mess it up. This is what this writer wanted and you do what that writer wanted. That’s how you present it because you’re interpreting his composer. Those are the philosophies I believe in and I dealt very hard on philosophies.

Troy: You talked a little bit about tours. Do you want to say anything about these? Did the high school and college at Steinbach do much touring with their ensembles?

Henry: Yeah, I started that. Every year after the college closed we would go for a couple weeks on tour. Thiessen Bus Lines rented us buses. I have a whole stack of books if you want to see some pictures. I set up a tour every year and we would go to Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Montana, North Dakota, and then come back. We’d do a lot of touring like that. Because I was the first tenor of a male quartet for a number of years, we toured. We toured quite a bit every summer. Sometimes we went to Indiana, Illinois, and all over. I knew this was important.

Let me show you some pictures. This is 1960; the first graduation. This book is not very good. There is very little music in here: music was not important. A lot of the other groups like the musical, and harmonica quartet were considered important. Let’s look at a picture here of the choir someplace. I thought it was here. There’s a picture of the choir singing, but I cannot find it.

Troy: Is it okay if I take a picture of you showing me?

Henry: Sure. I was going to get the picture of the A Cappella Choir, but I cannot find it.

Troy: In what year is this?

Henry: There’s the article I wrote; *Elements of Good Sacred Music*.

Troy: Oh neat!
Henry: I have a number of articles and philosophies and always keep them in here. That’s strange that I can’t find that. There’s the choir during a Christmas program. That’s in one of the churches. Here we are: that’s the A Cappella Choir.

Troy: I would like to get a picture of you just the way you are showing me these pictures.

Henry: Sure, that’s the A Cappella Choir. I’m not sure if there was a tour the first year. Then the bus tours started and at that time we had the music major. You can see students now have majors that they graduate with. Here is the music committee and there’s Bill Derksen with his violin. Here we are getting to the music department. Here’s the Christmas program again. There should be more pictures of the choir. The yearbook committee and those people weren’t that thrilled because I had so many music groups. Here is the choir again and my philosophy of music.

Troy: Would it be okay if I took a picture of that?

Henry: Go ahead. If you want to take a picture of that you go right ahead.

Troy: Let me see if I can zoom in on this a little bit. There we go. Okay thank you.

Henry: There’s the choir; the SBC Chorale. That’s in 1961. There should be pictures of tours from 1962. We didn’t always have pictures of the tours, but here is one of the SBC Chorale tour.

Troy: The yearbook was called The Star?

Henry: Yeah, and that would be the Chorale tour there.

Troy: Okay.
Henry: Do you see the bus down below with the choir there?

Troy: Okay.

Henry: There’s quite an interesting story on that tour.

Troy: In what year was this?

Henry: This is in 1962. We had a long tour all the way up to northern Alberta, then to Montana, and North Dakota. We had finally finished our concert in North Dakota and were on our way home. It was late: I think we left around 11:00 pm. We got to the border in Emerson and we needed to get back quickly because the next morning there was something going in the school where I had to be. I got up and I told the students, “If you bought anything, be sure you have your bills ready so that we can move fast.” We had occasional problems with occasional jokesters: this tour we had a problem.

There were several guys that were always late. We were up in Swan River area and we had to be in northern Saskatchewan the next evening for a concert. And I said to the guys, “You know, we’re leaving at 10:00. That’s the latest we’re leaving here because we have to be there by 7:00 for the program. We waited: ten o’clock and these guys didn’t show up. I finally told the bus driver, “Go.” We had to drive and the students were angry at me. They thought it was terrible that I would do a thing like this to them.

When we arrived at the church the boys were standing on the stairs there because they had hitchhiked: they got there before we did. What happened was not their fault because the people where they stayed overnight just didn’t get
moving. The boys were frustrated and the students always had a little feeling against me.

When we came to the border from North Dakota on that tour, these two guys figured they’d get me. As we drove up they rushed to the door before me. Border Patrol asked, “Any liquor?”

The guys said, “We’re loaded!” Can you imagine? You don’t fool with border guards. They knew it was a stunt and these guys were trying to play it. They said, “Pull over there.” I had 40 students and we had been gone for a couple of weeks. You can imagine the luggage we had. We had to empty our bus. Every luggage had to be taken across, emptied, and checked; everybody’s luggage. We were there ’til two in the morning.

Troy: What time did you get there?

Henry: 11:00.

Troy: 11:00 in the evening.

Henry: We were there until two in the morning before they would let us leave for Steinbach. The students were so furious at those two guys. They thought they got even with me, but they didn’t. The other students could have hung them they were so angry. We had fun touring. The kids enjoyed the tour very much.

Troy: What did you do for a music library?

Henry: We didn’t have much with no money, so we had to grovel. I was responsible to get the music.
Here is another picture of the Chorale and the music committee. On the 1961-1962 tour, I conducted “Oh, There’s a Story,” which was written by one of the students.

This Chorale consisted of 36 singers, each auditioned from the institute’s body under the direction of Mr. Henry Hiebert. They were accompanied by Patricia Friesen, who was a very wonderful and intense student. Later on they had her teach piano.

A considerable amount of time went into preparation for the Chorale. It was our desire to be used as a channel to sing His salvation come forth. We trusted that our program would also prove a challenge to some of the listeners to also enroll in the Bible School.

Here are some of the places that we toured. It is only a few of them, but you can see how many places we toured. We went via bus to Portage La Prairie, Brandon, Flin Flon, Swan River, Mafeking, Benito, Canora, Kamsack, Sturgis, Virden, MacGregor, and so on. This is just into Manitoba basically, but we went way beyond that, so this doesn’t give the full picture.

In 1964 we did the same thing again. There’s the Chorale again. Then I begin to see I’m losing hair. Here is a picture of my final year. That’s the last SBC Chorale that I directed.

Troy: That was 1965?

Henry: 1965, yeah that was the end. This is a picture of the last Messiah I did there. I did Handel’s Messiah when I was in Dauphin. I was there as a school administrator: I wasn’t teaching music, but I did direct a church choir and I started
a girls choir in school. I did Handel’s Messiah several times with community.
The last time I directed something like that was way back in the late 1970s. At any rate, that gives you a little bit of an idea what SBC is about.

Troy: Okay, Dr. Hiebert.

Henry: You can’t call me Dr. Hiebert because I changed into school administration and my doctorate was in the school administration and the Charter of Rights. I studied law courses at University of Manitoba in 1982 when the charter came in. The professor that taught it was a lawyer and said that it’s going to change the country beyond recognition. He said it’s the worst thing that ever happened to Canada. It’s the worst thing that ever happened because what’s happened is that the power has changed from government to the courts. The judges run this country now.

So I went I did my studies, but I was called to Edmonton for school administration and work there. I left Manitoba and transferred to the University of Alberta. They advised me to transfer my doctorate studies there, so I transferred there, and I continued there. I was so tied up with the work I was doing there, I didn’t have time to do my doctoral. It is very difficult to be in a fulltime position working and then finish your doctorate. I found it to be just impossible, so I put it on hold. I took my first early retirement in 1995, came back to Manitoba, and went to University of Manitoba. I picked it up again to finish it. I asked the department if my doctorate study topic had been completed by anyone else. I was informed that Jonathan Black-Branch had taken my topic and written it. They gave me a copy of it and told me there were five Ph.Ds. in it.
They encouraged me to upgrade it. Here it is. I went through this carefully, walked into the law library, put my laptop down there, and I went to the desk. I wanted to ask some questions, but I left my computer unattended. The girl at the desk said, “What are you doing? Is that your computer over there?”

I said, “Yes.”

She said, “You should never leave it there!”

I said, “What do you mean?”

She said, “You’re fortunate it isn’t stolen yet! What are you doing?”

I said, “I’m doing this.”

She said, “Oh, so we’ll see you for the next seven years.”

I said, “No you won’t.” I walked out, but I did quite a bit of research, but I got derailed again. I got called to someplace else again out of my retirement: that’s happened four times.

I ran into another issue. I was on a discussion group on the internet about feminism and so on. A woman from Canada was speaking at a tri-state family conference (New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia). One of the women from the discussion group wrote me a message and she said they had a lady from Canada who was to be a speaker. She said many things about family and about how things are going in Canada. I phoned her, Senator Ann Cools. She is black, comes from Central America, a Christian, and other senators called her “the black bitch” because she’s a Christian. Can you imagine what would happen if they called a Muslim a black bitch? They get away with it. I talked to her, was in contact with her, and she urged me to change my topic to the family and the
Charter of Rights in Canada. She and others encouraged me to change my topic and to get it done.

She explained that she could provide one example and believed there were many other cases. She said there was a husband and wife in British Columbia: both engineers with high wages and they had a small child. He got sick and had to go on sick leave. She divorced him and sued for child support. She asked for $3,000 a month for child support in spite of her big salary and his income was $1,000 a month now. His lawyer tried to get a rehearing, but the judge, a woman, threw it out and said, “He’ll find the money; end of story.” Three days later he was hanging from a tree because he had committed suicide. She said that this is just one story. There are many, many more that the media refuses to write. I went through Jon Black-Branch’s doctoral work and he concluded that the Charter of Rights does not protect the white males.

Troy: Is this work here Jonathan Black-Branch or yours?

Henry: This is Jonathan Black-Branch and that’s what he concluded. It does not protect the Christian of any gender or color.

Troy: In Canada?

Henry: In Canada. The Charter does not protect them. I believe if the doctoral committee had not agreed with him, they would not have passed it. They’re not going to pass a dissertation they don’t agree with in its conclusion.

Troy: Did it pass?

Henry: Yeah of course, he has his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. I didn’t know it until I got started on this very thoroughly. I came up with another thing in my
study in law, which I did not know. There’s the clause (reparation clause) in the law in Canada. I don’t know if the U.S. has it or not. Are you American?

Troy: Yes.

Henry: I don’t know if it is in the American laws. The clause goes this way: if one group has been in power then that law accuses that group of overriding other people. In other words Christians have been in power here so long, they have abused so many people it’s time to repay (reparation clause).

Troy: Is it like Stephen Harper’s apology? Is it anything like that?

Henry: Yeah, it’s terrible. I was at Frontier School Division where it is Indians. That’s what I worked with: I gave up. First of all, the billions that are poured into that, and the lives they have to suffer. I looked after ten communities there up north and the University of Manitoba was offering courses to Indians there. Any rate, some of my white teachers wanted to take courses there, but couldn’t. We appealed that. Do you know what the government said? They turned us down and said we could not take courses there because of the reparation clause. That’s what we’re facing: that’s what the Charter’s all about. I know it’s not related to music, but that’s what the Charter’s all about. You can’t call me doctor because I didn’t finish my research yet.

Troy: I do think there is a concern for Christian education there.

Henry: Sure, absolutely there is.

Henry: I’ll give you just a bit of background here on this school. I came back to Steinbach in 1995 because I had family related reasons. When I returned there were people who were writing the history of SBC for the 50th anniversary. They
really didn’t know much about SBC, so I got phoned and they said, “We understand you once directed a choir here.” They had been teachers and staff in the school for quite a while already. I told them all they needed to do was look at the yearbooks and look at the board minutes. They went to the minutes and it said I had come to teach public speaking. The yearbooks say all the rest; you’ve seen the yearbooks.

Troy: So in *The Star*—it has it right in the yearbooks.

Henry: Yeah, but the minutes of the board were wrong. At any rate, these guys on staff said, “We understand you once directed a choir here. What’s your relationship with the school?” That tells me there are highly educated people here who don’t think. They just don’t think!

In the community I’m known as the music man, but not the school. They don’t really acknowledge me at music. I don’t know why not, but the people from the EMB churches, the MB churches, all these churches, they see me in music.

Troy: The churches do, but the school doesn’t?

Henry: Basically these are the people that are here when I was here in the 1960s. These people my age and a little younger were students at that time. They said, “Oh Henry Hiebert the music man is back.” That’s how I was treated. They would come to me over and over to complain about the music in church because it’s all hip scop hop scop type of stuff: choral has gone out the window and their choirs are gone. All of this is gone. The organs are gone. The pianos are gone. The MB church literally moved them out. Everything is done.
Troy: Do they have more bands?

Henry: It’s all guitar and drums: boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. They talked to me. I said, “Look, I know every instrument that’s been made by man and played. I know them all. I’m not a narrow crate like that.” I said, “You are the narrow crate, because I was a guitar guy on horse.” Most people don’t acknowledge that, except the people in Steinbach area that know me from what I’ve done.

The people that came to me over and over from all of the different churches said, “You’re a man of music. Are we wrong in being upset and wanting more than just the banging of the drums in our churches? Is that the end of music? Is that all we should have? Tell us are we too narrow?” That’s what these people do over and over again: they come to me. People from the school would never come and ask me for any advice. Nothing. Yeah, they do their thing.

(There’s) drama, so I started drama too. I was in a drama troupe and I studied drama way back. I was in drama troupe, so I was in drama as well. I don’t want to say this braggingly, but I have a long wide area in my studies.

I was on my way to teach at the University of Prince Edward Island and I met a man. I was teaching administration there and we stopped in a park in Ontario where I met a professor from the University of Toronto. We were chatting and he asked me what I studied. I explained that I started out with a music major, went to an English major, then a psychology major, I studied
administration, and then went into law. He said, “Oh, you are going to be in deep, deep trouble.”

I said, “What are you talking about?”

He said, “You know too much and people are going to hate you. What you should do is stay in one area and never move from it.”

I’ve discovered it’s exactly that type of thing. People will ask, “What do you know about law?” because I studied law. They ask, “What do you know about psychology?” because I have psychology hanging out of my ears. They ask, “What do you know about music? What do you know about English? What do you know about administration? You know nothing: you’re just a musician.” That is how people respond and I’ve had this whether it was in Alberta, Manitoba, or other places. That’s what I’ve run up against. People become jealous that you know too much.

Troy: Thank you for your time. I’ve got to get to the other school.

Henry: Yeah. You want to see Harvey, he is a good friend of mine.

Troy: Thank you so very much.
Troy: Tell me about the tours.

Kristel: I would always take my Chamber Choir, the auditioned choir, on tour and we went to Edmonton my first year. The reason I went there was because I wanted them to sing in the Winspear Centre which is this amazing facility and that was where the finale for the festival was located. I planned everything myself along the way; found different churches or schools to sing at and that sort of thing. I believe my second year we were part of the Mennonite schools organization.

Troy: CAMS?

Kristel: CAMS yes, the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools. We had a big CAMS festival. One year we went to Victoria or Vancouver by Abbotsford there for the Mennonite Educational Institute. We went out there and participated in a huge Sängerfest type of a thing where we did a mass choir and each choir sang separately. I’ve done that with them. We did the Rocky Mountain Festival in Banff which is an awesome music festival. The last year I was there the principal and I planned a trip to New York. That was the biggest trip I’ve ever planned. We drove through the night to Chicago and spent a day there. We actually went...
down to meet Elroy in Champagne. He was doing his master’s and his doctorate there, so we went to his church for Easter. I believe it was a Lutheran church he was working at. Then we drove through to visit my aunt who was studying at the Association Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Illinois. We also toured several Mennonite schools and other places along the way, and then ended up in New York for four or five days. We went there to participate in the Heritage Music Festival. They’re all over the United States and Canada. They put on festivals everywhere, and it’s a competitive festival. That was the first time I had ever done a competition. What I thought was really neat was the competition categories went by the size of your school, so we were in the smallest category because we have such a small school. I think we blew them away when I said we have a grades 7 to 12 school and there are 160 students. They were quite shocked. We have high standards here chorally, so we did really well. We won gold in our category. I didn’t want a take them to their first competitive festival and have them do poorly. I wanted to make sure that they had a good first experience because choral music isn’t about competition at all. It’s about community, learning, and that sort of thing. I’m not big on competitiveness, but this festival was really good. A friend of mine had gone and had a great experience, so we decided to try it out. Those were my big festivals. Those were the big tours. We did one every year with something smaller in between because we always had to fundraise and that sort of stuff.

Troy: Yeah, the life of a music teacher.

Kristel: I would love to do a Europe trip. We’ll see if I can with my high school.
Troy: How about music at chapel services?

Kristel: Most they do praise and worship music with a band, and guitar, and drums, and such at SCHS. I didn’t have a huge hand in that, but one year I had to help with that. They mostly had other people; it’s not my strong point. I grew up with hymns in my church and that’s where I usually like to keep things. I don’t know a lot about praise and worship music in a sense, but I did help out. I couldn’t tell the kids what chords to play on the guitar, but we had people who knew what they were doing within there, so we figured it out. We had the chord changes and stuff and it went from there. Every now and then the choirs would sing at the chapels, but mostly it was the praise and worship band with chapel speakers.

Troy: Do you know where they got the songs from for the chapel services?

Kristel: Most of the kids would hear the big groups. I guess they had CDs or recordings from other people and then we went through is it CCPLI? I think I remember that was the number at the bottom of the screen so we paid a license to use the music.

Troy: Was that for the overhead?

Kristel: There was a list for the overhead. I’m not sure how that all worked because I wasn’t in charge of that, but they made sure that they had the rights to those songs to be able to use them. I think they had a big list and most of the songs that the students wanted to do were stuff that they had heard from another praise and worship group. They found out who wrote it and then would look to see if it was on the copy rights list and if we could do it. We had a big binder of stuff when I got there of accumulated music we had purchased.
Troy: Do you know if there were any Bible camps or anything like that which influence the type of songs?

Kristel: Absolutely. Most of the kids in the praise and worship bands played at camps in the summer. We did some camp type songs for sure and I think even for one song they wrote choral parts. They wanted a choir to sing it. I’m remembering that vaguely, and I’m not sure who did that or how it all worked because I wasn’t part of it, but I thought that was kind of neat. There’s not much SATB stuff, and it’s all by ear. I think we lost the tradition of the four-part singing a bit from the church. Kids can’t harmonize like they used to just be able to do that. We would always stand with your mom or dad and they would sing tenor, bass, soprano, or alto and everybody would sing their four parts. I grew up General Conference and I had a lot of EMCers, so they didn’t have the same hymnbooks that I did growing up. One year I taught them “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow” like the regular doxology that we would sing at meals. I taught it and showed them the four-part music. After they learned it I said, “Now you have to sing other parts. You have to make up harmonies that will work within them.” Once they have the hymn in their head then that’s easier, but that took quite a bit to get them going.

My favorite hymn is 606; we always sing it. We call it the 606; it’s not that number anymore, but it is the doxology for Thanksgiving. I taught that to them front to back and they really loved it because they had never sung it before. There was only two or three in the class that had done that version, so that was really neat. I really enjoyed teaching them different Mennonite versions of songs.

Troy: Do the students ever write any music? Do they compose their own songs ever?
Kristel: I didn’t do a lot of that. I’m not big on composition or arrangements myself. We would rearrange hymns sometimes or raise the tenor line up the octave as a descant, but nothing crazy. I always did a unit on Stomp. They made up their own stuff that way. We did some rhythm exercises and things like that, but not much though.

Troy: Was that in the choir class?

Kristel: Yeah. During the jazz bands we did improvisation. They didn’t have a vocal jazz group at the SCHS. I do that with my public school now. We have a vocal jazz group and we do songs. We listen to a song, figure it out, and we make it work for vocal jazz.

Troy: Do you use instrumental parts and put those in the voice?

Kristel: We put those in the voices and things like that, yeah.

Troy: I was wondering about the changes in music from the hymns to the praise and worship. I’ve heard that they don’t have the part singing readiness that they used to have when they come for class.

Kristel: Yeah, that’s what I think too. We do a lot of four-part singing in the high schools; four-part or more, sometimes up to eight parts. We don’t just take a melody and then say, “Okay, these are the chords, can we make up harmonies?” That doesn’t happen. What I have understood from the past is that singing has been so central in Mennonite history that when my grandparents landed in Canada the first instinct was to get together and sing. They didn’t have any instruments. My grandpa used to tell me that in the old Mennonite church they had the Vorsängers at the front who would lead the songs and then they would all join in.
Everybody would just make up the four parts; it was never written out. They just had the words and that was it. There was no songbook with music, notes, or anything. They could harmonize with the hymn, but that tradition is being lost because I don’t think that the harmonies are used as much. There are maybe one or two parts and a descant. I don’t think that we’re experiencing four-part, hymn singing anymore as much as we should.

Troy: In the congregation?

Kristel: Yeah.

Troy: I was wondering if the more aurally and orally centered praise and worship music has brought other skills to the table that the part singing used to bring?

Kristel: I think so. We had this discussion with one of the choral instructors at Providence Bible College. We were chatting one day that we used to never have enough tenors and now it seems like all we have is tenors. We have no basses because all the men sing higher with the pop music and the praise and worship music is all fairly high. We think now it has shifted that the guys sing higher in the tenor range as opposed to the basses because we can’t find enough basses now as opposed to tenors. We think that might have a little bit to do with it.

It is interesting that hymns are set up with verses and the chorus. I think with the praise and worship it’s much more meaningful about you repeat the same text over and there’s more thought on that. I think maybe that might be something people enjoy.

Troy: Like a meditation.
Kristel: Yeah, like more of that, maybe like Taizé. Taizé singing has more repetition like one line or that sort of thing. It might be more meditative in that sort of sense, but I just love a good hymn sing that’s for sure.

Troy: They are very different. Where did the Taizé come from? I think they’re French.

Kristel: I think they’re European or French, but it is in all cultures. I don’t do a lot of that.

Troy: Have you heard anything about the Iona Community and that kind of stuff?

Kristel: I haven’t heard a lot of that. I’ve done a little bit of checking out lately on shape note singing. I bought a shape note book of hymns. I think that’s very similar to the Old Order Mennonite, especially Hutterite. I think they sound very similar. I saw it in the movie Cold Mountain and I was very intrigued, so I bought that book. I looked through it to see what it is all about. I find that it is very interesting.

Troy: The shape notes.

Kristel: Yeah, I think there are many similarities to the Anabaptist traditions in Manitoba especially.

Troy: I think the shape note correlates with the Ziffern practice of number cipher notation.

Kristel: I haven’t looked into that. We had the privilege of going to a Hutterite church a few years ago. They have their books that just have text, no music written down. They do have choirs now. There’s a community here, the Crystal Springs Colony, and they’re in our Hanover School Division. They’re a part of it curriculum-wise and everything; it’s really neat. Their choirs actually are doing very well, and
they’ve westernized their sound for the choral end of things. They’re a little worried that they’re going to lose their traditional Hutterite sound which is very same sound like the shape note singers.

Troy: The nasal?

Kristel: Yeah, it is very untrained, forward, full out, and with joy. I love it. I think it’s really neat, so I hope that they don’t lose that either. That would be a shame. It’s a fine line. You want to have your choir and westernize that sound, and yet this is the tradition you don’t want to lose either. I guess everything expands and changes. If you look back to Mozart and Beethoven, they were probably appalled at the next generation of music.

We all keep going avant-garde and everything’s pushed. I don’t think that it’s like you just go on the colony and go, “Hey, I want to go to church.” We did an exchange at our church; their choir came to sing for one of our services so they invited us. We didn’t sing at their service, but they did their church service in English for us that day with the sermon which was kind of neat. Then we had lunch with them and then we got to sing in their lunch hall for them. We wouldn’t have been allowed to sing in their church service; that’s pretty sacred. They have their Vorsängers up front still. They have no pianos, no instruments there, but they do use pianos and instruments for the choirs. Slowly I guess they are integrating there, but it is still not in the church itself in the sanctuary.

Troy: Could you talk a little bit about music theater?

Kristel: Yeah. I don’t know much about musical theater. I’m more on the choral end of things, but we did musicals. Musicals have been a tradition in town for years. In
the 1960s and 1970s they were already doing them in the local public high school. When I got to SCHS as a student teacher they were doing *My Fair Lady*. They had to change a few things and rearrange some of the text to make it acceptable, but there’s always going to be complaints. They did have a couple of complaints on some of the English word usage, but it went over very well. It was amazing to watch Elroy. He did so well.

During my first or second year of teaching we did *Anne of Green Gables*. If you do popular musicals in this town, they’ll sell out. If they know them really well, people will come just to see the show because they know the show. Most have probably seen it or done it. We also did *The Mikado*, which I love. Gilbert and Sullivan musicals are pretty big in this town; they’ve done lots of that. You always have to change some of the text because some of it can be quite vulgar and a bit racist. We do change some of that stuff just to make sure that it will be acceptable in a Christian school. I think when we did *Mikado* we only changed two or three lines and the rest we left. The community’s accepting of musicals very much. We did *Cinderella* this year at SRSS, the public school, and my first year there we did *Oliver*. We had to make some big changes with that one. There’s abuse, a bit of the hinge towards prostitution, and things like that. There’s some interesting takes on that and the community is pretty good with those sorts of things. I haven’t had complaints in the public system that I know of, but the private school you have to be careful.

Somebody once asked me why I didn’t do any sacred musicals. I don’t know a lot of really good sacred musicals other than like *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ*.
Superstar. Those would just not go over. I think I would have had way more complaints because people would be offended by our take on this verse or that sort of thing, so I’ve stayed away from that and just went for the secular stuff. I didn’t want to deal with the guff.

Troy: The backlash.

Kristel: The backlash, yeah.

Troy: Is there anything more you want to say on that?

Kristel: No, I may have already said too much on that.

Troy: You kind of mentioned this already, but what was the role that they play in the community.

Kristel: For the musicals?

Troy: For any of the performances.

Kristel: I think the community is very supportive. We do peace concerts that are put on by the EastMan Choral Association.

Troy: The what?

Kristel: EastMan Choral Association. EastMan is this region. Each region (EastMan, WestMan, Central) of Manitoba are in the Manitoba Choral Association, so they are the umbrella organization. There is one for this region: we have an Eastman Youth Choir. That’s an auditioned group that happens. They rehearse two weekends and then they do a little tour. Every year they have guest conductors come in and that’s a high school group. They do a peace concert every year. They also do an Easter sunrise service each Easter morning. Free concerts are well taken in this town. If you charge for them that’s a little different. Sometimes that
doesn’t work so well. People like to go and then do a free will offering. Those go over really well. We don’t usually charge for our concerts.

Troy: Has the role that performances have played in the community changed at all over the years?

Kristel: I think there’s been more happening. It used to be very church oriented. The churches all had choirs and that sort of thing. There’s more community groups now, so I think there are more concerts, more music, and more of that.

Troy: Okay, so just more music in general in the community?

Kristel: Yeah, more community involvement I would say and less out of the churches.

Our church used to have a Junior Choir and Senior Choir. We would put on full shows and things like that, but that’s not done as much anymore. The Senior Choir will get together two or three times a year for specific Easter or Christmas concerts, but they don’t run regularly through the year anymore.

Troy: Have choral ensembles changed over the years?

Kristel: I don’t know. I haven’t noticed. I’ve only been teaching for eight years so I don’t know. I think the vocal jazz component has really come up in the last few years.

Troy: That answers that and then also the vocal jazz.

Kristel: Yeah, I think vocal jazz has come up, especially in Manitoba. We’ve had an influx of that in the last few years. We have a Brandon Jazz Festival every year and it’s huge.

Troy: What is by definition vocal jazz?
Kristel: That’s a good question. It depends on who you talk to. For high school and junior high purposes in Manitoba, it’s a smaller ensemble. They use a microphone. Hopefully, they’ll do some improvisation, but lots don’t. They should if they want to do some real jazz. A lot of them sing more pop type of music.

Troy: Are there a lot of sound effects?

Kristel: Yeah, vocal percussion and things like that. They use a combo of things sometimes. I do mostly a cappella, but some combo and then you can get some improvisation in on that.

Troy: How about instrumental ensembles, did you cover that a little bit?

Kristel: I did a little bit, but it’s not my forte. It was my minor in university, so if I have to do it I’ll do it. I like high school better than junior high. I’m not much into teaching the beginner fundamentals, but I’ve done some and there’s a mix of music you can get away with that is not so sacred or secular.

Troy: Did you have a little bit of that when you were at SCHS?

Kristel: I did about two or three years at SCHS.

Troy: Was that before they got another person in?

Kristel: Yeah.

Troy: What types of repertoire did you do?

Kristel: I just did the standard repertoire. You know. I don’t even remember much. You find band arrangements of hymns like “Joy to the World” stuff at Christmas and things like that. I picked things that they already had in their library. It wasn’t actually anything too crazy. I didn’t really have to be too careful I guess; there’s
Troy: How would you describe your philosophy of music education?

Kristel: My philosophy is I would like to make students respect all types of music. My aim is to experiment with different cultures and different styles. Even if it’s not their favorite, I want my students to understand where things come from, to develop respect for different types of music, and to have an overall sense of choral music so that they are able to participate in a community group for the rest of their life. I want my students to not only have the fundamentals of the technical end of things, but also to understand the emotional end of things. I think if they feel connected to music that means I did my job.

Troy: How does your philosophy of music education compare to the mission of the school?

Kristel: That can be a little bit difficult. You try and do things from different cultures, but I have to be careful of the text in the translation. If we did secular things, that was easier than sacred music—Buddhist music, or that sort of thing. I had to be careful what kind of cultures we sang from and how that came across. We did a lot of listening exercises, so I think it helps to listen to other groups, other types of music, and try to figure out what it’s about. I want my students to hear different cultures and different styles of choral music from around the world. I do a lot of listening with my groups.

Troy: How about the teaching philosophies from Orff, Kodály, and Dalcroze? Did that influence anything?
Kristel: I took those courses, but I don’t teach elementary music so I don’t use a lot of that. We talk about it occasionally. The kids all know do, re, me, and that sort of thing, but some of them have had the Kodály and Orff teachings in their past, but not a lot and I didn’t use too much of that. It would be great if it happened more in the elementary schools.

Troy: I’ll make sure I hit that.

Kristel: That’s right, exactly. It depends on who is teaching in the elementary schools around here. Some of my students do the hand signs and stuff while others indicate that looks familiar to them by the time I get them in high school. At SCHS we had a lot of home schooled kids too, so they didn’t have any of that and we started from scratch.

Troy: Did you do hands signs then too with it?

Kristel: I did in my elementary at U of M, when I took my courses. We did the solfège so, mi, so, mi, re. We did all that stuff.

Troy: Did you do that at MCI?

Kristel: Actually no, but he did try and teach us solfège. I had already taken all my theory and stuff by that time, so I found it very frustrating to learn solfège because I could sight read without it. We had Kodály books that he brought in for sight singing. We did a lot of sight singing in my high school and I really respect that because that made it so much easier when I went on to university. I could sight read and that was so helpful. I would like to do more sight singing. I’m looking into ordering some books, but I won’t go with Kodály or with solfège. The basis
of my sight singing that I use with my students is all based around 1, 3, 5; the tonic, mediant, and dominant.

If you know what key you’re in, the students just need to be able to read basics within there. I have students who are doing their grade 10 Royal Conservatory music piano exams. The next guy doesn’t even know which way to hold the music, so I start from scratch. I teach the fundamentals. I drill tonic, mediant, and dominant. If they can figure out what key they’re in, they can go from there. There’s a Nancy Telfer sight singing set of books and I’m hoping to order a set of copies for my classroom so that I can do a little bit more sight singing with the grade 10 coming in. I had that at SCHS and used it with the junior highs. That really seemed to help a bit. We studied all of the fundamentals there.

Troy: One of the things that I’ve seen a lot is about the music education or the community churches having an impact on the readiness of students when they get into the choral classroom. Does it ever go the other way? Do they ever bring things back from the choral classroom into the communities?

Kristel: Into their churches, I think so. Just a couple of weeks ago I was in charge of special music in our church, and I had two students play trumpet. They play trumpet in the school band and so they just did it on their own. They took two hymns, put it together, and they played those for special music in church. I think it absolutely goes both ways. It used to be your four-part singing in church, and then you would go out. I think it’s changed a bit. I definitely think that even in the public school we’ve done concerts or worship services in the church. They’ve
invited us and we do some sacred stuff for the church. Not all of the students in the choir are church people, so it makes things a little bit tricky in that sense. If I’m in the public school, I portray that as a concert rather than a worship service for them. It gets a little sticky, so you have to be careful. It’s a fine line both ways. If I’m at SCHS then we have concerts, but we talk about how we minister to these people. It’s a fine line to play that back and forth. You don’t want to make anybody else feel uncomfortable. If I have people who are not Christian or don’t believe and I ask them to come sing in a church, it makes things difficult. It’s not necessarily singing in a venue, but at a church service particularly. We’ve done it, especially on many choir tours. I’ve sung in tons of church services of things I don’t know and I don’t believe, but it’s a cultural experience and I think we need to take it as such.

Troy: You see this as like when college choirs go out and sing in churches?

Kristel: Yeah, we have sung in a Russian Orthodox Church. We did a service in some Finnish church. I don’t even know what it was because the service wasn’t in English. It was Finnish and we were all jetlagged, but it was really unique and interesting.

Troy: Was that at University of Manitoba?

Kristel: Yeah, it was University of Manitoba. We sang in many different churches. We did different stuff and I found it very interesting to do different services.

Troy: How would you describe the status of music education at SCHS when you were working there?
Kristel: SCHS was very supportive, but it was used as a tool for the school in part to go out and say thank you to the churches for supporting us. That was interesting to have that fine line, we wanted to say thank you for the support and we also wanted them to look at what we’ve been doing in our school. I think as a choir, we are one of the most out there. You don’t see math students at the mall performing. We are very public in that sense, so we get a lot of people commenting, “Oh, we saw your choir.” They don’t say, “We saw your math class.” It’s a fine line because you want to make sure you keep the standards up so people understand where you’re coming from, but if you have a bad day or a bad concert you hear about it sometimes. You don’t hear if you have a bad math class. It gets tricky sometimes because it is very public. What was the question?

Troy: What is the status of music education?

Kristel: I tried to stick with the Manitoba curriculum for music, but it has been changing and so it’s not currently up to date. It’s quite old and they’re redoing it. We don’t have an actual curriculum, but there are components of vocal jazz and components of theory that I tried to cover and SCHS was very supportive of that.

Troy: When you were at MCI, did they have theory classes?

Kristel: We didn’t do any theory classes. We did a lot of sight reading. I don’t even remember doing actual theory like notes or key signatures or anything, but I did that at SCHS. I did feel that was important for them to have some fundamentals.

Troy: Was that part of the choir class?

Kristel: Yeah, we had classroom choir which was not auditioned and then we have auditioned groups. With the classroom choirs, I did theory; with the auditioned
groups, I did not just for the fact that they were the more performance-based. They had to go out all the time to do the performances and that meant we needed to focus more time for the performances.

Troy: You mentioned it was hard getting used to doing Kodály in the choir at MCI, but you already had the theory background, where did that come from?

Kristel: Theory? I took it private theory with my piano lessons, just like sight singing, and I did voice exams. My mom is a voice teacher and a piano teacher, but I took piano lessons with a different teacher. She would sit with me and we would do ear training, intervals, and other stuff for those exams.

Troy: You mentioned about enrollment and feeder schools already. Who did you work with?

Kristel: The feeder schools come from everywhere and it’s interesting as it depends on who is teaching at the time at the different schools. You knew what quality you were getting. For example, when Millie Hildebrand was in town she taught at Mitchell, so I knew anybody coming out of Mitchell would have the knowledge of energy and vocal production and they would be fantastic. Cameron Friesen taught for a while in Blumenort, so I knew his band students would be phenomenal. It depended on who you knew and what they were teaching, but you could tell. When the teachers switched, you could see a change in the program there; it was very interesting. The teacher really makes or breaks the program as to what kind of kids I get. You get a combination of everything. You might have kids who were home schooled and may have never seen a piece of music before, so you start at the basics and then go from there. It is kind of sad, but you start
with the ta’s and ti-ti’s. I start with quarter notes and you do rhythms. You do everything to get people on the same track. Some of them learn by rote. They have the music in front of them, but they hardly look at it because they don’t know what to do with it.

Troy: You just mentioned that the curriculum was kind of outdated.

Kristel: The curriculum is very outdated. They are updating it currently and soon we’ll have new copies. I did get a chance a year or two ago to take a look at the draft for the elementary curriculum. They are trying, but we currently do our own thing and hope nobody calls us on it.

Troy: The butterfly model?

Kristel: The butterfly model, yeah.

Troy: The voluntary national standards that we have looks like a checklist.

Kristel: Yeah, it’s pretty interesting. We used to have a checklist. There is a separate jazz curriculum as well.

Troy: You mentioned about your autonomy as far as being able to do what you wanted to do.

Kristel: I checked in with my administration especially the first few years, but once you start trucking along, they know what you’re doing. If there’s something out of the ordinary I wanted to do, I would run it by them to make sure. At this public school I’ve never had anyone ask me other than for the musicals where they have asked me if I needed help. They leave me alone which is great. As long as they’re having good results and good performances, they will leave you alone.

Troy: What was scheduling like?
Kristel: Scheduling is totally different from public to private school and I think it’s just fluke wherever you are or whatever the person before you has pushed for. At SCHS it’s a private school, so they want to offer as many courses as possible and they also have to do the Bible courses. They have to fit everything in the timetable, so most of my stuff was out of the timetable. Classroom choir was in the timetable, but Jazz Band, Praise and Worship, and Chamber Choir were outside the timetable. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I taught from eight to nine in the morning and that was my early shift. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I was at school teaching until 5:15. My Chamber Choir went from 4:00 to 5:15 twice a week. They got credit for it, so I did encourage them to tell their employers my class day on those days ended at 5:15 because it was a credited class. It worked pretty good, but it was tough to get kids outside the timetable as they are busy people. They want to play volleyball and other sports because the kids in music are well rounded, so they do a lot of everything.

At the public school everything is in the timetable for me. Technically, it is during their lunch, but they get a credit for it. My Chamber Choir at SRSS does not get a credit.  

I give them bonus marks in their regular classroom choirs for the extra work that they put in, so I guess it’s a give and take. I don’t have them after school. If I had them after school for a separate time I probably could do it accredited.

Troy: Funding-wise did you get what you wanted?

---

6 The SRSS currently offers credit for their Chamber Choir (Peters, personal communication, 2013).
Kristel: My budgets are pretty good. Elroy, my predecessor at SCHS, had set up a system where it was per kid. They would do a number of times for each student. For example, if you know the number of songs you want to buy per student per year and you have that number of kids in the program, then that’s your budget total. They were pretty good with stuff like that, so I can’t really complain. They were pretty good with capital. If I needed to buy something large, they would help me out within reason. They would find the means to do it.

Troy: Was that for both the choral and the band programs?

Kristel: Yeah, the students all supplied their own instruments. The students rented and we had some instruments that we rented out, so they did have some income from rental instruments to help upkeep and things like that.

Troy: As far as facilities and performance spaces, did you have adequate space?

Kristel: I think all of Manitoba is lacking in performance space. Most of the venues are churches and that works fine for sacred or religious events, but for my community choir in Winnipeg who is not affiliated with a specific religion we always seem to be performing in churches. We would like a really neat facility that would be choral centered that we could use. That would be great, but we haven’t really found too much of that around, so we rent church venues and things like that. SCHS has the chapel and we had many performances there. It probably seats 200 or 300 people. It has a good sound in there, but when you want to have a big concert you can’t fit everybody in there. For a big performance, we would use the gym. Gyms are okay and surprisingly it usually turns out okay, but it’s not the greatest. The facility for performances in the public school where I teach is our

606
theater. It seats about 320 people and that’s not big enough either. We do most of our performances in the largest church here in town at the Evangelical Emmanuel Free Church or at the school gym.

Troy: Okay.

Kristel: It’s hard to find good facilities to perform in.

Troy: I suppose coordinating with when churches are available can be difficult too.

Kristel: You have to fit into that schedule and it’s tough. If you’re doing band, it is also difficult to haul all the instruments, your stands, and everything. It can be quite taxing.

Troy: Did you get help with that from the school?

Kristel: Yeah, and the students too. At SCHS we had our bus, so we would just load everything on the bus and they would drive all the kids over for the dress rehearsal during the day and then back. It was crazy.

Troy: Did you load the stands on the bus?

Kristel: Yeah, we loaded everything.

Troy: Did you load them underneath?

Kristel: No, it’s a school bus, so we threw everything on the bus. We also had some vans and trucks, so they would help us transport. Emery Plett, who was the vice-principal at the time, could drive the bus so he would drive us. I remember one time we actually shut down the high school for the day. Almost all of the high school kids were in choir and we all went to ChoralFest for the day. We just shut it down and all of the teachers came with us.

Troy: Was that just one year that it happened?
Kristel: Only one year. It was just fluke that that happened.

Troy: Fun, that makes for a good memory.

Kristel: It sure does. All the teachers came.

Troy: Did you have a good music library there?

Kristel: Yeah, the college had been around and had a really good program back in the day, so they had a huge library. They had started organizing it in the computer, so we had a really good library there. They also gave me a budget every year to buy music which was great. People in the area are really good with lending out music when we needed it too. The Manitoba Choral Association has a huge library and if you are a member you can borrow music there. I’m constantly calling other schools, asking if they have copies of music, and it’s no problem. People borrow stuff all the time. We lend it out as well. SRSS is no different. We’re reorganizing the library and putting everything into the computer, but there is tons of music.

Troy: Is there any other thing status-wise that SCHS had—like facilities or things?

Kristel: Not that I am aware of. I think they’re both on equal footed ground there.

Troy: Did you have risers and things?

Kristel: Yeah, both schools have risers. We still have to update them, so we can’t afford the Wengers.

Troy: Is that at the public school?

Kristel: At both schools. At my public school there is a whole division I deal with, so sometimes I have to get risers from different schools. SCHS is all-in-one with the high school and the college, so there it’s only two people. We had a schedule and
signed things out. We had one djembe drum that belonged to the high school, but
the college sometimes borrowed it. At the public school I have what I have and
that’s it. The only exception is we have only five risers, so if I have a year when
the choir is way bigger, then I have to ship in a few risers from different schools
within the division.

Troy: Is that Hanover School Division?

Kristel: Yes, Hanover School Division is the whole division and we are the only high
school in Steinbach. There are different high schools out of town: Grunthal,
Niverville, and Landmark.

Troy: What was the percentage of students in choir at Steinbach Christian and the
percentage at SRSS?

Kristel: We had a lot more at the SCHS in the choir because it was a course not offered at
lunch. I think we also had mandatory choir for a lot of the time I was there.
When I started we had grades 9 through 12, but the grades 9 and 10 had
mandatory choir. Elroy had set that up thinking a lot of boys stopped singing in
junior high and that was his way of getting them in and realizing that it was fun so
many of them stuck around for choir in grades 11 and 12. It seemed to work, so
when we expanded to the junior high we made choir for grades 7, 8, and 9
mandatory for the junior high and grade 10 was mandatory for high school
because a lot of students either started at junior high or they came just for high
school. Choir was mandatory for grades 7 to 10 at SCHS. About ninety percent
of the students were in choir and I knew every single kid in that school.

609
Here we have anywhere between a thousand and twelve hundred students. At the highest point, I have had up to 240 students in the choir. I think the percentage is quite high for a public school, but still quite a bit lower than SCHS.

Troy: That’s amazing to have that many students participate at SCHS.

Kristel: Yeah, but they had fewer options and fitting the class into their timetable was no problem. It was also mandatory for most students there.

Troy: Was it a benefit for them at that school to be in music?

Kristel: Yeah.

Troy: That’s amazing how it all works out.

Kristel: Yeah, it’s pretty neat.

Troy: Based on your experiences, would you have any anticipations on what the music program will be like in a few years at Steinbach Christian?

Kristel: They’ve had a couple years of a bit of depletion after I left. There was a year of trouble with one of the staff persons coming in, and I hope things can stabilize with one teacher for a whole year. They need some stability to build that program back up. I think that would be great.

They need to know their teachers are enthusiastic and caring. I think that is what is needed and some stability of having the same teacher for a longer period of time is helpful. If you see them from grade 7 to grade 12 you develop stability.

Troy: That is your wish list for the school?

Kristel: Yeah, I was there five years, so it was kind of cool my first year there I had some ninth graders and I saw them through until graduation. They were my first
students ever and I saw them through graduation. It’s nice for them to know what you’re like, they get used to that, they figure it out, and I think they respond to you as well.

Troy: Do you have any memorable stories you’d like to share?

Kristel: I don’t know, memorable stories? What do you mean?

Troy: Things that stand out in your mind.

Kristel: The New York trip was huge because we got to see and hear choirs from around the world at that festival. That was really interesting. We saw many schools with thousands and thousands of students at their school. One school had three thousand students that go there. That was crazy for us. There were so many people and we were just this small little group of 35. We did really well there and I was really proud of them. They worked really hard. I can’t think of any other memorable stories. I’ll think of everything tomorrow.

Troy: If you think of something tomorrow, give me a call.

Kristel: Okay.

Troy: I would appreciate it. Would you like to make any final comments or anything?

Kristel: I thought of a story. I remember my first Christmas concert after Elroy left, those were big shoes to fill. It was a bit of stress getting to that first Christmas concert and I was a little bit worried. We made it, the Christmas concert was done, and I sat in my car in the parking lot for about an hour and cried. I was just so stressed and then I was relieved. It was great, it was done, it was over. That was my first year teaching and to follow Elroy with a huge program was cool. That was funny to me. Another thing at SCHS was they had good food at the cafeteria. Danelda
is a good cook. The Bible College is tiny, but with that being attached, it was interesting there. That’s about all.

Troy: Do you have anything else?

Kristel: Not that I can think of.

Troy: Okay, thank you very, very much for your time.

Kristel: You’re welcome. I hope that helps.

**Visiting with Kristel about being a student at MCI**

Kristel: We used to have chapel at MCI in the old, small gym that has the little stage. It’s behind the new Buhler Hall. That’s where we had chapel and we had chairs that we always set up. We rehearsed with the all school choir in there as well, so we had everybody squished in there for choir. We did all of our musicals from that stage. We had no backstage area. The backstage was the music room just off to the side. They’ve redone a lot there. I’m very jealous that they have that huge facility. We sang there on the opening weekend.

Troy: You did?

Kristel: Yeah, during opening weekend at Buhler Hall. It was amazing and I can’t get over it. They have enough to run their soundboard, their lighting, everything; they have a full program there now. You can take courses on stage management and things like that. It’s unreal. We have nothing like that. It’s pretty cool.

Troy: What years did you go to school there?

Kristel: I graduated in 1994 and attended there from 1991 to 1994. I lived in the old dorms that aren’t in existence anymore for one and a half years. That’s where my mom went and she stayed in those dorms too. I stayed just next door to where she
lived and then I got one and a half years in the new residence hall which is what you toured. It was kind of neat I got to be in the old and the new. I’m really glad I did.

Troy: You saw the transition?

Kristel: Yeah, it was pretty cool because we had six showers for the whole girls’ dorm in one big bathroom and now they have two rooms to a big bathroom which was nice they changed that. We have the modular right now where they have six rooms around a big lounge and that is cool.

Troy: What year did they build the hall?

Kristel: Buhler Hall was built in 2004 or 2005. It’s only been around for four years or so.

Troy: It was built about ten years after you were there?

Kristel: Yeah, I was doing Prairie Voices at the time. I think that was my first year by myself, so it was probably 2005.
Appendix M

Emery Plett Interview

Emery Plett, 12 June 2008 at Steinbach Christian High School, Steinbach

Troy:  The first thing that I’m going to ask you is what does your school look for in a music educator?

Emery: We are looking for a few different things. We are looking for someone that comes with a good set of skills. Our primary focus has been choral, but we do have the chorus and the band, but we want someone who has a strong choral background. We would love to see someone that has experience in terms of having prior work with groups. In terms of the expertise side or technical side, we’re looking for someone that has strong qualifications. Because we are a private Christian school, we are also looking for someone that can balance the musical selections as well. We need someone that understands the idea of the importance of music and faith and the idea of conveying the message of faith through music. Those are the important things. It’s not that we just have to sing music from faith, we can also do some secular stuff, but the intent would be to maintain a strong sense of what is it that we’re conveying in terms of the message that we carry. Along with that, a music person has to be able to have a vision for the program that we have here. That includes developing high-level choirs. We have our Chamber Choir which is a very strong choir. We look for someone who
is able to do those things, bringing groups to excellence, and also effectively manage all that happens in the music position itself. In terms of the band program, we look for someone who can manage the instruments, manage music, manage spaces, and also manage tours, concerts, and those kinds of things. There’s a lot of not only being able to handle the classroom side of it, but we also look for somebody that’s a bit of a manager because of the nature of the way our music program, our facility, and those kinds of things work here.

Troy: Do you want to say anything about the backgrounds of the teachers? Are you looking for somebody that’s Anabaptist?

Emery: Yes, preferably. All our teachers have to agree to our statement of faith regardless of what position they’re filling. In terms of that, we do take care of that that way. We would look more interestedly upon someone that comes from sort of the background, heritage, and the training of this perspective. We haven’t always had that in a music teacher, so that depends. We are looking first for a quality person as well as their faith. They’re both at the same level for us and that can be sometimes a challenge to find someone that’s both strong in the professional sense and strong in the faith sense. We continue to try to find those kinds of people for that job.

Troy: Can you think of any teachers that have had a lasting impact on music education here?

Emery: There have been a few. I am an alumnus of the high school as well as the music program here and I know that when I think back to individuals that have impacted me and my career I know there have been a few.
In recent times, we’ve had some very strong conductors. I would say one of the stronger ones would have been Elroy Friesen. He is currently the director of music at the University of Manitoba. He started his career here and was here five years. The music program for us here at Steinbach Christian High School resurged under his direction. The ones that followed him worked good as well, but if you’re talking about a crossroads, that would have been one.

Another one in that past that I had experience with would have been Rudy Schellenberg. He brought a very high level of musicality and expertise to the position, has also worked in a number of different choirs in Manitoba, and has had an impact on the choral side of life here at school. In my experience, those would be two that would have been key in the last 20 years for me. There were others that I may not have had as much experience with, but in terms of if you’re asking my perspective, those were two strong ones. I have to be careful there because there are many music teachers. They all have an impact, but in the last 20 years I would see those two music teachers as having significant impact in terms of where the choral program here went.

Troy: As far as the role of performances, what role do performances play here?

Emery: Maybe define for me what you mean with role.

Troy: Is it used as a public relations vehicle, as a means of edifying the community through music, or recruitment?

Emery: Yes to all. In the last couple of years we haven’t had as much opportunity.

We’ve had some changes in our music program simply because of changing music staff in terms of health and some other situations outside of our control.
We really try to get into some of our constituent churches. It’s a double thing: one is to be of service to our church community which supports us, but it is also an opportunity for us to let those that are potential students know who we are, what we are about, and particularly to attract those that are interested in music.

We have our standard Christmas concert and spring concert, which are also an opportunity for us to showcase the talent that we have and would be a part of the academic or the curricular expectations of our choral and band program. You always work towards performances and those two performances are significant in the academic role of music in this school because those would be the high points in the musical program. You build towards Christmas, then you have some festivals and things, but you build again towards spring concert. I would say those spring concerts would be edifying things. For us it is important that they are a God-centered event, but they’re a combination of things. I would say when you ask is it recruitment, is it edification, it is simply a performance, but it’s a yes to all of those in balance.

I’ve said we haven’t had a whole lot of opportunity to do it, but we would love to get more into our churches to do some singing between church services to say thank you to them as well.

Troy:  Is that on Sunday mornings?

Emery: Yeah, that would be Sunday mornings. We would go to different places. They’ve been called deputations or service.

Troy:  How about any music festivals or music theater?
Emery: Not so much music theater. We do a musical, again with the change in music staff this should have been a musical year, but it didn’t happen. We’re hoping to put a musical together for next year. It’s a little easier for us to do that in the middle of the year around February.

In terms of festivals and things, we do participate in our local festival here. There is a ChoralFest in November in the city. Our festival here in Steinbach would be in February. The Optimist Festival in Winnipeg is either in February or March as well. We have had a jazz band. Currently we don’t, but when we had a jazz band they went to Brandon for the jazz festival there. I know that our Chamber Choir has participated in a couple of larger events. They have been to Toronto for a ChoralFest. Last year they also went to the Heritage Music Festival in Vancouver. That was their tour this year. We do take opportunities to mix with other choirs and other programs.

Troy: Are there any church related festivals you participate in?

Emery: Not very many in our area. There’s not much of that. I know that last year our Chamber Choir’s tour took them to the ACSI music festival and we have also been a part of the CAMS which is the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools. Every three years they have a musical get together. I don’t know if it would be a festival, it’s not adjudicated, but it’s an opportunity for all the schools to get together and do a music weekend. We do participate in that one.

Troy: What is ACSI?


Troy: Okay.
Emery: Yeah, I can throw out many acronyms.

Troy: That’s not a problem, thank you. That is a global organization?

Emery: ACSI is global; they do have a western Canada branch, and so that’s the region. We’re not a member of them, but we do participate in some of their events. One of the things we did do was get involved with their music festival. It’s called Musicale.

Troy: Have you seen any changes in the ensembles over the year, like as far as enrollment goes?

Emery: This year?

Troy: Through the years, do you see any changes or trends?

Emery: Every grade has its own unique flavor. Right now we have a grade 9 group where the boys aren’t interested in music. If you take a look at our grades 11 and 12 classes, of the 90 students in those two grades, 70 are in choir. Choir has a got a lot of positive peer involvement and peer pressure in a sense. It’s cool to be in choir. The boys aren’t considered a sissy because they sing. It’s a thing that actually has a fairly positive connection with our kids. I think when you ask me that, every grade has its own uniqueness, but I would say in general we have a very positive feeling about what happens in choir and what happens in the music program here. Students will choose. A lot of the students in grades 10, 11, and 12 are in choir. It is mandatory for our grades 7 and 8, so there’s not so much choice for them.

Troy: As enrollment as a whole goes up, does the same happen with the music program?

Emery: Yeah.
Troy: If enrollment goes down as a whole, does it also go down in the music program?

Emery: Yeah, in that way, if student enrollment goes up, our choirs get larger and we actually face some issues with that since we’ve grown by about 30% in the last couple years. We have a nice choral rehearsal space, but it’s now getting tight particularly with the grade 11 and 12 choir at 70 students. That room would have been built for primarily about 50 people, so we are starting to stress some of the outer boundaries of some of our facilities.

Troy: When you have concerts, are they normally in the chapel?

Emery: We haven’t had concerts in the chapel for a number of years. Our spring concert we do in the gym and our Christmas concert we do at one of the local churches. Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church seats about 900 people. We had our spring concert in the gym, so we would have had just under 600 people in there. It was a good feeling.

Troy: That’s a great crowd.

Emery: Yeah, it was very nice.

Troy: Is there anything you notice about the repertoire that has been done over the years? Are there traditional favorites or has it changed?

Emery: That has been adjusted by the instructor and has changed. We have a good collection of music in our music library. It’s been developed over the last 30 or 40 years and so there would be some older pieces done occasionally. The conductor really dictates how much of what I would call a contemporary feel they like in their music and how much of a classical feel they have in their music. One of the criticisms that sometimes comes is those conductors that can’t seem to get
out of singing Latin and some of the classical pieces. On the other hand, you have those conductors that only sing more contemporary style of pieces in terms of the chorus. It comes and goes depending on the conductor.

I would say in the past we have probably been more classical and we have moved to a little more contemporary. We also have some that have dabbled in twentieth century stuff. That is more of an avant-garde kind of nonlinear music. You’re talking about sounds and noises—a very different feel. There’s been some of that, but right now it is a slightly more contemporary feel. For instance our spring concert would have been a good sampling of where we are right now. There was some, but not a lot of classical repertoire that was sung. I know in the past we’ve done more and it will come back. As conductors change we get movement in our repertoire. They will pull you one way or they will pull you another.

Troy: Do you think having had a substitute music teacher for most of the year had something to do with that?

Emery: I think there was a challenge with that. I know that Johanna probably picked most of the music that was sung, but there was some leeway for James to do some work. I know Johanna is more contemporary in general. James is more classically trained, but I know he has brought in some more casual stuff and he does arranging as well, so some of the things we heard in the spring concert were arranged by him like the piece with the band. He put that whole thing together. James was a sub, but he’s coming on fulltime next year. We’ll find out which direction he goes. I know what his background is and that he’s classically trained:
opera, oratorio, and that kind of stuff. He has done a fairly significant amount of work at Providence in terms of working with their voice students which tends to have a bit more of a classical feel and training to it. So we’ll see.

Troy: Time will tell.

Emery: Time will tell. It’s hard for me to judge at this point. I have time for one more question. I have about 3 minutes.

Troy: If you have 3 minutes, why don’t you tell me if there any stories from your student’s years here that you’d like to share?

Emery: What kind of stories are you looking for? This is always a tough one.

Troy: It could be something that you remember from your own experience as a student that stands out in your mind. Maybe there is a highlight or a life-changing event that was significant?

Emery: I was a bit of a shy kid when I entered this building in grade 10. We didn’t have junior high back then, it was just a high school. It was only grades 10, 11, and 12. I sang in choir and we all had to do a little bit of a voice audition which wasn’t a whole lot of fun for a guy that’s a little bit nervous. Rudy was the teacher. He took me aside and said, “You know Emery, I need another tenor in Chamber Choir and I think you’d be good for the job.” What he ended up doing is for me, in grade 10, he brought me into the Chamber Choir and it was at that point in time for me that I began to really love to sing and really loved music. That started me off, but I wasn’t a musician. I had taken some piano and I was in band, but that was when my first singing experience began. I’m by far not a professional musician in any sense of the word, but through university I was part of University
Singers, I took about 5 or 6 years of voice lessons then in Bible college and in university, and so out of that start I got a whole lot of training and a lot of opportunity to do a lot of singing which I still enjoy. I don’t have as much time to sing as I used to do.

Troy: What repertoire did you do when you first caught on to the singing thing?

Emery: It would’ve been whatever Rudy brought in. Some of it would have been classical and some of it would have been a little bit contemporary. I could walk you to the music library and show you some of the stuff we’ve done.

Troy: Were there some traditional hymns?

Emery: We didn’t do a lot of hymns.

Troy: Was it choral works?

Emery: Yeah, choral works. There were a number of different pieces we would do. I know we did some Bach and some Mozart. We did the Messiah. We did some oratorios as well so my training and my background in what I’ve sung would’ve been much more classical. It culminated for me in some sense when I was in University Singers and I think it was with the University of North Dakota Choir that we did the Carmina Burana with the Winnipeg Symphony.

Troy: When was that?

Emery: Carmina Burana?

Troy: Yeah, when was that performed?

Emery: That would have been in 1993 or 1994.

Troy: UND and the Grand Forks Symphony did it this past year.
Emery: Yeah, I know it was the University Singers, and there was a choir from the States. I don’t remember if it was Minot State or whether it was UND. Somebody came up and sang with us at that point in time. I was at the University of Manitoba. There were a number of groups and we probably had 200 or 300 voices. It was a very, very cool experience—the full orchestra, the two pianos, and all the stuff that happens.

Troy: If I have more questions is it okay to email those to you?

Emery: Send me an email and I can try to type some of my responses. A phone call might be easier. Send an email and I’ll see what I can do.

Troy: Alright. Thank you very much.
Appendix N

Harvey Plett Interview

Harvey Plett, Ph.D., 12 June 2008 at Steinbach Bible College

Troy: Thank you very much for letting me interview you. Do you have any questions before we start?

Harvey: No, I’m ready to go.

Troy: What is your relationship with the high school?

Harvey: My relationship with the high school at this point is rather tenuous, but I help with counseling over there. That’s right now. If you take me back, then it’s much different.

Troy: Could you talk to me about that?

Harvey: Yes sir. I came to the school here in 1962 during the time of Henry Hiebert. I came and the schools were very close together at that time. They were administered as one thing, so we had a dean of the high school and a dean of the college, but we had one faculty and one staff that ran the whole thing together. I taught in the high school as well as a lot of courses here. The connection over the years has been very close and by the time I got to retirement from teaching, they were already quite a bit more separate. There were still some things being done together, so that’s a little bit the connection. Is that clear enough?

Troy: Yeah. Are they still connected?
Harvey: Yes, we have a board that runs both. At this point they are more independent bodies than they were then. The high school has its budget, the college has its budget, and then they bring them together and form a budget. Each one is responsible for their own budget.

Troy: Okay.

Harvey: They have a formula by which donations are spread if they come and it is not designated where they go. You might be better off to ask Emery some of those details. I don’t know if you had a chance to Emery or not.

Troy: Later today.

Harvey: Good. He’ll be able to answer those questions better. It’s called Steinbach Christian Schools which includes Steinbach Bible College and Steinbach Christian High School.

Troy: Has that name stayed consistent?

Harvey: The name has not been consistent. It was changed and they have changed names. If you want the whole story it started off as Steinbach Bible Academy, then it was Steinbach Bible Institute, and finally, the Steinbach Bible College with a high school department. The Bible department and high school department were run together. With greater separation it became Steinbach Bible College and Steinbach Christian High School, and then Steinbach Christian Schools. That’s a relatively recent development, but Emery can confirm it. Steinbach Bible College has been a name that’s been around since about 1960s.

Troy: Okay.

626
Harvey: It was the Bible Institute from probably about 1950 to the 1960s. Before that it was the Bible Academy.

Troy: When did the high school start?

Harvey: The high school started in 1948 and then it was dropped. It was started again in about 1953 or something like that. I don’t have the precise dates. There’s a book that would tell you that information. It has stayed since then and has continued to grow.

Troy: What is the name of that book?

Harvey: I’ll show you after the interview. I hope there is a copy that we could give you that would help you as well. It’s a history of the school.

Troy: That would be very helpful.

Harvey: I’m going to try and see if you can get a copy. There were some extras because they’ve been giving them away already, so remind me when we’re finished.

Troy: What is your educational background?

Harvey: My educational background is high school of course and then I took Bible school here. I moved on and studied at Goshen College where I got my B.A. I studied at Goshen College Biblical Seminary at that time and got my Bachelor of Divinity and later on I upgraded to a Master of Divinity. I don’t think they offer a Bachelor of Divinity anymore. The idea was you were at graduate level so you couldn’t call it a bachelor. It was probably an ego thing. I did also an M.A. at the University of Minnesota and then I did my Ph.D. from University of Manitoba. I’ve had several summer schools at the University of North Dakota as well as
some summer schools at the now no longer existing School of Theology. That’s a
brief history of my past studies.

Troy: You have the strong theology background and what else?

Harvey: History.

Troy: Theology and history.

Harvey: In my studies I tried to take as broad a sweep as possible because I knew that I
was going to be working in an environment where the specialty as it is in some
schools was not at that point recognized as a specialist. I taught Old Testament,
New Testament, Christian Education, history, counseling, and psychology. I took
my studies at a very broad scope and filled holes later on where I felt needed.

Troy: Do you have any experiences with the music program here?

Harvey: I have experience with the music program basically in terms as an administrator
to help develop it. I do not sing very well. If I sang a solo it would be a quick
way of emptying the auditorium. I have been supportive of the music department.
I have also helped plan and give guidance. I was a president here for some fifteen
years and so during that time we worked hard to have a good music department.
The music departments overlapped quite a bit. For example in our voice and
piano studies, students from both sections participated. We did have separate
choirs and we had courses of music in the college. The high school had also some
music courses that they could take into their program. Right now I don’t know if
they have any course like that, but they do have the choir and band there.

Troy: How long have they had the band?
Harvey: I’m going to just make an educated guess and say the band goes back to about 1980 or maybe a little before that.

Troy: A little before 1980?

Harvey: Right around the 1980.

Troy: When was it that you started here?

Harvey: I started in 1962.

Troy: Have you been here all that time since then?

Harvey: Yeah, I’m one of the odd birds who has stayed at one place all his working life, and when I retired I was kept on as a part-time teacher. Because I had developed counseling work they let me have an office, and so I still counsel and teach a course or two every semester.

Troy: Is that in the high school or the college?

Harvey: In the college.

Troy: What subjects do you teach?

Harvey: It varies a little bit. Up until now I’ve been teaching a course what is called Spiritual Formation. I’ve taught Marriage and Family, Bible book studies like Hebrews and so on. I have also taught Anabaptist History. Next year I’ll be teaching Marriage and Family and Anabaptist History.

Troy: Do you see any correlation between the themes that you teach and the music tradition at this school?

Harvey: I would say yes there is. For example, when you do Spiritual Formation you have a whole number of worship and music ties in there. When you teach Anabaptist History you also teach the worship of the Anabaptist history pattern,
so there’s a certain amount of that coming in there. There may be some that are more directly related to that, but that’s there. In the Marriage and Family course it’s not connected, but there are also discussions about what do you do for music in the family and that kind of stuff. There is in that sense, a loose connection, but is related in my mind.

Troy: As far as the identity of the school, do they have a strong Mennonite identity or is it more interdenominational?

Harvey: If you look at our statement of faith it’s called a school that stands within the Evangelical-Anabaptist tradition. The statement of faith is very clearly Anabaptist Mennonite.

Troy: Are the Evangelical and the Anabaptist adhered okay?

Harvey: Yeah, we use both of them because we believe that is what they are. We believe that a genuine Anabaptist is also a genuine Evangelical.

Troy: Does that relationship affect the music tradition at all?

Harvey: My guess is it does to some degree, but I’m not sure how much it directly does.

The only thing it would be is if you do a course on the history of music. That would touch what the Mennonites had been singing. In terms of the selection of the music being sung, it may play a behind the scenes role a little bit, but not a major one in that sense. I would say we sing here a Negro spiritual, gospel, classical, sort of spectrum.

Troy: Are there any pieces of repertoire that you would consider standards that you would just expect to hear in a four year period or that you are going to hear certain pieces every so often?
Harvey: I would say at this point no. That has changed. I think back whether there have been some songs that have been sung. For example, one of them that we have sung is “Wehrlos und verlassen.” I don’t know if you can understand the German but “In the Rifted Rock I’m Resting” I think is the song. When considering the classical, some of Handel’s stuff has been repeated. Right now the director chooses and so it changes based upon the director. I don’t think I would say there is the expectation that these will be sung every year at this point.

Troy:  Do you remember any particular piece of Handel’s music that rings a bell?

Harvey: “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring,” but that’s not Handel is it?

Troy:  No, Bach.

Harvey:  Bach, yes. That would be one. I’m trying to think of the Messiah, I know they tried “Hallelujah Chorus” once or twice, but they haven’t done that very often. That was a tough piece for our kids. There’s some more out on the side. Let’s see if we can think of something. Maybe give some titles and I can say yes or no.

Troy:  That’s the one that I hear a lot of is that one in particular.

Harvey:  Yeah, there are a few others that have been sung every once and awhile, but I don’t recall the titles now.

Troy:  Okay.

Harvey:  You’ll sense that my memory on background stuff is rather sparse.

Troy:  Okay, not a problem. Did you know any of the music teachers through the years?

Harvey:  Oh yeah, I knew all of them. As a matter of fact I hired a number of them. I can list the ones that I remember best. There were one or two that I’ll remember, but I probably won’t remember their names very well. Henry Hiebert of course,
and then there was Lee Bartel, Rudy Schellenberg, and Doreen Klassen. Some names fail me. It’s one of those names if you want to stop recording I can go get the book or we can look at it later on.

Troy: We can wait, that’s fine.

Harvey: Okay good. There’s Ruth Oommen who’s done the private lessons, Shirley Ardies, and Leora Loewen.

Troy: Who was the Loewen?

Harvey: Some of these are also the ones that give private lessons.

Troy: Are there any that stand out in your mind as far as contributions that they made during their time here?

Harvey: Yes, I would say Henry Hiebert and also Bill Derksen. Those are the ones that I can remember best in terms of the contribution they made. I am talking about the college now to a large degree.

Troy: Okay.

Harvey: They also did the high school many times. I would say Henry Hiebert, and if you go back Bill Derksen, Lee Bartel, and Rudy Schellenberg are the four that stick out most in terms of contribution. The others have done well too, but they are the ones who for me stick out.

Troy: Why do they stick out?

Harvey: I would say because of the giftedness they had in their music which seemed to be more than other directors. The way they handled stuff, the way they worked stuff, and so on just simply worked a little better than some others did. That doesn’t mean the others weren’t good, but those stick out. It might be because they were
here a fairly long time, some were here a year or two and you don’t even remember. That doesn’t mean they weren’t good because they were, but they came and went quickly.

Troy: Was there a strong tie to traditional hymns or choral music?

Harvey: I would say that the Mennonite names that I mentioned and the strong tie would be to choral music and then a selection hymns. One or the other would be into Volkslieder spiritual as well. I would say that has been the stronger tradition that would have been choral music, some hymns, and hymn songs. My guess is that to some degree that is still true, but it has gone more into African type music with its roots from the peace movement.

Troy: From what movement?

Harvey: I call it the peace movement, the apartheid kind of movement. There’s been a mixture from that. During my time that would have been the stronger. It would also have been in the high school. It was amazing what those guys could get the high school students to sing. They didn’t just have to sing the contemporary. They sang what I call the good choral music, and they did well. It was just amazing how they could get those kids to sing.

Troy: When did the African music start coming in?

Harvey: Oh that, I would say that would’ve been there already about the mid-1980s.

Troy: Are there any other musical influences there?

Harvey: You would probably have to ask somebody else. Henry Hiebert could have told you some of it. I’m trying to think now. We had some gospel, I don’t know if
you consider that hymns, but there was an element of gospel. Those are the ones that I can think of right now.

Troy: Do you have any specific choral works that are your favorites that you’ve heard over the years?

Harvey: There’s one piece that they did, and I won’t get the name of it now—that’s my problem, I would say is my favorite. I can’t remember the title, sorry.

Troy: No, that’s okay.

Harvey: For me it was a very, very powerful piece. They sang it by coming in and then they sang it, but that doesn’t help you, so let’s leave it there.

Troy: Do you have any memorable events from any of the things that the music people have done in the ensembles?

Harvey: Oh, yes. I would say we usually had a spring concert which has gone over very well. We also have done Christmas concerts and some have gone over very well. We’ve done concerts both at the college as well as the high school levels and they’ve gone over well. Those are always high points. We’ve had small groups—a deputation kind of thing. Some of them have done very well, but if I think of here then I would say those regular kind of things that are part of the school year plus also at graduation the choir or small group would sing. Those were usually done very well. That continues today for both schools.

Troy: Do you have anything like a personal philosophy of music education?

Harvey: I probably did, but I have not worked on it very often. My philosophy of education is I would like to see a broad spectrum rather than a narrow one—a bit of everything. Part of my philosophy is that we used to have a compulsory
participation in choir and everyone was required to sing. I think that has its merit
to give experience of music to everybody and have that be part of the program. I
also think there’s a place for the audition choir groups because there’s a better
quality kind of thing. By the way, here at the college we don’t have the music
department anymore. We basically have only the choir and private lessons.

Troy: At the college level.

Harvey: At the college level. At the high school level it’s not much different, but Emery
can give you exactly what they do there.

Troy: Do they have the same teachers for both schools or are they different?

Harvey: No, they’re different. We have basically a choir teacher here and they have a
choir teacher and a band teacher over there. The private lessons like voice
overlap.

Troy: Okay, so the private lessons overlap.

Harvey: Yeah. The students can sign up and then the teachers come in and teach guitar,
piano, and stuff like that. Another thing I was going to say about my philosophy
of music education is that when we had the department was that all students could
take an introduction to music of some kind. I know when I was in college I had to
do it and I didn’t like it very much, but later on I found out that was very helpful
course. In my mind that’s part of my education philosophy.

Troy: How was it helpful?

Harvey: My understanding of music was broadened tremendously. We had to do quite a
bit of listening to music, identifying music instead of just listening to
contemporary or popular kind of stuff, and we also learned how to understand the
symphonies and stuff like that. It broadened an appreciation for different music, where before it was just long haired music until you learn how to understand it. I do suggest we teach them so they have an understanding. You won’t all like it, but at least develop an understanding of it.

Troy: Is there a difference between music education and Christian music education?

Harvey: There’s a lot of overlap. I think Christian music education focuses more on how this music contributes to the spiritual welfare of a person. I would probably be somewhat critical over some Christian music and also some of the contemporary stuff that pushes another theory. Let me give the music to the people, let me have them sing the songs, let me determine the songs that they sing, and I will determine their theology. I think there’s a lot of truth in that. It is more informal than directly, but what you sing does ultimately become part of your heart. It is more in the words that I think makes a difference and then also the whole philosophy of what you do with music. It’s not just mere entertainment. It is that, but it is more than that. For me it also becomes an act of worship.

Troy: If you have Christian music education, is there such a thing as Mennonite music education?

Harvey: I don’t think I would call it that. I would call it Christian music education. Under that I would have a category of denominational emphases and so on. You could study Catholic, Anglican, and particularly what the Mennonites have been singing. You have a whole repertoire and if you know your Mennonite history, you know there’s the whole Amish influence and the Old Colony. I don’t know, have you ever been at an Old Colony service?
Troy: No.

Harvey: You should do that. It is worth the experience. You can get up in our churches and almost anybody can sing. Pound out the hymn on the piano and away you go. You would never be able to do that in an Old Colony church. Do you know German at all?

Troy: Ein bißchen.

Harvey: Ein bißchen. Alles gut. Sie habe die langewiese. They sing syllables. If they sing Großer Gott, wir loben dich—Holy God, We Praise Thy Name, Großer they’ll sing Gro-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o they’ll go there for a long time then ße-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-r. I was in a service one time and we were singing and I didn’t have a book. They have that old German hymnal.

Troy: The Gesangbuch?

Harvey: Yeah, Gesangbuch, yeah. We were singing and I was down in verse four and all of the sudden the guy beside me pointed out we were in the middle of verse two. They sing for ten minutes or so, but only get through a couple of verses. It’s fascinating to hear the song leader. It sort of sounds funny, but you begin listening and you find out there is a skill that has to be learned. The song leaders practice every day. The song leader starts off, the men join, and then the ladies come in. It’s actually quite beautiful. There is a whole gamut of Anabaptist music which really goes back in part to the Gregorian chants.

Troy: Do you think there is some Franciscan influence in there?

Harvey: Yes, I think so. There is an article about that.

Troy: Really?
Harvey: Yeah, on the Franciscan influence and you would probably find that in the

_Mennonite Quarterly Review_. Are you familiar with that?

Troy: I’ve heard of it. That’s published by Goshen isn’t it?

Harvey: Yeah, the Mennonite Historical Society out of Goshen publishes it. I don’t
know if it’s online, but it might be.

Troy: Okay.

Harvey: I’m not very versed in that, but I read an article and found it interesting. As a
matter of fact, that’s an intriguing study that somebody should do sometime or
maybe it has been done but I’m just not aware of it; the monastic influence, a very
fascinating question. I think there is some.

Troy: What is the protocol if I were to go observe some singing among the Old Order?

How would I go about doing that or making contact?

Harvey: When we talk Old Order, we have to be clear about what we are talking.

There’s the Old Order Amish and there is the Old Colony; they’re different. I
think the Old Colony singing here in Manitoba is different yet than the Old
Colony in Mexico because the Old Colony here in Manitoba is already faster.

They don’t sing the slow melody.

Troy: In Manitoba.

Harvey: Yeah.

Troy: It’s faster.

Harvey: It’s faster, yeah. I was in Belize in a Kleine Gemeinde church and they sang out
of the _Gesangbuch_, but they sang just the same speed we sing. If you gave it to
the Old Colony, they would sing that same song, but totally slower pace. I’ve
been at an Amish service, but that was with a friend. At the Old Colony I invited myself. We spent seven winters in Mexico helping with a German Bible school there and we went once or twice. I was also there with students and I arranged so we could come with students to the service to hear it. They would be very happy to let you come in. I would suggest you dress a little more like I do—a little on the black side. That type of dress is true for the Old Colony as well as the Old Order Amish. Don’t wear a necktie or you’re going to stick out like a sore thumb.

Troy: If I go, I should be dressed in a basic pair of black pants and a plain shirt?

Harvey: A plain shirt, yeah that’s good. You could have a dark jacket too.

Troy: Yeah, then I wouldn’t stick out so much?

Harvey: That’s right. You can stick out if you want to; but if you’re going to go there you stick out anyway, but not quite as much if you dress this way.

Troy: Thank you for that information.

Harvey: I would encourage you if you have an opportunity to do that. I don’t know if you have Old Order in Minnesota or North Dakota. I doubt that.

Troy: I don’t know. I have friends that have talked about Amish being in the area. They were from Minnesota.

Harvey: I don’t know everything about the Mennonites from there. There’s another group you might be interested in. There are some in North Dakota yet, Hutterites.

Troy: Yes, when our General Conference church in Montana closed it was Hutterites that bought the church and they moved it south of the Missouri River.
Harvey: They also have their unique singing which has latched on to that other stuff a little bit. If you are interested in music I’m sure you would be interested in the Hutterites.

Troy: Okay. So I will need to check out the Mennonite Quarterly for the Franciscan connection.

Harvey: Yeah, that’s right.

Troy: Are you familiar with Ziffern notation at all?

Harvey: Yes.

Troy: Did they ever use any of that here?

Harvey: No, not that I’m aware of. They have used that in Mexico where they will still use that in what is known as the village school. The village school is the school that they went down there with in the 1920s. They taught the ABCs to read, reading out of New Testament, reading from the Old Testament, and the catechism. Their music would be with Ziffern, but most of them have gone over to notes now.

Troy: Did anybody ever use shape notes here?

Harvey: Not really. Some hymnbooks have them, but as far as I know they were never a major issue here. As far as I remember here we have never worked with shape notes unless they were in the book you sang from, but otherwise not.

Troy: Strictly note notation?

Harvey: Yeah, that’s right.

Troy: How about the influence of like praise and worship music?

Harvey: That has taken the thing by storm.
Troy: What kind of effect has that had?

Harvey: It’s pretty difficult to assess right now, but I would say more of them in the hymnbook is now looked down on by some of the younger people, which I think is very sad. There is some quality stuff in hymn books. The other thing is also that the older generation in the churches are not familiar with the songs that are being sung off the wall. At least in my church, we don’t do just worship and praise. We’ve got everybody a little unhappy, so we’re about where we should be. We do about half and half and it’s very interesting when you do the hymn singing then you have a full body of music coming. When you do it off the wall it’s much weaker because people don’t know it. That’s a little bit of the impact: people are quiet. That may change with time, but they aren’t together often enough to sing those songs often enough that they will learn them, so that for me has been a negative.

Troy: Is there a theological difference between the text of the praise and worship and the traditional hymn?

Harvey: Yes, I was just going to say I think that there’s going to be a theological impact. I think the praise and worship tends to be more emotional, but I would say more shallow, more experience kind of thing, and not quite as much theology.

Troy: So a focus on the subjective experience versus the objective truth.

Harvey: That’s right. I think they do more and some of our hymns do probably the other, but I think you need a balance of that. For me personally, I believe that by singing that subjective experience you are pulling things in that certain direction. It also affects that everything wants to be subjective and if it doesn’t give me a
good feeling, it’s not a good kind of thing. I’m overstating, but I think you know what I’m trying to say.

Troy: Is there a model that contemporary Christian music movement is coming from? Is there a model that sustains them?

Harvey: I don’t think I can answer that for you. I’m not sure I understand the full question.

Troy: For example, is there a Willow Creek Church model or something like that?

Harvey: Yeah, there’s some from that. In our church we have printed a chorus book which is eclectic—we take from wherever it comes. Yes, I think models like Willow Creek have had an impact. There’s no question about it. Their music comes from a large group body. They have the money, they publish, it gets played, and their songs attract some people.

Troy: What kind of effect has that had?

Harvey: I don’t think I can respond to that in a very informed way. The music from publishers like Willow Creek will push their theology to some degree.

Troy: Is that an emphasis on the subjective?

Harvey: That’s right. That doesn’t mean that some of the songs aren’t good, but it’s an emphasis on the subjective.

Troy: As a theologian, what are the implications down the road for like not having a balance of subjective or objective theology in the music?

Harvey: I would say that music alone won’t do it, but it will contribute to it. One of the implications I see is that we will determine truth by our experiences, rather than by it being based on the Biblical text. That to me is a little scary quite frankly.
Troy: Do you think it would get to the point where instead of saying, “I’m saved because of Jesus Christ, I don’t feel saved, so I’m going to look someplace else?”

Harvey: Something like that could happen, but I would verbalize it a little bit differently. They would say, “I’m saved by Jesus Christ, but if I don’t feel it, then I’m not sure I’m saved.” It moves into the realm that unless you feel it, it’s not there. I would say we’re well on our way to that way of thinking. As a matter of fact in the emergent church, McLaren and some of the new kind of Christians have moved us very strongly into the subjective realm. It’s moving not only in music, but it’s undergirded by their writings which they say, “Theology grows out of your experience,” so that dovetails together with that. I happen not to buy that.

Troy: If you were going to put a paradigm on that theology, would you consider it liberal, pietistical, or something else?

Harvey: I would say it’s pietistical and subjective. What other word could I use there? It is experiential and it comes out of the experience. When it comes out of experience, then it’s very subjective. The push in many of these areas is strongly experiential and the implication of that, in some places I’ve seen it, is that what you experience is truth for you, but not necessarily truth for me.

Troy: Kind of that post-modern take on it.

Harvey: Post-modern, yeah. As a matter of fact, the emergent church criticized the post-modern kind of thing. I say you still have to be rooted in the text—there’s truth. For me truth is not just feeling and not just experience, but truth grows out of my theology. I obey the truth and then I get an experience. That’s my take on it very simply. It’s a little simplified, but that’s a little bit my take.
Troy: If you were going to put a paradigm on that, would that be something more along the lines of orthodox pietistical?

Harvey: Yeah, that’s one way of putting it.

Troy: I think for myself, I’m somewhere between orthodox pietistical and orthodox protestant. This is where I am at and I believe these beliefs would be pietistical subjectivists.

Harvey: Yeah, something like that.

Troy: Are there any liberationist theology tendencies?

Harvey: I think it is there, but it is not articulated because some of these things come from discontented writers who have not found their peace.

Troy: So like fringe Mennonites.

Harvey: Yeah, fringe Mennonites or from authors like Philip Yancey. If I remember correctly, he was from a small Mennonite church, but he was unhappy and he left. He has come up with a lot of stuff; some of it is very good. McLaren comes out of an unhappy Pentecostal background and some of his ideas come out of what I call discontented theologians. I’m not saying everything is wrong from them, but there are concerns if the discontent drives you. You can be discontent, but then go for the right force to look at how to deal with the discontent. For me it tends to be also little reactionary; but that’s Harvey Plett speaking. You have to remember that [laughing].

Troy: I’m thinking of the music traditions that come out of these things that are then left to people to weed out and determine what is good Christian music (and) what
isn’t. Do you find at this institution there is a basis that people have for evaluating the theology of the music?

Harvey: I would say at this point very little. I don’t think there’s a conscious criteria set down to evaluate. I’m sure there is some talking and some thinking. If a song is going to be sung, and I think it’s going to be true for both schools, then it might be discussed as to whether it is appropriate to sing. They would have a certain amount of criteria. The general criteria may have to do with how does it harmonize with the theology of the Bible and then take it from there.

Troy: Do you know anything about the feeder schools from where the students are drawn from that come to school here?

Harvey: Are you saying high school or college?

Troy: Let’s stick with the high school for now.

Harvey: The high school is largely a local school and they come from basically all the churches: Mennonite, Free, Independent, and some charismatic. They come from all over. Because it’s a private school and there is concern for the environment in the school, it’s a very good spiritual environment (and) a very good spiritual emphasis in the school at this point. People are asking now for lower grades. We’re teaching through grade seven now and they’re asking for five and six which is being demanded from the people. There’s also been a quite a bit of home schooling going around in this area. We also have the Holdeman [Hedda] School and the Baptist school which is very conservative.

Troy: What grades do they have?
Harvey: They probably have the elementary grades up through perhaps grade nine, maybe even grade twelve because some of these use A.C.E.—Accelerated Christian Education (curriculum). Gospel Light puts out a Christian version of it more. You have an adjudicator in the classroom and each student has work he does on his own. If he needs help he gets help from the adjudicator. I don’t see anything wrong with that.

Troy: I contacted some of the elementary schools and asked what percentage of people came to the locally funded independent school and that’s interesting, because I didn’t know about the Baptists.

Harvey: It’s only a small group here, but the Holdemans have had their own schools already for quite a while.

Troy: Is that for the elementary?

Harvey: Yeah, they don’t push high school.

Troy: After elementary school they’re done?

Harvey: They’re done, yeah. If they would go on, there are some people who go on for example to become nurses and so on. They probably would not come here. They would probably go to the secular school because they would wonder which is more dangerous, this one or that one?

Troy: What is that again?

Harvey: Which is more dangerous for their faith you see? There they know it’s more secular. Here it’s Christian and this could be a threat to their beliefs. I understand that.
Troy: They would be concerned about some of the ideas that we talked about with the other theological influences?

Harvey: Yeah, are you familiar with the Holdeman?

Troy: Not a whole lot.

Harvey: They have the beards with the men and the ( . . ) for the women.

Troy: Where does that branch come from?

Harvey: From the General Conference. They are from Pennsylvania. Back in probably the eighteenth century, John Holdeman broke off from either the General Conference or other Old Mennonites and started this. He also did something in Kansas and then the *Kleine Gemeinde* which now is EMC invited him to come up here in 1890. As a result of his visit here the EMC split pretty well down the middle.

Troy: Was that Peter Toews that invited him?

Harvey: Yeah, Peter Toews was *Kleine Gemeinde*; he invited him and John Holdeman came here.

Troy: It was kind of a revivalist movement?

Harvey: Yeah, that’s right—revivalist. He did something that I’ve tried to learn from and that is he invited Holdeman in and said, “Here’s the church, work with it.” I was involved in the facilitation process and then I was asked if I was ready to accept whatever the facilitators said. I said, “No. I’m not saying I won’t, but no.” That’s what he did and there was one minister and two deacons that stayed with that group. The others all went with John.

Troy: Was that damaging to the community?
Harvey: It certainly tore up families, but they’ve learned to live together. That happened in 1890 during the early pioneer days here. We’ve had them around here all the time. They have kept to themselves and don’t mix very much, but I would say it has worked. They don’t integrate into the community very well but otherwise it has not been damaging.

Troy: So there’s very little interaction with them.

Harvey: It’s getting more again. The Holdeman have also gone through what they call purges. About twenty years ago they began to clean house. You had nurses who were at the hospital in administrative posts resign from that and would only work bedside. You had a Holdeman owned feed business that was doing very well, he sold out or he left the church—got kicked out and left the church. There were houses that had brick fronts, that brick got pulled away. There was a pull back because (and again I understand the mentality why they did that) of the direction they were going. They pushed back there now it has again slacked off and it’s moving again. The question is where do you draw the line? We all face the problem “where do you draw the line on things?”

Troy: Did they think they were becoming too worldly?

Harvey: Yeah.

Troy: Has that mentality ever affected music at this school?

Harvey: That would depend upon who you ask. I would say the whole matter of rock music, if you would consider that, then yes I would. There has been an ongoing discussion and some outward criticism of rock music. Otherwise, I would say this has been a fairly open school here.
Troy: Okay. I will just go on to the next question. From an administrative perspective, how has the school used its facilities? For example, they’re doing some construction work in the music room, how does that meet the needs of what the music program does here?

Harvey: As a small school, we have always worked hard at trying to have facilities that would suit the music program. For example there was a building here not being used and Henry Hiebert renovated it himself for use by the music program. It was separate. When our chapel was built, it was acoustically designed for music. We built practice rooms and offices for use by the music program, so we have attempted to accommodate needs.

Troy: Was that for the college?

Harvey: That was for the college and the high school. They used the same facilities. I would say that I think facility-wise, the school has tried to accommodate and do a good job of that.

Troy: Does the college do concerts?

Harvey: Yes they do some, but not very many. There is nothing now that is offered but drama. We do an annual drama which is part of the fine arts program. We do a spring concert, a summer concert, a Christmas concert, and then the choir goes on deputations and so on. That’s basically what happens now.

Troy: Does the high school choir do the deputations?

Harvey: It may sometimes, but the high school choir does concerts.

Troy: Okay, and then the college does deputations.

Harvey: Yeah, some deputations.
Troy: They visit churches and that kind of thing?

Harvey: Yeah, the high school has done that too, but very little because most of the high school students are a little more local. The high school choirs have visited local churches, so in that sense, they’ve done deputations.

Troy: What is the philosophy behind that? Kind of a service for the community or . . .

Harvey: Servicing and also (promotion)—a combination of the two. I don’t know how much the high school pushes getting to the churches. They may offer to come to a church or a local church requests to have the choir in because they would like that so it is a combination of the two.

Troy: Are there a certain number of visits that they like to get done a year?

Harvey: I don’t know about the high school. There are a little more in the college, but I can’t answer that for you for the high school.

Troy: How about equipment? You mentioned the acoustically designed chapel. Is there anything else that has been specifically purchased for the music program?

Harvey: We don’t have as good equipment as some schools might have, but we have a couple of baby grand pianos and also some practice pianos which have been replaced. I don’t know how good they are right now. Students can buy or rent their own instruments that they play individually. We do not have a whole raft of instruments. Most of them are rented and the students are responsible for their own.

Troy: How about a music library? Does the school have a substantial music library?

Harvey: The music library at this point is integrated into the regular library. I would say when we had a strong music department we had. There is a collection of . . . all
kinds of sheet music and so on that you have in the storage some place. Churches can come and borrow music and they do.

Troy: You don’t have any idea of how much music the school has?

Harvey: No, that I don’t know.

Troy: The music teachers are kind of young too.

Harvey: Yeah, right now we have Leora Loewen’s in the college who teaches piano and she’s probably one of the older ones. There’s also Sheila Ardies. I would say they’re probably pushing forty or forty-five, somewhere thereabouts. The others are pretty young. How long have they been here? Some of them have been here five to ten years. We try to keep them, especially those who do private lessons.

Troy: What would you consider to be the outlook for the music program?

Harvey: For the high school program, you will have to ask Emery. I’m going to give you a guess for the outlook for the music program. I think it will continue the program with quality leadership. The lady that was choir director had cancer, so she’s not coming back next year. They’ve just hired a very qualified teacher to teach the choir and the band. I think their aim is to keep on pushing that way.

The college is about the same thing. We’ll do the performance things, but I don’t think that our music degree will be inaugurated right away. We had a degree for many years, but it was very expensive. We had only a handful of students in the program, and ultimately you have to decide whether you can afford it or not.

Troy: So they don’t currently offer a music degree at the college.

Harvey: No.

Troy: But they can take lessons?
Harvey: Yeah.

Troy: What degrees do they offer at the college?

Harvey: They offer a B.A. in Peer Counseling, Biblical Studies, and Christian Education. I think those are the ones I can think of right now.

Troy: Are these accredited programs?

Harvey: The B.A. degree is accredited through the American Association of Bible Colleges. We also have a transfer credit arrangement from the college with the University of Manitoba, but those are selected courses and not every course will transfer. The University of Brandon also accepts some of our courses. We have a good transferability to Goshen College too.

Troy: Do you have anything else that you would like to say?

Harvey: No, I think it’s an interesting study that you’re doing. You’re working toward a Ph.D. in—

Troy: Music Education.

Harvey: Music Education, good. That sounds exciting. I wish you well.

Troy: Thank you very much.
Appendix O

Roland Sawatzky Interview

Roland Sawatzky, 2 July 2008 at Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach

Troy: And maybe just state your name for the record.

Roland: Roland Sawatzky. I am the senior curator at Mennonite Heritage Village. It’s my last week here and then Becky’s taking over.

Troy: Okay.

Roland: The collection we’re looking at was donated by Mary Schroeder Loewen and it is a collection of Liederperlen, which is Ziffern, musical notation books and handwritten copies. Mr. Schroeder, Mary’s father, came to Manitoba in the 1920s with his wife and family fleeing the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. I think they arrived in 1925 and he was a church leader and song leader in Russia which is now Ukraine. He brought with him a lot of Liederperlen books which were published and arranged by German speaking people and Mennonites in Russia during the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was a common method of worship music for Mennonites there. Here in Manitoba the Mennonites first came in 1874 and these were the most traditionalist; some would say conservative groups. The more liberal ones went to Kansas and Nebraska. They continued to sing in unison from the Gesangbuch published sometime in the mid-1700s which consists of 725 hymns with no notation and all in unison. That is a whole history in and of itself.
What Mr. Schroeder did when he came, was organize choirs of local youth from different Mennonite churches and had them singing in choirs together. He was teaching them how to sing in harmony. This was occurring in the 1930s and 1940s. He was teaching using this *Liederperlen* method. Eventually the books that he brought, I think there are at least four in that stack of papers there, became so damaged because students were copying them out by hand—both the words and the notation. We also have a lot of the hand written copies of those songs. He would also make more copies with a special pen and paper that he had. It was sort of like a copying system and then those would be distributed to the students. Not only were they learning it under his direction, but they were also taking it home with them. It wasn’t just oral history anymore or memorized learning, it was also notation and written learning which is a whole different ball game.

Troy: Was that in the 1920s?

Roland: 1930s. He came in 1925 and he started gathering these choirs together in 1930s and 1940s.

Troy: That was in the Steinbach area?

Roland: Steinbach area, yeah. I will give you a copy of this and it gives a detailed history of that. It was at that time that a lot of the Russian Mennonites were organizing *Jugenfreund* or youth gatherings and also *Sängerfests*, which are song festivals where people would gather together in a large tent or building from different areas, Sometimes there were hundreds of people together and they would have their big songfest and sing together their favorite hymns. It was directed by a
local popular choir leader. We still do that here at the museum on our Pioneer Days, a *Sängerfest*, so it’s still a tradition that continues.

Troy: So that’s something you do at the museum and not affiliated with any particular—

Roland: No, it’s not affiliated with a particular congregation. It’s open for everybody and we still get a well-known choir director in. There are a lot of them around that are quite good and some of them are very famous. We get one of them in and people come by. We don’t restrict the music to any particular background. We do German hymns for sure. Sometimes we also have like quartets singing. We do English hymns, gospel tunes, and anything that’s come into the Mennonite tradition in the last century we put in. There is something for everyone.

Troy: When they started the choirs in the 1930s, did all of the congregations have youth that went to those things or was it only some of them?

Roland: I don’t know. My guess is that some of them would not have allowed it. They would have considered it too liberal or considered harmonic singing to be inappropriate for worship. There are still some of the more conservative groups who only sing in unison like the Sommerfelder, the Old Colony Mennonites, and the ones who went to Mexico and Paraguay in the late 1920s who also sing still in unison. I would think it would probably have been youth from the more liberal groups who would be encouraged or were supported to do that.

Troy: To be more specific, what do you mean by liberal?

Roland: Yeah, that’s a good question. It certainly would not be what people necessarily consider liberal now. Liberal in the modern sense can often mean urban, and perhaps engaged in liberal politics. What I mean in terms of liberal at this point is
groups that were considering adopting other traditions into their own tradition for whatever purposes. It could also mean a renewal process in the church where they felt some of their traditions were outmoded or were not relevant to young people anymore. They would renew it by adopting other things like a more evangelical or a more mission-minded stance. In that sense, they were considered liberal.

What I mean by conservative is not what’s meant by conservative today which is often associated with evangelical or fundamentalist groups, but rather traditionalists. In this sense we’re often talking about material culture, how they were perceived to behave, talking about conformism—that everybody should be behaving in a similar manner in terms of clothing, relationships, perhaps what machinery or material culture is allowed into the home, et cetera. That’s what I mean by conservative. I prefer the term traditionalist in that sense. Does that make sense?

Troy: Yeah. It’s kind of for the record thing, because otherwise it is just the connotation.

Roland: Yeah, the terminology is problematic for those terms I think.

Troy: You do oral history?

Roland: I have done oral history. I did my Ph.D. on Mennonite House Barns in Manitoba and I talked to people who had grown up in some of the dwellings that I was looking at in my study.

Troy: Where did you complete your Ph.D.?
Roland: Simon Fraser University, it was in archeology near the history department, but I did my research here in southern Manitoba in Neuberthal, Chortitz, and Rhineland villages on the West Reserve, west of the Red River.

Troy: Where did you do your undergrad at?

Roland: University of Winnipeg and my Master’s at University of South Carolina.

Another thing that I learned in my oral history project was that instruments were not allowed in the church within the more traditionalist groups. Often young people would have instruments at home and this could include an accordion, guitar, harmonica, and those kinds of things. They were small, relatively portable, and could be hidden. From the Chortitz village I heard people saying that they would wait until their parents were gone, they knew the minister wasn’t around, then they would pull the tables and chairs to the side, and they would actually dance. They would also sing local folk tunes like “Red River—”

Troy: “Red River Valley.”

Roland: “Red River Valley,” waltz, polkas, and things like that. They did things that they were picking up from other cultures as well: Anglo Canadians, perhaps French Canadians in the area, and who knows what else they were singing. It was popular local folk tunes basically. That’s from the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. This was something that wasn’t officially allowed, but it was done. It was a way for them to express their other musical side and have fun.

Troy: What was done recreationally within a school setting?

Roland: Yeah, that’s a good question. Within the Mennonite private school setting, which was common until about 1918 or 1919 in Manitoba, the children learned
the songs from the *Gesangbuch*. That’s not something you learned in church, that’s something you learned in school. It was a religious school, so you would learn the Bible, worship songs, prayers, and things like that. The kids started going to church in their teens, they didn’t go as children. When they started going to church, they knew the hymns already because they had learned them in school. I don’t remember the exact number, it’s somewhere between 60 and 90, but the first 60 or 90 hymns in the *Gesangbuch* all have particular tunes that are known through oral history and oral tradition. The rest of the hymns are sung to those tunes, so a song leader would get up in church and say, “Sing hymn number 282 to the tune of number 8,” or whatever. People would remember that tune because they had learned it day after day in school and then they would sing it to that tune.

They’re very slow hymns. They may not have been early on and these hymns are not particularly Mennonite. They’re German from Germany and Prussia in the 1700s, but there’s a couple of good articles that discuss how these things get slowed down over time because there’s no notation or tempo noted, so it’s up to the song leader. Often they’ll start elaborating those first syllables and then the congregation will join in, so it’s long and drawn out. Some of them have 20 or 30 stanzas, but they only sing three in the hymn service because they are so slow. The kids would learn them in school and then sing them later on as adults in church.

Troy: What was the reasoning behind the practice of not allowing the children to go to church?
Roland: Mennonites baptized as adults and church was considered something for adults. It was considered an adult worship time. It was a very, very serious . . . and no Sunday school or anything like that. The kids were getting their Sunday school five days a week during school, so they were getting all their religious teaching already. Children were considered a problem in church. If there was a young couple with some very small ones and they didn’t have anybody to leave them with, they would bring them with them. The boys would sit with the fathers and the girls would sit with the mothers on separate sides of the church. If the kids were older, say 8, 10, or 12, they would stay at home with older siblings. They would have a lot of fun at home from what I’ve heard from my own Grandmother while the adults would be in the church.

They would start attending church at maybe 13, 14, or 15. They would sit at the back and then slowly start getting ready for their catechism classes. They would be ready for baptism and once they were ready for baptism, they were ready for marriage. Those things are all linked.

Troy: Are there any misconceptions about those practices?

Roland: What I’ve heard from a lot of people when I have done tours of the churches is that a lot of people say that the singing was really boring, very nasal, and didn’t sound very good. There was no harmony and they didn’t like that. Other people I’ve talked to said that when they hear those hymns again they’re very meaningful to them because they learned them as such young people. There’s a lot of actual spiritual meaning to them. There’s differences in opinion about the quality of that
music and when people talk about the quality, it tends to be more in spiritual
terms than aesthetic terms.

Troy: Could you elaborate more on aesthetics and spiritual?

Roland: Yeah, that’s a tough one for me in terms of song, because I’m not very gifted in
that way. Harmony is extremely important for Mennonites and is considered a
unified aesthetic and spiritual process. At that time, singing was almost a rote
practice. You had to sing because it was part of the worship service. It had been
done for hundreds of years, so you kept on doing it, and it didn’t really matter
necessarily what it sounded like in terms of quality as much as getting it out there.
This is something that I know was happening in the Appalachian Mountains and
happening with Gregorian chant before 1000 A.D. where it was about getting it
out there. Without tempo it would slow down over the centuries as well. Those
are my only real thoughts on that.

Troy: Do you think there was there a time when people started becoming conscious of
aesthetics and making a nice sound?

Roland: Yeah, that would have been in this period between the 1920s and 1950s. That’s
when Mennonite society began to change very rapidly in Manitoba. They were
starting to move to the cities, had a lot more contact, and the education system
changed to a standardized British Empire education rather than from a Mennonite
private school. This was post World War I, after a lot of suspicion of German
culture. World War II came about and then you had that conscientious objector,
so there were a lot of changes in Mennonite society and their relationships with
the outside world. I think that’s when a lot of those aesthetic considerations came
in as part of that. Plus this group came in and they were teaching the harmony. It just sounds beautiful, so I think people now all of the sudden realize they were missing something.

Troy: And they latched on.

Roland: They latched on in a big way. Harmony singing is a big part of Mennonite culture now. For a lot of Mennonites, they believe the misconception that it’s in the blood and it’s natural. I’ve heard that a number of times that harmony’s in the blood, but few Mennonites realize how new it is to their culture. They think it’s age old, but it’s actually quite new. They can break into beautiful harmony almost anytime there’s four of them gathered, myself excluded unfortunately. I’ve heard it a number of times when all of a sudden somebody says, “Let’s sing the Doxology for prayer,” and it’s gorgeous. It comes out very naturally because they learned it early on. One theory I’ve always had is that one reason that Mennonites are so good at harmony and the choirs are so good is because they have dampened the idea of the individual voice through their cultural tradition, which is that equality matters. It doesn’t always come out that way, but submission of yourself into the greater whole is an important element of the society. It’s certainly not the only one, but it is important and in the choir setting that comes out very strongly. One voice is not supposed to be louder than the other. It’s supposed to be actual harmony in the spiritual sense as well as in an aesthetic sense. You don’t have one person belting it out, overtaking the others, or you don’t have one person who thinks another isn’t a very good singer, so they have to compensate. What I hear when I hear Mennonite choirs is a lot of balance
and the choir leaders are very conscious of that balance as well (and they will rein them in). They accept that leadership as very strong leadership of the choir director. It’s something I’ve thought about a couple of times, but certainly not a scholarly opinion.

Troy: I’ve heard it said that when education first got organized in Manitoba that there was no public education and it was all church related education at the time. Do you know what the education background is of the province?

Roland: Yes. There were many different ethnic groups. The Icelandic people had their own educational system, the French Canadians had a Catholic education system, the Mennonites had the Mennonite education system, and each group taught religion in the school to one degree or another. Mennonites were very strong in the school.

In 1916 the Manitoba School Acts standardized everything and they said to Mennonites, “You can’t go to these schools anymore, you have to go to the schools we build and where we decide they are.” In order to deal with that, some Mennonites left the province or the country. Others sent their own young women to Normal School to be teachers and then come back to the community to teach. There were Mennonite teachers teaching in the British school system which I think was a very clever thing to do. They often taught religion in the morning and German in the afternoon after and before the official school hours so that the Mennonite kids going to those schools could still pick up those things. That was a way to get around the system in a legal way.

Troy: How about the practice of flags with Mennonite schools?
Roland: There were no flags until the British Empire imposed them in 1916. Then there was a flag on the inside and the outside of the school building plus pictures of royalty. There was none of that in the Mennonite private schools. It was very plain. Girls and boys had separate entrances and they sat on common benches, whereas in the public school there were separate desks and it was much more individualistic. It was about competition and being the best you could be and the Mennonite schools it was about attaining the same level of education. Schools were very different, totally different actually. In Mennonite school you didn’t learn about geography or history and the British Empire. In the public school you did and you learned to be a British citizen. This had a great effect on the amount of Mennonites who joined the war effort in World War II—about half of them did. In World War I almost none of them did and that was a direct effect of the school system changes. I don’t know what they taught in terms of singing in the public schools, but I would think one of the biggest changes was the changes in language. Instruction was in German earlier, and then it was in English.

Troy: All of this was because of the change in 1916?

Roland: Yeah, that was part of it. The government did the same for the French Catholics, Icelandic people, and the Ukrainians as well. They all had to learn English now. They all had to stop speaking whatever their little language was.

Troy: Do you know anything about the school inspectors when they had Mennonite schools and that?
Roland: I know the inspectors came by, but I don’t have too much information about that personally. We do have a booklet that we produced here on Mennonite private schools and you can have a copy that.

Troy: Okay, thank you.

Roland: It’s a very, very well researched little booklet with a lot of data in there.

Troy: I’m out of questions. Is there anything else you want to say?

Roland: I can’t think of anything, I think that’s it.

A Conversation about Exhibits at the Museum

Roland: We found these two windows which you’ll see at the back of the Lichtenau Church behind the choir loft. That would have given light to the people so that they could read from the books. It is very different from the system in the Old Colony church where there is no choir loft: it’s just a group of song leaders at the front and the people had their own books which they brought to the church and they sang from there. There’s no choir and separation of choir and congregation. That was very much a Russian Mennonite development. The whole idea of a choir separate from the congregation was totally new from approximately the 1920s onwards in Manitoba.

Troy: Okay. Thank you!
Appendix P

Rudy Schellenberg Interview

Rudy Schellenberg, 24 June 2008 at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg

Troy: Will you describe your occupation and educational background?

Rudy: I did my first undergraduate degree at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. I got a Bachelor of Church Music and I focused on piano and voice. Following that I transferred to the University of Wilfrid Laurier in Waterloo, Ontario and completed a Bachelor of Music. Like a number of Mennonites in western Canada, I went to West Germany to study at the Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie. At that point I was very interested in choral conducting and orchestral conducting, so I spent a number of years there studying conducting, piano, harpsichord, and voice. I came back with the equivalent of a Master’s in Music. It was a conservatory, not a university. I taught at SBC/SCHS for a number of years and then began doctoral studies at the University of Cincinnati (Ohio) Conservatory of Music and completed a master’s and ABD doctorate; I did not finish the dissertation. That is my educational background.

Troy: When did you start at SBC and SCHS?

Rudy: I started teaching at those schools in 1978 the year I came back from studying in Germany. I taught in both the Bible College and the high school. I did choral work in the high school and the college. My time ratio was a quarter of my time
at the high school and the remainder at the college in choral, church music, history, and a variety of things. I was there from 1978 to 1993 and then I started at CMBC, Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 1993.

Troy: The quarter of your time that you spent at SCHS was that just choir?
Rudy: Yeah, it was only choral music. I had three choirs. I did that for about seven years until they hired a certified teacher. I didn’t have an education degree so they needed to get a special dispensation from the department of education, and that was fine in those days. I had a concert choir with up to 80 or 90 students and the Chamber Choir of about 20 to 24 students. On one occasion in the high school I also had a women’s choir. That was in the high school; those were the things I did. We did not do musicals at that point. There were some choir tours, but primarily we just did church visits and concerts.

Troy: What was some of the repertoire that you did?
Rudy: I still did lots of variety from the traditional Classical repertoire. In those days some of the most challenging Renaissance motets would have been what I would have done with the Chamber Choir: William Byrd’s “Ave verum corpus,” African American spirituals, folksong arrangements, more recently written compositions, and as much variety as possible in a variety of languages. Do you want titles of names of pieces?

Troy: Do you have some favorites that you remember that you did?
Rudy: I remember we did some things like Copland’s “Ching a Ring Chaw” and that went extremely well. It was a folksong arrangement of Aaron Copland, but we also did some Mass settings. I know we did Schubert’s Mass in G and Charles
Gounod’s mass together with orchestra. We shared those two concerts with the local public high school, SRSS. We did collaborations. Those would have been some of the challenging repertoire for our students—mass settings with orchestra. We didn’t have our own orchestra at SCHS so we had to pull it together from various members of the community. Other challenging repertoire . . . (I should have checked my list), but pushing the edges would have been some of the five part Renaissance motets like I mentioned like William Byrd’s “Ave verum” and Schubert’s “Psalm 23” we would have done that would’ve been challenging.

Gary Froese was directing there for two or three years before me and he had done a lot of good work with the choir. There was already a strong base set. There was never any resistance to any of the repertoire that I chose from the students. They somehow were eager to try everything; it was just a matter of their young voices and time to practice. They were up to any challenge; it was remarkable. I also remember doing Murray Shaefer’s “Epitaph for Moonlight.” It’s now become a classic Canadian extended vocal techniques piece, and that’s something we did as a more contemporary, non-traditional literature. Those are some of the things I recall. You can certainly email for a list of things I would have somewhere in storage [laughing].

Troy: Do you have some of those programs?

Rudy: Yeah I would have kept them all. If you’re interested, I can send you copies of those.

Troy: Oh, that would be great. I’ll check with you later on that.

Rudy: Sure, absolutely.
Troy: Was the student population a pretty homogenous German background?

Rudy: I’m sure 98% would’ve been Mennonite students; German, Russian Mennonite students from within a radius of ten miles. A lot of students came from Blumenort (that’s a strong connection). They were good students with a good music background (good singers). Students came from other surrounding communities including Steinbach. They were quite a homogenous group of students. Occasionally we had some foreign students, primarily Korean, but a large percentage of our students were Russian Mennonite students.

Troy: Did they have chapel services when you were there?

Rudy: Yes, they had daily chapel services.

Troy: What kind of music was done in those?

Rudy: When I was there it was all hymn sings. We had a hymnal and all the singing primarily would have been done with keyboard and or guitar and from the hymnal. That changed over time. My last years there it was much more variety; the praise and worship tradition, folk music, and four-part singing from the hymnal.

Troy: Which hymnal?

Rudy: It would have been this one here probably at first, *Worship and Service Hymnal* and published by Hope in 1957. We brought it in when I was there in the last few years, the Mennonite Church Canada’s Hymnal, published in 1992. That included a much greater breadth of song. It didn’t really catch on. By then the congregations were slowly losing the use of their hymnal and there was more of
praise and worship music. I’m not sure what they use at SCHS now if there’s a hymnal there or not.

Troy: It sounded like praise and worship music. I didn’t get to see a full service.

Rudy: That’s probably what primarily happens now.

Troy: What did they use for scripture readings? Did they have a preference for the translation of Bible use?

Rudy: It probably would have been the NIV?

Troy: The NIV is popular.

Rudy: It would have been a revised version of some kind.

Troy: It’s about the same back home too. My advisor was asking, so I added that question.

Rudy: How interesting, yes, it was probably NIV, but not the latest edition—the more inclusive one.

Troy: I just came onto the English Standard Version a couple of years ago and I like that.

Rudy: Yeah, alright.

Troy: I like that because it’s a literal translation and it’s fun.

Rudy: Okay, yeah.

Troy: You mentioned a little bit about the school background of the students and the ethnic background. How about with the praise and worship tradition, are there any specific types of Mennonites that are more prone to that than others?

Rudy: I think the more Evangelical they are, the more they would choose praise and worship music because for one it has an immediate emotional response. It has simplicity of text, it is musically understandable; and curiously enough,
rhythmically it’s quite complicated. SBC and SCHS are from the Evangelical tradition. The previous tradition would have been gospel music which is similar in that it has immediate emotional appeal with language that is easy to comprehend, not complex poetry so that the move to the praise and worship tradition was probably an easy one. There was certainly opposition in congregations to it, but at the school there was much less resistance.

Troy: Do you know what kind of resources they used for the praise and worship music?

Rudy: I don’t know. When I was there it was probably all oral I assume; it was not my tradition. The students would have brought it in and then we would have tried to direct them, but probably often to no avail. I do remember some conversations about not giving up one tradition to start another one, but using the best of both. Students are young and they want to push the boundaries and sometimes forget the value of other traditions. I do remember that it didn’t take very long for the praise and worship tradition to catch on because it also happened in the churches. It was probably a little later, but it showed up in the churches soon after it caught on in the schools.

Troy: Did that affect what happened in the choral room?

Rudy: It depended on the teacher. Students are very open-minded. If you have a good rapport with the students, they will sing whatever you place in front of them if they respect you, and if you say this has value for this reason. My experience is they will not object as long as you keep variety, interest, and some of the music that appeals to them immediately. If you push them hard on more challenging repertoire, curiously enough, they don’t object.
Somehow in church music it is different because in the church music they seem to think they have the expertise. If I can play a guitar, play five chords, and can sing, then I can lead the singing. It was different with hymn singing; it was more challenging there, but in choral music they respect your expertise and they trust you in that. Somehow with the less complex idiom like praise and worship, they can easily consider themselves to be the experts.

Troy: Do you think the background they gained in the choral room influenced what happened back in the churches? Was there a feedback loop that way?

Rudy: Sometimes I think it did. If I think of the situation today, it may not be that much different as it was then. There isn’t enough transfer of skills from what students are doing in the choral programs in high schools. I’m talking about from SCHS to what happens in the church. SCHS is a very fine school and so is the MCI choral program. At SCHS I do not see that transferring into their congregations. I’m not part of the EMC churches or EMMC that support SCHS, but my suspicion is that it does not transfer. In other words, there are no church choirs. These high school students don’t easily move into a choral situation in their congregations. The preference is for small groups like a band. There may be small singing ensembles which is something I’ve been very curious about over these years as to why does that happen. I ask myself many questions and there are many reasons for it. Maybe your study will determine that too; I don’t know. I don’t understand why all that excellent choral experience the students have results still in a demise of the church choir. To answer your question again, no, it is very limited I think. The skills they learn in choirs, listening perhaps, and musical skills will transfer,
but not via another choral situation. Typically they may participate in small
groups, bands, or things like that.

Troy: They get more of the vocal training rather than choral skills?

Rudy: Vocal and other musical skills: listening, tuning perhaps, perhaps more critical
skills when they’re rehearsing their own bands, things like that. I believe the
praise and worship tradition which many students will transfer to in their
congregations has a different sound. You don’t use a choral voice there because
you’re amplified. You wouldn’t focus as nearly as much on choral skills of
projecting your voice because you’ll have to use the microphone. The sound or
vocal quality is different. I am sure consciously or unconsciously skills do
transfer, but it is not always easily noticeable, unless perhaps if you’re of that
house.

Troy: You mentioned a little bit about some of the activities you did like tours and
different things, could you talk about the types of performances that you did?

Rudy: With the choirs, there was always the annual Christmas concert which was the
first major event of the year. There was always the local competitive music
festival and our primary opponent would have been the public high school, SRSS.
That was really great because the conductor of that choir and I were good friends,
so it was always a healthy rivalry between our two schools. We would always
seem to share the trophy on alternate years. We also had the annual spring
concert and there were occasional tours. We did not take the large, 90 voice
Concert Choir on tour, but we did take the Chamber Choir on tour at least one
year I recall—good experience. We did make some church visits to
congregations, but because I was very busy with the Bible College, there was less activity at the high school. I did not do musicals with the high school as they do these days. There wasn’t the time.

Troy: Did you do anything with the Bible College?
Rudy: We did share Christmas concerts and sometimes some repertoire. Students in the high school were also invited to join the Oratorio Choir which had its home at SBC. The college choirs formed the core of the Oratorio Choir and there were always a select few high school students who were particularly gifted and were interested or encouraged to participate. They would sing some things like Elijah, Creation, Messiah, or things like that, but that would have been the students who had the voice quality and the time.

I think I did mention to you we did periodically share concerts with the public high school. I had mentioned the two masses we did with orchestra and those were great experiences; we did those with high school students and that pushed them hard. We tried to choose high school students who could do the solo work and there were some very fine students for that as well. That was the extent of the concerts that the high school choirs did. I know they do a lot more now because they have teachers for the high school itself, but then that’s what I would have done.

Troy: Was there a band during the time that you were there?
Rudy: There was a band for the last few years when I was there. I didn’t do the band because somebody else was hired to do that. Boy, I’ve forgotten his name. I know he was the third trumpeter in the WSO, and he had the band. It was a small,
fledgling band program, but he did that. Ken Austen was his name and he had the band program. We did some small things together, and it has expanded.

Troy: Did that start when you were there?

Rudy: I think Lee R. Bartel may have started it. I’m not sure when it began. He would be a person to talk to if you haven’t already. He’s at Toronto I think.

Troy: Okay. How was enrollment when you were there as choral director?

Rudy: I’m not sure what the student body would have been, but there would have been about 120 high school students from grades 10 to 12. About 90 of them would sing in the choir, so it was a high percentage of students who were singing.

Troy: From the other data I’ve collected they were guessing around ninety percent of the students participated in choir.

Rudy: Maybe I gave a wrong percent. I had fewer students, maybe 100 to 110. There was a high percentage of students.

Troy: Was participation mandatory?

Rudy: No, it wasn’t mandatory, but they received credit for it. I know we took attendance very diligently so there was accountability. Overall, they were very good students. I really enjoyed my time with the high school kids. Those were good choirs.

Troy: You mentioned feeder schools like Blumenort. Was that one of the bigger ones?

Rudy: Blumenort was a big one. They provided a lot of students. There were some fine students that came from Kleefeld which is southwest of Steinbach, certainly Steinbach, there were also students a few students living in residence who came from other parts of Manitoba or further away, but that was a small number.
Troy: Would they stay in the college dormitories?

Rudy: They would have stayed in the college dormitory, yeah. Primarily our students came from Steinbach and surrounding communities.

Troy: Did you have a curriculum that you had to follow or were you free to do what you wanted to do?

Rudy: Because I did only the choir I did follow curriculum. I learned this through observation of what other schools were doing and through the festivals. I should have mentioned when it comes to concerts we typically participated in CAMS, Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools every three or four years. We did that several times. We also occasionally participated in the Winnipeg Music Festival and those kinds of things. As far as the curriculum, I did not follow any Manitoba schools Department of Education curriculum.

Troy: I don’t even know if they even had one for choral.

Rudy: It was never shown to me or I was never told to do so.

Troy: Were you pretty autonomous when it came to choosing music?

Rudy: Yeah, it was my decision, and I was never told what direction to go.

Troy: Were there any music classes that you taught at the high school level besides choir?

Rudy: No, only choir.

Troy: Okay.

Rudy: One of my colleagues in the college taught music theory to students, but those are the only options as far as I know.

Troy: Have they changed the facilities since you were the teacher there?
Rudy: Oh yes. I’m not sure if you’ve been there lately. They’ve made the distinction between the college and the high school much, much sharper. There is a brand new addition and expansion program that was not there when I was there. I arrived in 1978 and they had just completed an addition of a new library, administration office, and the chapel came a few years earlier. There was no new expansion during my time there.

Troy: Was the main building of what’s the high school now part of the original building?

Rudy: That white square building? Yeah, that was the original college and high school building and was built probably in the 1950s. I think the plans are to tear that down and build something new as well. That’s the next phase, but that was the original building. The gym was there, the chapel, the rehearsal hall was there which has now been expanded, library, and the administrative building.

Troy: Do you know if they will be getting a new music building?

Rudy: I don’t know. I’ve had very little communication with teachers, except an occasional conversation and the odd concert. You find a different job and get busy with your own life (and you keep an ear to the ground to see what’s happening), but you just start another chapter in your life.

Troy: I hear you. Do you know if the practice room that they’re using is the same one that you had?

Rudy: The rehearsal hall behind the chapel? Yeah, I was in there just a few months ago. I’m quite sure they’re using the same facility. I’m not sure what else they would use.
Troy: It was kind of a small room for choir.

Rudy: Yeah, you have to cram people in there. They still use that space, unless they rehearse in the chapel. I don’t know.

Troy: From the sound of it they still use that room. It was under construction when I was there. They were putting air conditioning in, so I didn’t get in there for pictures or anything like that.

Was there any equipment that you needed for the choral program, facilities, or concert space? What did you use?

Rudy: Our concert space was always the chapel for smaller events or the gym. Those were the spaces we used for concert space. I think when I was there we purchased choral risers, the Wenger ones back there, and started to raise funds for a new grand piano. We began that fund, and I think it was purchased a year or two after I was there. The rehearsal space was small, so when we had 90 students it was very crowded. I bought as much music as I wanted; those were my choices. I was careful to choose music which makes sense for the school and for the students. I tried to push them nonetheless, and as long as you give a good explanation of why you’re doing this and it has content and quality things went smoothly.

Troy: How did you make those decisions like as far as deciding the content? Was it for aesthetic reasons or textual reasons?

Rudy: Choosing the right repertoire is a long process. It still is for me because it’s something that will last the year. You sit with it for awhile. I usually had several piles on my piano. That’s how I worked in those days as well. I’m a pianist, so I
can play through it. I’ll start early, probably start in May, and I’ll look at it over a period of weeks. I go back to it and my mind is usually changed. But certainly it’s obviously quality of text, quality of music, sustainability, acceptability, variety, audience appeal, student appeal, and challenging the student. All of those factors come into play when I choose music and challenging myself as well. I don’t want to repeat things too often. If I do repeat repertoire it’s probably after a period of four years or so. I may repeat some stuff that’s worked really well, but as a musician you want to keep your own interest in the repertoire as well. It’s a constant search and that’s probably what I did in those days as well: constantly searching, going to conferences, listen to other choirs, and sharing repertoire ideas with colleagues. That’s basically a lifelong process. You can go and find all kinds of resources which is a great benefit. Does that answer your question?

Troy: Yeah. That describes the aesthetic considerations for yourself, textual considerations, and the process that you went through to get it. Were there any criticisms on the repertoire?

Rudy: Nothing that called me into the principal’s office. There may have been people who made occasional comments, but certainly not from students. Maybe I was naïve and just wasn’t listening. Some repertoire elicits more enthusiasm from students, but some of it has to grow on them because you’re convinced that this is good repertoire. There was never any serious critique. I knew the conference, I knew the school fairly well (but I’ve never been a student there), and so I think I knew where I could push and where I shouldn’t push too hard. I tried to stay away from the saccharine kind of popular stuff. I personally didn’t like it myself,
so I tried to stay away from that. I did try to choose music that was rhythmically interesting. I chose the spirituals or the world music that was just becoming popular. I tried to choose repertoire that would challenge students in all kinds of ways.

Troy: They have had a bit of transition between the choral conductors recently. One of the things they mentioned is that coming in in the middle of things and not having rapport with students kind of affects how they chose repertoire. You mentioned the challenging repertoire and having good rapport so it seems like those two are tied together.

Rudy: Yeah and private schools are easily critiqued because people seem to have a greater sense of ownership because they’re paying students’ tuition. They put their students in a private, religious school for reasons. The choral repertoire needs to match that sometimes. You want to avoid humanistic kind of repertoire (if that’s a word I could use), sentimental stuff where it speaks of human relationships on a kind of sentimental level. So not that there isn’t good repertoire out there, but I tended to avoid that kind of stuff. Often it was great repertoire, I would have loved to do it, but not in that setting. It wasn’t always sacred repertoire; there was secular repertoire I did as well. Because so much of our programming related to the congregation (much like my job here), ninety percent is sacred music.

Troy: Was there any push for traditional German hymns, German folksongs, or things of that nature?
Rudy: The EMC (the Evangelical Mennonite Conference) and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference schools were looking for a teacher who had moved away from the German language already primarily. So no, there was no pressure, but I did some hymn arrangements for example of German repertoire of Esther Wiebe. I bet you know her yeah. I would have done some of those in German; things like “Gott ist die Liebe” (that would be a common kind of German scared folksong piece), or “Nun Danket Alle Gott,” “Now Thank We All God” and “Was Kann es Schön’res Geben.” I would have done some of those because they were well loved German songs, but those two conferences would have moved away from the German much more quickly than what was then the General Conference Mennonites who would have retained the German language much longer. So yes, I did hymn arrangements in English consciously (always one or two on the program) by composers like Bill Derksen who was a former teacher there. I did some of his repertoire. I thought that was important to connect, and that makes an immediate connection with the congregation. It’s important for students to know their hymn heritage and these were solid arrangements. Bill Derksen did some very fine arrangements. I think those were important for the students and for myself in connecting with the supporting congregations, and we sang that repertoire as well.

Troy: As far as conducting goes, you mentioned studying in Germany, were there any choral schools that have influenced you?

Rudy: Well certainly the schools where I studied influenced me—for example, Mennonite Brethren’s choral tradition. That was very formative because those
were my early influences. But choral schools, certainly the German choral school in my studies and certainly the repertoire that would match the German Choral School.

Troy: Is that kind of a Leipzig type sound?

Rudy: I studied in north Germany. What do you mean by Leipzig?

Troy: I think the Norwegian chorale tradition like the Christiansen being similar to that tradition. Does it sound similar?

Rudy: Yeah possibly, but it is probably much more similar to the north German choral tradition with Brahms, Schubert, and the more contemporary choral composers like Distler. The English choral school would have influenced me, the African tradition, and certainly by listening to recordings of Robert Shaw had a great influence on all of us—that kind of rich, warm, tone quality (the English and the north German choral schools have a much more non vibrato, clear, straightforward sound), much more American in its warmth and color. I would have been influenced by all of those schools.

Troy: What did you use for guidelines for the things that you wanted to accomplish as a conductor or things that you wouldn’t want to do as a conductor when working with high school students?

Rudy: I’m not quite sure I understand the question.

Troy: What were some of the technical aspects that you believe a conductor should take into consideration?

Rudy: When working with high school choirs, I think establishing a relationship with the students is very important. You want to be a friend, but you don’t want to be a
buddy. This is my experience: you want to establish discipline from your singers. In other words, you want to make sure that the students understand that the choral art is a discipline so things like punctuality, full participation, and score marking is essential to being disciplined. Those are some of the things I try to instill in the students. We have a productive atmosphere. I did not like to waste time. I work efficiently, and I demand the same of the students and expect them to focus. There are students who lack it, but you try to instill in them the fact that it’s important for them to make this project work. Those are probably very common things that we all do, yeah—efficient use of time. Am I still answering your question?

Troy: Yeah, you mentioned the relationship between the choir and not being too chummy.

Rudy: There were certain students who one could more easily associate with. I think what worked for me was a sense of humor, enjoying the rehearsal, but still working hard. I think I brought that to the rehearsal; made it enjoyable. I think students realize that there’s an accountability that requires concentration and serious work. I think I achieved that for the most part. I think it worked, and that’s why I think I enjoyed my work so much with the high school choirs that they responded positively for the most part. There are always discipline problems of course, but I do remember the good things. Make no mistake, the good things, the rapport: it was a give and take. I still see some of the kids and students in the high school. They’ve grown up and have been married. Two weeks ago I met somebody, and there was a wonderful conversation we had and that’s great to see.
Besides all of the musical aspects, I think it was important to develop a good working relationship with the students. Does that answer your question?

Troy: I did have a question on what the relationship was between you as a conductor, the music, and the choir, but that was kind of a little bit like that.

Rudy: Yeah, yeah.

Troy: Does that strike anything that you would want to comment on, the relationship between choir, music, and conductor?

Rudy: Could you be more specific?

Troy: What is the dynamic of the choice of repertoire and the choir that you’re working with? Was there a certain dynamic there? Is there anything more that you would want to say about that relationship between the music, the choir, and you as the conductor?

Rudy: I’m not sure.

Troy: It could be within this context if that’s fresher in your mind or if you want Steinbach that’s fine too.

Rudy: I think a general comment I mentioned earlier is that the music is something that intrigues, interests, and challenges all parties. I’m constantly thinking about that too. Who will be in the choir next year? What strengths will they bring? What background do individual singers bring? What will interest them while still challenging me? What will challenge the listener and still keep them interested? All of this provides a solid choral education for all students. I try to provide for them the breadth of the chorale experience with all of the musical challenges. I think basically that everybody’s challenged in some way or another. I think that
would be an overriding comment I would make if that makes sense. Maybe that’s not specific enough for what you’re asking?

Troy: If there are more questions I will ask you if it comes up.

Rudy: Okay.

Troy: I don’t have any more questions written down. Do you have any particular memorable events that you would like to share?

Rudy: From my experience?

Troy: Yeah, any story that stands out in your mind?

Rudy: What I found interesting was there are several instances when a student came to the high school, joined the choir, and one has the immediate sense this is a musician. It might be immediate or might be discovered through the course of the year where the student demonstrates musical qualities, leadership qualities, and you say this person could very easily go into music education, go into graduate studies, get a degree in choral conducting, and it happened in a number of instances. Those were bright lights that came up and were very satisfying. There are students who have done graduate studies, are teaching at universities, and I recall when I heard that student sing or participate in choir, I thought this is something very special. Those are highlights. I also have students who are teaching at other schools and are doing choirs or students who are participating in their own congregations if they have a choir. You get the occasional email with a contact and you share repertoire ideas. When you can relate to former students that way, it is very gratifying. Those were some of the highlights from teaching back at SCHS.
Troy: Did you ever see any of your SCHS students here?

Rudy: Some, yeah. Their connection would probably be closer (at least before CMU they probably would not have chosen Canadian Mennonite Bible College) going to Providence College perhaps. Many of them would have gone to Providence College or the other universities, but that’s changing with CMU spreading itself and having a greater depth. CMU is not as restrictive when it comes to denominations, so we see more and more of those students now coming here.

Troy: Is that because they (are) mostly MB in the Steinbach area?

Rudy: They would have primarily been EMC (Evangelical Mennonite Conference) or EMMC (Evangelical Mennonite Mission), so their theological beliefs would have been more conservative. They would have gone to places like Providence, or maybe Briercrest, Prairie, or those kinds of places. The other schools would have been considered too liberal theologically. That’s why I went to MBBC, but they are seeing more and more students come through here.

Those would have been some of the bright lights; students following musical careers. There certainly were other experiences that I mentioned earlier: offering students choral experiences or combined choral and orchestral experiences which they never experienced before. One valued those kinds of experiences, so you share them with students, and see their response about what a great experience it was for them; even though it was tough learning a mass or the Latin text they would never have sung before, but seeing them attack it with eagerness and then participate in rehearsal and performance and seeing how it expanded their musical worlds. I remember taking them to music festivals, seeing
how they sang together with other choirs to broaden their horizons, watching
them sing in large mass choirs with 300 high school kids, and seeing their eyes
light up. I enjoyed facilitating these experiences that they would not have gotten
by doing it on their own. It was those collaborative experiences (those were
wonderful) that were highlights for them and for me as well.

Troy: Did you have any experience with the music festivals that they used to have like
the music festivals and choral workshops that Wesley Berg talked about?

Rudy: Like Sängertests?

Troy: Yes, things of that nature.

Rudy: Sängertests would have been a variety of choirs coming together to sing, but we
would have experienced that through CAMS (Canadian Association of Mennonite
Schools) or something called the Provincial Honour Choirs where the choral
association of Manitoba organized mass choirs and then individual choirs.

Troy: How much is the provincial choral system influenced by Mennonite choirs? Or
aren’t they?

Rudy: Boy, I don’t know. At SCHS we always participated in the provincial choirs. If
we influenced them in anyway I don’t know. That’s a tough question.

Troy: I’m thinking of perhaps choral directors at the other universities. Some of them
are Mennonite too aren’t they?

Rudy: Yeah, Elroy Friesen for one if you know him. Have you spoken to him yet?

Troy: No I haven’t.

Rudy: I’m sure you will because he taught at SCHS about a decade after I did. He was
my former student as well. What was the question again?
Troy: Did the Mennonite choirs and choral directors influence the provincial choral music?

Rudy: We participated at both of those events, bringing our choirs and sometimes leading the mass choirs. Other Mennonite conductors I know, for example Rick, may have done that too at MCI. I know we led choirs at the youth choir level. There are various Manitoba youth choirs that still exist. I know we took our turns leading those choirs, whether we made a difference because we are Mennonite, I don’t know.

Troy: You just bring who you are to the job?

Rudy: Yeah. There were non-Mennonite people who directed these choirs equally as well. I don’t think it influenced our repertoire or our repertoire was different. What I mentioned earlier was the choices I made—maybe I had a higher comfort level with certain repertoire. Certainly Mennonite schools and singers brought numbers to the group and brought good backgrounds. Whether it was better than the Anglicans or simply different; it’s a good question.

Troy: It’d be hard to do.

Rudy: Yeah, that’s a tough one to answer for me.

Troy: Would you like to make any final comments?

Rudy: I think at least when I was teaching at the high school these students came from backgrounds where four-part singing was common in congregations and in most homes. Students had that sense of hymn singing. They brought that to choral singing. Now there’s more of a disconnect between church and school, and I think whereas the church was much more involved in the music education
whether consciously or unconsciously through children’s choirs, youth group, and youth choirs. The school is the primary music educator, so when I began to teach high school in 1978 those students had already a tradition of singing in harmony or in choirs, and that’s different now. For the most part it doesn’t happen in church consciously or deliberately as it used to. I’m not saying the choirs are any less good. I think they probably are as good or better than they were then. Perhaps the school choral programs—are they better, maybe. Maybe students have more opportunities. What I’m trying to say is my experience was excellent and the schools are still doing a phenomenal job of choral programs. They’re getting stronger all the time because we collaborate with them. We have an event at CMU annually called Choral Connections where we invite high school choirs to join our choirs as a collaborative event. Sometimes they come from the Mennonite private schools and sometimes from other schools. And so the schools are doing a great job.

Troy: Okay.

Rudy: I’m not sure if that constitutes a final comment.

Troy: Well, believe me I’ll be in contact with you if it isn’t.

Rudy: Good, please do.

Troy: Thank you so much for your time.