

At the Local



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Member Services Department Offers Well Orchestrated Class

Dr. Norman Ludwin's orchestration course series at Local 47 strikes a chord with students

BY ROBIN LASLEY, LOCAL 47 MEMBER



Courtesy of Dr. Norman Ludwin

As a vocal performance major at Cal State Fullerton, I managed to stay awake long enough in Orchestration Class to get the required "A" and then promptly forgot what I learned. Why would I, an opera singer, ever need to know the intricacies and bowing techniques of the bass? I only needed to know how to produce the bel canto tones of the masters. Little did I realize that years later I would marry bass player Gary Lasley and with his encouragement find myself creating a small singing group that required orchestral arrangements.

Fortunately, Dr. Norman Ludwin's class in Orchestration I, sponsored by the Local 47 Member Services Department, coincided with my needs. Let's face it; the joke is that there are "musicians" and "singers," so it was with a bit of trepidation that I walked into Dr. Ludwin's class that first Saturday.

With questionable hearing and even more questionable eyesight, I took a place in the front of the class in hopes that I would not miss anything in what I was sure would be a challenging return voyage from the senility which encompassed my college education. As Dr. Ludwin went around the room asking us to give a brief introduction of ourselves, and our goal in this class, my fear turned into sheer terror. The professionals that were in that room had resumes as long as their arms and had

all found a need to learn orchestration. Maybe it was the copyist who needed to orchestrate for a band; maybe it was the bagpipe player; maybe it was the famous guitarist who had played with every rock band and wanted to orchestrate his own music; or maybe it was Dr. Ludwin's respect and interest in each individual that made me relax. I just know that some students were as challenged as I was.

Dr. Ludwin divided the eight-week course into sections, the first three of which were strings. We were taught the ranges and basic bowing techniques; the meaning of slurs to a string player and that dreaded subject: harmonics. Out of the depths of my personal cobwebs came the return of the harmonic scale, dynamic structure, accents, and rhythms. We revisited the history of the orchestra and listened while we followed scores. Our first assignment was to orchestrate a short harpsichord lesson by Gambarini and a Bach Chorale into string quintets. Staying true to the composer, each of us offered our own arrangements the following week. Dr. Ludwin showed us a composite of past students' work and went around the class requesting improvements. After we completed this exercise, Dr. Ludwin summarized the previous week and began teaching us new material. This became the pattern of all subsequent classes. Dr. Ludwin was always positive

and encouraging rather than scolding; he suggested rather than demanded.

Fellow students in the class volunteered to demonstrate their instruments and to show us techniques that would help us when orchestrating. Ranges, registers, embouchure and the fact that double or triple tonguing is not a pathway to erotic fantasy were all explained in depth and subsequently demonstrated by talented and generous individuals. We covered woodwinds and brass and we orchestrated quintets by Kabalevsky and Debussy.

And then came the day I dreaded more than any other: Percussion. You understand that singers are as famous for being able to keep a beat as poorly as are some conductors we know. Fortunately, I can count and though this wasn't easy, I managed to orchestrate a 39-second Poulenc Toccata that accelerates from a quarter note = 160 to 176 for two malleted percs, one stick perc and a timp. Every person who now walks into our home must listen to this piece before being fed. The first drink is provided before it plays on the stereo.

The penultimate class featured harpist Ellie Choate, who taught us the tuning, pedaling, fingering, writing technique and the beauty of the harp. Then came the homework, with which I struggled until 2:30 a.m. Saturday when I woke up with a vision of how to pedal two small pieces. I didn't get it all

correct, but I got the idea.

At our last class we had a surprise guest, film orchestrator Tim Simonec. He brought scores from "The Incredibles" and "Ratatouille" and the DVDs to share with us. We saw how composer Michael Giacchino and Simonec worked together to turn a small melody into a classic swing number in "The Incredibles." Then we saw how Simonec took an almost complete orchestration of "Ratatouille" and filled it in without losing the essence of Giacchino's composition. The last hour was spent listening and analyzing selections from Ravel's famous orchestration of "Pictures of an Exhibition" with Dr. Ludwin and Simonec. It helped emphasize the vast difference between orchestrating for a symphony or for a film. This allowed us a preview of what is going to be taught in Dr. Ludwin's Orchestra II class sponsored by the Local 47 Member Services Department.

In the end, the cobwebs of my mind are clear; my eyes are open; I am awake; and I am anticipating my next journey into Orchestration II.

Dr. Norman Ludwin is currently teaching his eight-week Orchestration II class through Dec. 12. Please stay tuned in future issues of Overture or contact the Member Services Department (323) 339-3179 for information about possible future classes offered at Local 47.



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