

# David H. Sargent

## History



Brigham Young University School of Music  
Professor of Composition/Theory/Composer in Residence, 1976-2008  
Interview June 16, 2009

## **Education:**

BA, Brigham Young University, 1966

MM, University of Illinois, 1968

MA, Brigham Young University, 1969

DMA, University of Illinois, 1975

## **Interview with Mike Ohman-June 16, 2009**

**David, you've been at BYU thirty-two years. Your experiences are important to preserve. Tell us about where you were raised, and little of your educational background.**

I grew up in Springville, Utah, a town next door to BYU. I started piano at age seven and took lessons until I went on my mission. My undergraduate major at BYU was music, my minor German. I did a master's degree at BYU. In those days, everybody's master's degree was the same: about a third of it was music education, a third musicology, and a third theory. Very little was left over for your specialty.

When I applied at the University of Illinois, School of Music, they didn't accept me into their doctoral program until I completed their Master of Music degree. It was exciting to know I would be in one of the best composition programs in the nation. The University of Illinois accepted, as my thesis composition, the four-movement symphony I had written for my master's project at BYU. Therefore there were no oral exams, just course work for the Master's degree.

It's a good thing I had to do Illinois' master's degree. Otherwise, I would not have been prepared for their doctorate. There was no duplication whatsoever of the courses I had taken at BYU. I thought that was great. So, I got another master's and my doctorate at Illinois.

**In the process of your education at BYU, you were also a teaching assistant.**

Yes. I taught a theory class, and what was called a dictation class—ear training.

**When you came to BYU as an undergraduate, who were some of your professors? Also, what was the facility like?**

My BYU days began in 1959, but I didn't get started in music until 1963. I took two years off 1961-1963 for my mission. The theory classes were taught in the Knight Mangum Building.

**Martha:** I also started in 1963. Music classes were taught in twelve buildings on campus. All the instrumental groups rehearsed in the Social Hall. The Joseph Smith Building was the performance hall.

**David:** Some piano classes were taught in a Quonset hut.

**Martha:** That's where the practice rooms were.

**David:** Dr. Merrill Bradshaw used to teach piano lessons in one of those rooms.

**Martha:** Some of the teachers had studios upstairs from the Social Hall, while some were still on lower campus.

**David:** Some of the faculty members were Merrill Bradshaw, Harold Laycock, Quenten Nordgren, Don Earl, Crawford Gates, Ralph Laycock, Lawrence Sardoni, John Halliday, Clawson Cannon, Robert Smith, Ralph Woodward, Evan Davis, Elvis Terry, and Reid Nibley. The dean was Gerrit de Jong. Josef Klias and Paul Pollei had just joined the department. Dick Ballou had the marching band, Ralph Laycock had the concert band, and Crawford Gates had the orchestra. Rendol Gibbons was over music education. Margaret Woodward taught voice.

### **Who were some of your students/peers?**

Preston Larson, a very fine organist, Troy Newville, Don Jenkins, James Smith, Stanley Krazcek, William Call, Dave Koralewski (who went more into library science), Ken Hicken (now retired from the University of Lethbridge), Stan Evans, Bob Shed and Ellis Worthen. Other colleagues were our piano tuners, Jack Reeves, Merrill Cox, and Lynn Hansen who took sixteenth century counterpoint with me, as well as other theory classes.

As a new faculty member, I remember when Merrill Cox started wearing a toupee, but that didn't last long, because of Jack Reeves who, at a faculty party, wrote and recited a limerick:

There once was a fellow named Cox,  
Who put all of his hair in a box. . .

Merrill put his toupee in a box after that and never got it out again. His face was so red—I didn't think we would ever quit laughing about that.

Jack was so fun-loving. He once said to me, "I don't think we should bring that topic up again."

**Martha:** There was another toupee story. I sang in a chamber choir with Kurt Weinzinger. When he left, Bob Downs took over the choir, and then Dave and I sang in the choir together. Bob had a role in an opera—

**David:** And to make him look young enough to play the lead male role in *The Crucible* by Robert Ward, he wore a toupee. He then wore that toupee afterwards for some time, and it really made him look young. When he went to do post graduate work at Eastman on his sabbatical, he said, "My wife just hates this toupee." He told me that one day they were at the temple. One of their dear friends they hadn't seen for years came up, threw her arms around them, and asked his wife, "Is this your son?"

Dave Dalton sometimes wore his toupee, and sometimes he didn't.

Bob had three versions of his toupee. One looked like a new haircut. The next one looked like his hair had grown for a couple of weeks. The last one was pretty shaggy. When he got his "haircut," he'd have to go back to the first one.

One day we were walking down to the bank in Rochester, New York to get some cash. A big windstorm came up, and blew off the toupee. He made a wonder and well timed catch and immediately replaced it. We had a good laugh together over that.

Seriously now, Bob Downs is a dear friend, and is one of the warmest, caring, empathetic, loving friends anyone could have, and is also one of the nicest people I have ever met. I met him and his wife Clarine while on my mission in South Dakota. He's been a wonderful friend and colleague for all these years.

My daughters have asked me if I'm ever going to buy a toupee, because my hair is starting to look like one went east and one went west. I told them no; they said, "Thank you!" If you wear it like a hat, then it's not an issue. When you try to pass it off as being your hair, that's when it becomes an issue.

**Describe some general things of interest that you remember from your student years.**

I remember Ernest Wilkinson. When I asked my dad if he knew him, he said, "Yes, I know who he is. He gets it done. He talks the language of the Brethren. He can put a new building up, but frankly, I wouldn't walk across the street to shake his hand."

I remember moments with some of the teachers, for example, Robert Smith in Chamber Music. I remember the way he coached and encouraged us. He was one of my favorite teachers. I truly admire him.

I also love and admire Harold Laycock so much. One day in my second semester of theory, he passed back the papers and my paper had a C on it. I looked all through it, but there wasn't a mistake. I'd been used to getting A's. I waited until after class, thinking it had just been an oversight on his part. I said to him, "Would you look at this grade to see if it's right?"

He said, "Yes, that's right. I gave you a C. You know, I've been meaning to talk to you about this. With your perfect pitch and all, I see you sitting over there in the library doing all your theory assignments. You don't need a keyboard. You can hear everything, you always manage to do everything right. But you're not challenging yourself one bit. You're going

to get C's on all the rest of your assignments unless I see some real effort. You're just following the rules and doing the easy stuff."

I made the mistake of saying, "Then why don't you give me some harder assignments?"

He said, "I thought you'd mention that." He then got out the "Walter Piston" book which had some demanding exercises for me.

When he and I had some of those conversations, some of the other students picked up on them. In class the next day, Ron Richardson said, "Dr. Laycock, will David's grades affect ours?" Dr. Laycock said, "He has a different itinerary than you do, so don't worry about it."

I told him, in my first semester of dictation, that I thought it was a waste of time. I would like to test out of the entire program.

Dr. Laycock said, "All right."

He set me up to take the four tests. At that time I didn't know what Augmented Sixth or Neapolitan chords were, but by listening to how the voices were resolving, I knew what notes had to be sharp or flat. When I got it all done, he said, "Congratulations, you don't have to take any dictation classes. You did just fine. But I want to challenge you—you do need to do more dictation work. I want you to check out some string quartets of Mozart and Haydn scores and listen to them. You will not be checking out or listening to the recordings. You will listen in your mind to the music without a recording."

This was my first encounter with an alto clef sign. When I asked him what it was

he said, “Well, you’re the guy who tested out of the dictation program. Figure it out yourself.” I figured it out.

He challenged me in another way. At the beginning of my junior year, he saw me in the hall and gave me three theory papers to grade. He said, “I’m thinking about hiring you to grade papers, so grade these and we’ll see how you do. Don’t write any comments on them; just mark the mistakes with red pencil.” I corrected them and handed them back to him. He looked at them, and he said, “Everything you’ve marked on these assignments is correct, except you missed this one set of parallel fifths, right there. See that?” I said yes.

He said, “Well, you’re not ready to do this.” I said, “But it’s only one mistake.”

“You’re not ready. You can’t do this for me until you find all of the mistakes. That was humbling to me. He let me know in his own way that I needed to be meticulous in my work. My perfect pitch wasn’t going to be an excuse for my success. So the next semester, he tried me again.

**So it was his way of raising your already high standard of musicianship to another level.**

He stayed in touch with me while I was in graduate school at Illinois. I learned while I was there that the many bright and intellectual theorists I studied with were not only incredible as theorists, but that Dr. Laycock was on the same level as they were. He was superbly informed in all aspects of theory. I think that about everything I learned in music theory, I learned from Harold Laycock.

There’s another thing about him: He used to come to class a few minutes early to write examples on the board—so fast and

neat! You could easily read everything. It looked like somebody had already done manuscript work on the blackboard. Then he’d say, “Okay, let’s take a look at example number 1.”

I’d say something like, “Before you look at them, don’t you think the alto part in measure 3 should be an f-sharp?” “Oh, yes, it should be. “And that the third to the last measure should have an A-flat in the tenor part, shouldn’t it?” “Yes.”

This went on for about three weeks. I thought I was really cool, because I knew all that stuff. And here’s this experienced teacher. One day he came in about three minutes before the start of the class, and I didn’t know it was a set-up. He said, “Dave, I’ve got a problem. Put these two examples on the board for me, would you? I’ve got to run to the office.”

What I didn’t know was that he was standing outside the door, laughing. I was writing these examples on the blackboard, trying to do the best I could.

He came in and said, “You know, that should be an E-flat in the tenor, shouldn’t it, Dave? Shouldn’t this be a B-flat over here?” I said, “I’ve got it. I understand.” I embarrassed myself big time.

If you didn’t love Harold Laycock, you couldn’t love anybody. I appreciated what he did for me. I also loved his dry humor. He once made a comment in class, “You know, one of the strangest things about music theory is its very strong connection to genealogy work. You find so many cross-relations.”

It didn’t even dawn on me what he’d said till I was driving home. Then I said, “You know . . .” I laughed about that. You couldn’t study with a more gentlemanly, warm, academically sound person.

**Your gift of pitch is considerably stronger than that of most people I know who have perfect pitch. You hear not only the pitch, but the entire harmonic content of the chord. You hear entire orchestral parts, as I understand it. Do you know others who can do that?**

There probably are others, though I haven't been around that many people in the same classes who have perfect pitch. One of the things that have been very beneficial to me is the ability to memorize in my head the sound of every octave on each instrument—what's going on. When I'm writing music, I'm not only thinking of the notes, but of a flute, or an oboe. I feel the color combination and the dynamic level. What does that do to change the position of the instruments? That's very helpful. It's probably been for me the strongest blessing of perfect pitch.

**I remember Jack Reese telling the story about him tuning a piano. "I'm going to find out how good this guy's perfect pitch is." You finish the story.**

He said to me, "Come here. I want to find out what your ear is really like." He had all three A 440 strings on the piano stopped to dampen the sound of two of those strings, so only one string would sound. He handed me his tuning hammer and said, "I want you to put that on A 440. Just do it by ear."

I never could work those hammers. I did that for a while then said, "I can't get it right on, so let's just say, for the sake of it, that this is A-440, but it's just a tiny bit sharp."

He checked the oscilloscope and said, "I'll be darned. Your A440 is just two cents sharp."

I said, "You know, Jack, for two cents, I'd tune your piano."

"Get out of here! Just leave me alone!" he said laughingly.

I surprised myself with how close I was. I really hadn't thought about whether I had an exact ear or not

**Martha:** Because your mom kept the piano at the house in tune, you discovered that you and your sister Gloria both had perfect pitch.

**David:** When I was seven and Gloria was six, we were taking lessons from my uncle Arvil Huff, a graduate of the BYU music department. We were at Grandma's place in Spanish Fork. He said, "Hey, Dave, play for your grandma one of little tunes you've been learning."

This was after we'd been taking lessons for about five weeks. I started to play then said, "Arvil, how come if I want to play C on our piano, it doesn't sound like C on Grandma's piano? I have to play C-sharp on our piano."

He looked at my mother and said, "Don't let them touch the piano till you get it tuned."

It took ten days before we could touch it. I was surprised to learn that some people with perfect pitch are consistently a half or quarter step off.

I had in my theory class at Eastman a young lady who was a flutist. She could identify notes only down to middle C, which is the range of the flute. Below middle C "she couldn't hear a door slam"—haha. We spent weeks and weeks matching octaves in order to help her hear and identify pitches below middle C.

Another thing: A person with perfect pitch might say, “That’s a B-flat.” You ask them to sing an F, and they say, “Oh, I can’t do that. I can only identify notes when an instrument plays them.” They can tell pitches, but they can’t reproduce them. There are many variations of perfect pitch. I have been very fortunate.

**You have not only the ability to hear and reproduce, but you hear orchestrally. I’ve heard of some who hear with color—a certain sound has a color—sort of a visual approach to pitch. Do you hear in color?**

I hear in instrumental color, but I don’t hear in pink, blue, red, etc.

**Martha:** I think one of the reasons Dave hears so well orchestrally is that he learned the instruments so well; he studied and taught that at Eastman, right after he’d taken orchestration and experimental orchestration classes at the University of Illinois.

**David:** I had been told I’d be teaching theory and ear training. When I got to Eastman, I was told, “Okay, you’ll be teaching orchestration classes and private composition lessons.”

I said, “Okay.” I had seventeen non-composition majors to teach privately. I had four orchestration classes besides that. The classes were taught to students at the PhD level, to the Master of Music candidates, to a class combined with the wind ensemble (with Donald Hunsberger, called Conducting Orchestration), and regular orchestration class. That was a lot of work.

When I was at Illinois, my composition teacher, Prof. Gordon Binkerd, was a perfectionist at orchestration. I learned a lot from him.

At Eastman, my teaching assignment was changed the day before classes started from theory and ear training to the above mentioned orchestration and composition classes. I had my handouts and a syllabus made up; but then was told what they decided I’d be teaching. I said, “I don’t know why you think I can do that.”

The chairman of composition said, “Well, you came highly recommended, my friend. You’ll do just fine.”

At first I panicked, because I couldn’t get anything ready for the next day. It was then three o’clock in the afternoon. So I called Martha’s dad and said, “You know, I’m kind of worried about teaching orchestration to PhD’s.” By then, I hadn’t quite finished my doctorate at Illinois, though I’d had experimental orchestration classes and traditional orchestration as well

My father-in-law, who was not a musician but a professor of English, said, “You know Dave, from what I understand it seems that the Eastman school is the most conservative music school in the nation. You’ve had lots of exciting training in orchestration. You’ve got lots of things to teach these students. The only thing I wouldn’t do is stand in front of the class and lecture. I would get music checked out and in their hands, get their heads in it, and then let them come in and share with everybody.”

That worked beautifully. When I mentioned that we’d be working with new music composers, one of the students raised his hand and said, “Are you serious? We’ve never been able to do that. Nobody around here is interested in teaching about that. We are really going to do that?”

“Yes.”

“Wow, the only new music composer I’ve ever heard of is Colin McFee.”

I thought to myself, “Who is that?”

But it worked out well. My father-in-law was right: Eastman turned out to be conservative. Now I was feeling a lot better, because I could see what I’d be doing in these classes.

He then said, “There’s one last thing I want to tell you, and don’t ever forget it: It’s only a fool who can’t learn something from his students. I don’t care if you’re teaching a Sunbeam class in Primary, or a graduate seminar, if you can’t learn something from your students, you’re a fool.”

He said that very lovingly, and it’s some of the very best advice I’ve ever received. Those classes went very well, thanks to him. It was an adjustment: it involved regularly grading almost 85 assignments by 85 students (different assignments according to which class they came from). That’s about all I did. It was a good experience, though it was a hard one.

The main reason it was hard was the time issue—trying to get everything graded, and that kind of thing. I also tried to finish my dissertation—I almost forgot about it.

I finished my dissertation while I was at Eastman. My experiences there set up my life musically in the most positive way one can imagine. It gave me new contacts.

While at there, I had a chance to compose for some very fine performing majors, and later on for two very fine faculty performers from the Eastman Brass Quintet—Cherry Beauregard, tuba; and John Marcellus, trombone.

I was supposed to be at Eastman for only one year, but I was kept for three. My experience there has helped me everywhere I’ve been.

When I was interviewing for a job at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, the person who interviewed before me—it was for a music theory position—was ripped to shreds during his interview with the students. I was standing outside the room, and I thought, “Oh, I don’t think I’m going to be teaching here.”

This person came out of the interview, and as I walked down the hallway with him, I asked, “Well, how’d it go?”

He said, “It didn’t go.” It felt to me like neither one of us was going to get a job.

When I went in, it was really funny. The gentleman that introduced me said, “This is Dr. David Sargent. He’s taught music theory, composition, and orchestration at the Eastman School of Music for the last three years.”

Someone asked, “You were really at the Eastman School?”

I said, “Yes.”

People started asking, “What is Eastman like? What is their program? How do they do such and such?”

My whole forty-five minutes went by talking about Eastman. The students didn’t learn a thing about me or what I do. I came away from the interview with a very positive reaction to the students, campus, etc. That was one way the Eastman School of Music saved my life.



**In your early instruction in orchestration, who at BYU influenced you?**

Merrill Bradshaw, who himself was a very strong orchestrator. I had him for two semesters, and I learned a lot.

**Your expertise in orchestration is now legendary. You've written a wide variety of pieces in your very recognizable style of composition. It's a unique and powerfully gifted style. In the process of writing, you've covered all kinds of genres— instrumentation, vocal, etc. What are your druthers? What is your favorite medium?**

I don't know how to pick one, because when I got a doctorate at the University of Illinois, I started getting commissions. One of them was for modern dancers, The Great Chazy Dance Company and about 25 wind ensemble players, who performed Mosaics up and down the East Coast. People would commission, and I would write whatever they asked, whatever the instrumentation was. It seems like I've been asked to write more wind ensemble kinds of pieces than anything else.

It would seem like I favor instrumental, because I had so many instrumental commissions and only a handful of choral pieces.

**You've seen composition change a lot through your years. What was it like when you began to compose vs. what it is today?**

At the beginning at BYU, the writing was traditionally oriented-modal music and some twelve-tone, some impressionistic kinds of things. I thought I was writing in a fairly "far out" way, but when I went

back to Illinois in 1968, it was the Avant Garde music capitol in the United States. When I heard those kinds of things—this is when I first heard Penderecki, Lutoslawski, Rochberg, Cage, Ligety, Crumb, Berio, Boulez, Davidovsky etc.—I rapidly realized we had not heard or been trained in any music of that kind at BYU. Apparently, it wasn't known at BYU, or much at all in the State of Utah. I don't know. I was hearing music of all these different composers, and the composition students were writing "New Music". I was amazed at how good it sounded, and how positively it was appreciated by audiences in concerts—something that took a long time to happen at BYU. I thought for quite a while that it would be very hard to do that kind of thing, because I hadn't had training.

I chose to study with a conservative composer, Gordon Binkerd. Interestingly enough, I wanted to study with him because his expertise in orchestration was far beyond anybody else's I knew at Illinois. However, he wouldn't let me write anything of a conservative nature. He said something like this to me. "If you write anything of a conservative nature, you can go study with somebody else. I want you to move forward. I want you to stretch. And you will. And if you don't, 'Mr. Doctoral Candidate,' you may not last in the program." He offered those kinds of comments to help me face reality. He was also a good man, a very good man.

One time I decided to take in a piece that would be so weird that it might break him down. He looked at it, and the expletives started moving around. He said something like, "You know something? I could perform this piece myself on about five or six radios, okay? Don't ever bring anything like this in again!"

The very first time I met him, while setting up composition lessons he said, “So, what would you like to write?”

“I think I’d like to write an orchestra piece.”

He said, he wanted me to write a piece for a cappella choir.

I told him, “Well, you did ask.”

He said, “Yes, I did ask, but you gave the wrong answer.”

I said, “What’s going on?”

He said, “How familiar are you with choral music?”

“Not very.”

He said that a composer isn’t a real composer unless he has choral music in his bones. So, I composed and brought a choral piece to my first lesson, and he didn’t look at the music when I handed it to him. He held out his hand to receive it and asked, “What’s this?”

“It’s an a cappella choir piece.”

He said, “Can you give me one good reason why I ought to waste my time looking at this?”

I’d never had a teacher say that to me before. I did not know how to answer him. I kept trying to think of different answers, but didn’t know what to say. He then threw it in his wastebasket.

I sat there and looked at it. He insisted, “Give me an answer, and I’ll take it out of there.”

So I gave him an answer, but he said, “Nope. Write another one for next week,

but come prepared to tell me why I should waste my time looking at it.”

I didn’t know what to say. As I was on my way out the door, I said, “You know, if you don’t take a few minutes and look at that, you’re going to miss the chance of a lifetime.”

He just burst out laughing. “That’s the worst answer to this question I’ve ever heard. But, at least it’s an answer.”

He then got it out of the wastebasket and looked at it. That’s how my first composition lesson with him began.

The following year, I was writing an orchestra piece. He looked at the first three pages and said, “This doesn’t work, does it, Mr. Candidate?!” He told me to get rid of the first three pages.

I kept working on that piece, not getting rid of the first three pages because I knew they worked just fine, but wasn’t sure why Professor Binkerd was concerned about them. During my next lesson, he was looking at all the new stuff I had composed. Then he noticed I hadn’t changed the first three pages at all. He said something like, “I still see these three pages, Mr. Candidate. What are we going to do about them? You know, I told you to get rid of them.” He went right down the line. I said, “Okay.”

Approaching my next lesson, I told myself, “I’m going to have to cancel today because I’m afraid I will ‘lose it’ if he reacts the same way as last time.”

I tried to phone him to cancel that lesson, but he apparently wasn’t in his office. So, later that day, I went to my lesson anyway. He looked at the first three pages and made similar comments to what he’d said the week before.

I said, “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with them.” I don’t know the exact words for the conversation that followed, but he reminded me that I was a “doctoral candidate” and should know what’s wrong with these three pages. He mentioned he could take these three pages and put them in his dog house as wall paper, or just lay them flat on the bottom of his bird cage.

I completely lost it. I just yelled at him. I don’t even remember what I said. I only know that much of it was true. I was just venting. He was sitting there smoking a cigar, a huge smile on his face. After a while, my face went so red, and I was so embarrassed, I just stopped. He said, “Are you about done?”

I said, “Oh, yes. I think I am about done.”

He let me know that my response was wonderful. He told me that I was the only student he’d ever had that can answer his questions with one syllable: ‘Good, okay, sure, etc.’ He reminded me that I was a doctoral candidate, and he felt the only way he would ever get me to say something more about my music was to insult me. It was the third straight week of insults! He figured he’d really have to insult me to get me to say more than one syllable to his responses. That’s why he told me about his “doghouse and bird cage.”

He was pleased. He told me he got a whole paragraph out of me. He then said something like, “I am proud that you could do that. And remember, Mr. Candidate, you’re going to have to talk about your music at times, and you’re going to have to be right on top of it. You obviously have plenty to say, because your music backs it up. But you’re just going to have to learn to do that so you can succeed as a composer.

I thought about that a lot, and realized that he really did care about me, my future and my abilities. From then on, when I went to my lessons, I was able to talk a lot about what I had written. The more that happened, the better he seemed to react to me. He helped me get over some of my bashfulness and feelings of uncertainty. He was my favorite professor at the University of Illinois.

**Martha:** It didn’t matter. Dave had more music. He had more new stuff each week than they could look at in a lesson. Binkerd would always say, “Is this all? Is there any more than this?” So Dave always felt like he wasn’t putting out enough. After a while, it started to get back to us that Binkerd was bragging to the other teachers that he had a student who had new music *every week*.

**David:** Professor Robert Kelly of the Composition faculty later told me that Binkerd had commented that during my first semester, I composed sixteen a cappella choir pieces, and some of those were performed.

Professor Thomas Frederickson asked Professor Binkerd, “How did you get him to do this? I don’t know anybody else who has done that.”

Binkerd said, “I just told him to.”

Several years afterward, I was told that I really was one of Binkerd’s favorite students’. I always thought I was one of his least favorite. Sometimes, he would tell me to try to write two choir pieces in only a week’s time. Once, I was able to do it. When we were looking at the second one, he said, “You know, this is just a watered-down version of the other piece.” I answered, “That’s right! I’ve tried to tell you that I can’t write two different pieces in a week.

This man's way of teaching was very interesting, but I didn't know how much he really cared about me until I was hired as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Eastman School of Music. He's the one who got me the job there. Professor Binkerd and Samuel Adler—composition faculty at Eastman—were good friends. Apparently, Adler phoned Binkerd because he knew Binkerd was going on sabbatical. The Composition Faculty wanted him to come back there for the year. He declined the invitation. He told them, "I have a Mormon boy from Salt Lake City that can do it."

I told him, "I'm not from Salt Lake City."

He said, ". . . and nobody cares."

That same day I received a phone call from Samuel Adler telling me to send recordings and scores of my music as well as my credentials as part of my application process. I was told I would be one of three candidates interviewed. Then two weeks later, I was hired over the phone.

After I'd been there about three weeks, I asked Joseph Schwantner, who was one of the composition faculty and a Pulitzer Prize winner, "I know that you interviewed three people for this job. Who were the other two?"

He told me there weren't other applicants, just you."

I said, "I was told there would be three of candidates interviewed." He said that I was the only one considered because Binkerd said, "Hire him." When I tried to thank Professor Binkerd for helping me get that job, he expressed that he had little to do with it. My employment there ended up lasting three years instead of one. What an incredible blessing and what a

fantastic way to prepare me for my future teaching career.

Years later, when Martha, the kids and I were coming back to BYU—I had been hired full time—we stopped at his place and talked to him for a minute. I told him that I wanted to again thank him for helping me get the job at Eastman, and that I knew he had something to do with it. I wanted him to listen to me and not give me that old "I had nothing to do with it" comment.

So, I thanked him, again, for getting me the job at Eastman—the most important and magnificent thing that ever could have happened to me. I let him know of his influence on how that came about. He accepted my thanks.

He was one of the best things that came into my academic and my composition life at the University of Illinois and beyond.

**You have been that same kind of mentor to many students here.**

I've tried to be nicer.

**You were always nice and you were always right. Name a few of the students you would consider successes, students who were mentored by you.**

Michael Hicks, Christian Asplund, Steven Ricks, Neil Thornock, Paul Hart, Stephen Jones (the dean), Michael Ohman, Larry Vincent, Glenn Palmer (the composer), Joe Downing, Todd Coleman, Ethan Wickman, James Worlton, Holly Harris, Marcie Romney, Ohleen Campbell, Margot Glassett. There are others, whose faces I see but whose names escape me. I remember an unusual experience with a student named Holly Harris—I can't

remember for sure if Harris is her last name.

She studied composition with me for one or two semesters, I can't remember for sure. What an amazing talent for composing she had. She was very good at it but didn't realize just how good she was. She wasn't convinced she had the kind of talent I tried to tell her she had.

One day, in a sarcastic tone, I said something like, "Isn't it awful to have to go to these composition recitals, when you receive all the applause, and all these people hang around and tell you how much they like your piece? That must be awful."

She got kind of angry with me and told me a few things to straighten me out.

Anyway, she decided she wanted to leave BYU to go to the Eastman School to finish her Bachelor's degree—her folks lived in the area. So they hired players from the National Symphony Orchestra to record four of Holly's best instrumental pieces. She submitted those to Eastman and got in slicker than a whistle. Solid performances of one's music can make a huge difference in whether one is accepted into a university composition program or not.

**While you've been teaching at BYU, you and Martha have experienced many other assignments; teaching is just one assignment, and your writing is another. Then you've had church callings.**

Back in 1988, I was made a bishop of a BYU married ward. That has to be one of the most important experiences ever had—being able to get close to so many people, and hearing about their lives. It

was a separate calling that sort of pulled me away from my music side a bit.

**Your musical experiences have been inspired by a variety of things. Service is one, and part of that service is your being a bishop. I remember you telling me that some of your experiences were very sacred, for example, the family who came to visit with you. They were losing a baby, or had lost a baby. You said it was agonizing to hear about it, but you were able to give the family some hope and some peace.**

No they hadn't lost a baby, but their child suddenly became noticeably, seriously ill. The parents requested a priesthood blessing for it. Apparently, during the time, my counselors, executive secretary and I were holding our bishopric meeting, and the baby started to turn a kind of blue color. I heard someone running down the stairs toward my bishop's office door. The father knocked and opened the door at the same time. Here was a young man holding his baby and saying, "Bishop, we've already called an ambulance, but would you please give her a blessing?"

I had had kind of a rough week and so didn't really feel spiritually in tune enough to give a blessing. I said, "Let's have brother so and so—!"

"No, you need to do it, Bishop. The ambulance is coming."

So he anointed and I gave the baby a blessing.

Later that night, the parents came back from the hospital, and the baby was just fine. The father said, "Do you remember at all what you said in your blessing?"

"No, I don't.

He said the parts of the blessing were answered in the order they were offered. What a wonderful experience and what marvelous parents that child has.

I had many such experiences.

When I was at Eastman, I got to conduct a hundred-voice choir, one of the choirs that participated in the dedication ceremonies of the Washington DC Temple. That was something extremely special and significant to me.

I've had many experiences like that, and they seem to intermix. The groups that Martha works with also ended up being an important part of my life. I always told myself that I would never ask her to see if I could write a piece for these groups, because I didn't think that was right. They were *her* choirs, so I wasn't going to ask; but the choir finally asked me to write a piece. In the meantime, every time that Martha asked me, she'd say, "Now don't tell me I'm remembering this wrong, my dear, because I'm remembering it very right."

**Martha:** I asked you clear back when I was doing women's chorus if you didn't have a piece for us.

**David:** I take it all back.

**Martha:** It didn't happen for years, but I've been happy that it did happen.

**David:** The first time was when we ended up in Germany, singing at the dedication of the Karl G. Maeser Statue for the Provo, Utah—Meissen, Germany Sister City Ceremony. Thomas S. Monson was the one who dedicated the statue. The UBE choir also performed my piece along with other composer's music in Frankfurt, Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig—near the statue of J. S. Bach just outside the St.

Thomas Church where Bach's body is entombed. The choir couldn't perform inside the church since it was under remodeling construction at that time.

Two years later, Martha's Utah Baroque Ensemble performed "*Praise Ye Him*" for choir and cello, as well as other composers works in Swansea, Wales and England—University of Leicester for the International Kodally Music Education Convention, the Bath Abbey in Bath England, Holy Trinity Church at Stratford-upon-Avon, the St. Paul Cathedral (London), and for a Stake Fireside in Leicester.

When we came back from Europe, we had more performances with the choir. Some of my own pieces I had previously written were performed by other groups in France.

It all comes down to a very strong feeling of love between Martha and I because of music. We're both very different in what we do, even though we're both musicians. Martha does things from a very different viewpoint than I do, and I think that sometimes, when I hear her and her choir do one of my pieces, it feels like she knows more about the piece than I do—but don't take that wrong. I know what's there, because I wrote it, but when she interprets it with her choir, this and that happens. When I hear the choir do that, a great feeling of spirituality comes inside me. If I were conducting, I would probably think of doing the same thing; but I'm not a conductor. I just write the music.

Whenever I write music for anybody, I always tell them, "It's for you. It's to be done the way you do it. I don't have any preference that you must do this or that." I like to see what that person's own personal artistry can do.

When I said that to Stella Simakova, the marvelous Russian pianist who played a piece of mine on KBYU, she said to me, before the premier concert, “What do you want me to do to make sure your piece sounds like you want it to?”

I told her I wasn’t thinking of anything in particular, except that I wanted the piece to be her version of what the piece was. “Your artistry is phenomenal, and I don’t have that kind of artistry. I play the piano, but I’m not a concert pianist, by any stretch of the imagination. You are, and I’m excited to see what you want to do.”

“That’s unusual,” she said. “Most composers have a list.”

I said, “Well, I figure if I can’t indicate what needs to be done in the music, you shouldn’t have to listen to me telling you what you should do.”

That’s the way I’ve done it all along. It has never produced a negative or ill performance. Let the performer be in charge. In my letting artists do that, I’ve learned a lot about music, things that I could never have been taught in school.

**You’ve decided to hang up your shingle, or take it off this building and put it up someplace else.**

Yes, I’m going to hang it up at home.

**What have you not accomplished that you feel you would like to do?**

I wish it had worked out for me to have written more music, along with teaching theory. That’s what I’m going to do now. With the assignments you have and the students you are trying to help, you can’t always just write whatever you want to. You have to wait until there’s time. I always wished I had written more pieces,

especially more orchestra pieces. I’m working on a piece right now for Don Oscarson for wind ensemble and film. I’m hoping to have it ready for the fall, but I’m not sure I will. Sometimes I feel that with the orchestrational strength I have been blessed with, I could have used it more. But I don’t regret anything. I’m going to compose and try to make my wife as happy as possible—by staying away from the house.

**You have taught a myriad of classes here. Give us an overview.**

I’ve taught every class in the composition theory program that we offer—all of the theory and dictation classes. I taught the old music theory seminar that we used to have, when we had a theory program. I’ve worked at each level of orchestration. Most recently, I taught eighteenth and twentieth century counterpoint, and one semester I taught sixteenth century counterpoint. That was the only course I taught just once.

I taught the Schenker analysis class for about fifteen years. It was a wonderful class.

I also taught form and analysis classes.

I never taught anything outside of music. Brother Monson asked me to consider teaching a Book of Mormon class. That was just three years before my retirement, and I thought that I really wouldn’t have time to service the music students as much as I could. It’s not that I don’t believe in the Book of Mormon, because I do. I just couldn’t take the time to learn the ins and outs of the Book of Mormon, as the people in religion do. I felt I would have done myself wrong by teaching students in a situation where I couldn’t help them as much as I would like to.

**We haven't mentioned another aspect of your life—your association with your wife and family. Many of your family are involved in music as well.**

My daughter Katy got her master's degree a few years ago at Southern Methodist University in piano performance. She was there for five or six years. She taught piano lessons in a studio while there. She also used to go in and sight read for the clarinet jury. One day she said, in jest, "You know, Dad, I'm going to quit my job. I recently played for nine juries and was paid two hundred dollars. I'm going to be a jury player all the time."

Our oldest son, David, has been in France, where he joined the choir that sang my piece in Toulouse. He said it was very good choir, and wanted to audition to see how he would do without putting pressure on himself to get in. To his great surprise, he was accepted into the choir. He also sings in a choir that performs lighter music, and he enjoys that. Plus, he has a finale program of his own. When I was sending the clarinet piece back and forth, I would say, "Oh, we need to make a change here."

He'd say, "Okay." He would make those changes on his computer in France while I was at home in Utah.

Jeff played the French horn while in Jr. High School and also played in the Springville High School Marching Band. He also played the piano. His musical interests now seem to be in composing music for his computer programs. He's getting pretty darned good at it. He is married to a wonderful wife and is the father of two great children. We sometimes play piano duets together when time permits.

Jeannie, our oldest daughter, studied piano for several years and played the Flute in the Springville Middle School Band. She took private lessons with one of our BYU graduate flutists.

One day in her band class, there was some kind of a shakedown. She'd been first chair in middle school for a long time, but she came home one afternoon and said, "I'm the only person who played everything—all the musical gestures, the dynamics, and the shaping." The person who was then on her chair didn't make it through the example because there were so many mistakes. "I want you to go down there and talk to Mr. So and So and get this straightened out."

I said, "I can't do that."

"Because you won't?" she asked.

I said, "No, maybe you've been on that chair so long, that it might be someone else's turn for the experience." That didn't go over well. Then one day she made it known that she was no longer playing in the band.

She said, "I'm quitting."

"Why?"

"Because there isn't anybody in that band that's good enough to play with me," she replied.

Emily, our youngest, also studied piano for several years and was our vocalist. She took voice lessons for several years. She uses music mainly for feeling comfort and peace.

For many years now, between Provo-Orem, Dallas, Texas and now Salt Lake City, she has worked full time in facilities that treat people with drug problems, that



have been abused, dumped etc. She takes her work seriously as she loves and cares about others and the successes they obtain and can have. She is also putting herself through the University of Utah working towards her Bachelor's degree.

We have four wonderful living grandchildren. We also have twin grandchildren that were born premature and lived maybe fifteen minutes. They are in a very good place, where they're not being buffeted by Satan.

**You're wonderful.**

Thank you. (Jokingly) You're the only person who's ever said that in my thirty-two years at BYU.

**Your thirty-two years at BYU have been probably the same as my years at BYU. I have been at BYU through your career. I had to go the thesis routine with you. You went through other universities, and then came back.**

It's been a delightful experience to be at BYU. There's a saying, "Always treat your students well, because if you don't, they may later become your boss." So now I see Dean Jones, Mike Ohman, and Michael Hicks—chairman of both

Graduate and Undergraduate Composition as such. I told Steve Jones one day, "Don't give me a hard time if I call for a favor."

I've loved BYU.

**Martha:** One of the things that David has been best at (he's good at a lot of things) is that he's helped a lot of students who didn't like contemporary music—didn't want to hear it, didn't want to study it—find the beauty in it, and find their own voice in it.

**He's helped them understand it. I think the issue is mostly that people don't understand contemporary music.**

**Martha:** David's approach has worked. When David was an undergraduate, he was sort of in that same position. He hadn't had much exposure to contemporary music. I actually knew more modern music than he did when we were first acquainted. When he got into it, he really got into it, and now he knows it and loves it. He has helped a lot of people learn to love it.



David, Mike and Martha

