

DANIEL WARREN STEPS ONTO ANOTHER PODIUM

Who you think Daniel Warren is might depend which concerts you've attended. For some he might be the trumpet player sitting at the back of the KW Symphony; for others he's sometimes on the KWS podium conducting Pops and other concerts; you might have seen him doing community outreach shows; amateur musicians and their audiences know him as the conductor of the KW Community Orchestra.

He is all those things, and now that Wellington Winds conductor Michael Purves-Smith is stepping aside, Daniel will be in front of that ensemble as well – so *The Music Times* had a brief chat with him about his musical life.

MT: First of all, congratulations on your new position as Music Director of the Wellington Winds. You're hardly a stranger to local concert audiences, but for the benefit of those who haven't had a chance to get to know you, let's start with a little bit about your background – e.g., what were your first music lessons (piano? trumpet?), and was your family musical?

DW: Music was always in my home. Our family always sang. My mother was a singer, my father played the piano, my sister played the guitar, my brother played the drums. We sang happy birthday in four part harmony since I was a boy at every celebration. We sang in church and my father would make up a chorus to a song and we would take turns making up verses while we drove to the cottage. It drove my mother nuts... My father played the piano. Incredible - everything by ear. He could sit for hours playing tune after tune all by ear. My mother was an opera singer. She studied at the Royal Conservatory with George "Papa" Lambert. The dean of the conservatory at the time was David Ouchterlony. He told her that there were two singers at the Con who were really going to make it big - and she was one of them. The part of the story that I love is that also at the school at the same time was Maureen Forrester and Jon Vickers. My Mother gave up her career to have a family - for which I am very grateful.

My first instrument was the drums. I was 7 years old. Much later I would play them in the high school jazz band when our drummer was sick. I loved it. I miss it! My brother played guitar and after a few years we swapped and I played guitar. Never any lessons - always by ear. My brother and I would jam. Later I played bass guitar. I still have one and pull it out once in a while. I actually played bass with Frank Leahy's band for a few gigs - enough to pay for the bass and amp!

Trumpet came in grade 9 music class. I didn't intend to take music in high school



and had signed up for machine shop (which I thought was woodworking). When I arrived to the first class and saw everyone making metal hammers and screwdrivers I fled. Music was the ONLY class I could fit into my schedule. That was close.

I played jazz in high school and university,

studying privately with Mike Malone from the Phil Nimmons big band. It has stood me in good stead to this day.

My love for classical performance took me away from the jazz for the rest of my university but I still spend some time with it for fun. I play (after a fashion) jazz piano now and have a great time doing background music with my wife, Rosanne.

MT: When did you become interested in conducting, and when did the journey from the back row of the orchestra to the podium begin?

DW: I first conducted my high school band in a transcription of Mozart's "impresario" overture at a 'band-a-thon in 1977. My teacher then told me to pursue it. No way... I took a conducting class at the University of Toronto from Victor Feldbrill. He really told me to pursue it. No way...

I was going to play in an orchestra. Period. During my tenure with the KWS as second trumpet I experienced many thrills but, I must admit, there were also some very disappointing and frustrating times. It was due to these that, for fun, I picked up the bass again. I also took some singing lessons with Victor Martens and Daniel Lichti for a short time. During this time I remembered back to the encouraging comments of my conducting teachers and with my parents help attended the South Carolina conductors institute in 1994. From there I studied with Raffi Armenian at Orford in Quebec. (I learned more from him in the first 1/2 hour than I did during the whole month in South Carolina. This is no exaggeration, honestly). Uri Mayer was a great help to me as was Martin Fischer-Dieskau and Simon Streatfeild. Edwin Outwater has been very good to me and is encouraging me to get out of my comfort zone and spread my wings. I'm grateful to them all for sharing their insights and encouragement.

MT: Was it a difficult transition?

DW: I think the transition was more difficult for my beloved colleagues in the KWS than it was for me. I was in heaven conducting some of Canada's finest musicians in Canada's finest concert hall some of the greatest music ever written! The KWS musicians encouraged me and watched me take baby step after baby step til I learned the craft to a level that now I have guest-conducted orchestras all across Canada. I owe them all a huge debt of gratitude. As well, KWS General Manager Michael Duschenes was a great support to me.

MT: Did becoming a conductor change the orchestral experience for you? That is, when you're sitting back there in the brass section, are you hearing and seeing things



from a conductor's point of view – perhaps especially if someone is conducting a piece you have conducted before?

DW: I think that it has helped me to grow as a musician. I have much more patience with conductors than I did. It's more difficult than you can ever imagine. One funny thing is that the timpani is never loud enough for me when I conduct. When I'm sitting right beside Ron Brown in the orchestra it's loud enough (wow!) but when I'm up front it never occurs to me to tell him to play less! So I have to be aware of my somewhat perverted balance bias! Others are always there to help...

As far as interpretation goes, this drives me crazy. I remember going to a rehearsal (just to listen) of a very prominent orchestra with VERY prominent international conductor and going out of my mind. I had just conducted the piece and knew very well that he was not addressing any of the details of the score. In a way it encouraged me to think that I might not have done such a bad job if given the opportunity. It's much harder to just go to a concert now. I'm always thinking and critiquing and squirming. Drat!

MT: Speaking of transitions, what's it like to conduct both the fully professional KWS and the amateur KWCO? Are there any similarities, or interesting contrasts?

DW: The KWCO is an absolute joy to be with. It's quite different from the KWS as you can imagine. It's really a time to enjoy music on a level where no matter what your ability, you give what you have and we all are richer for it. This happens every week. There is a huge improvement curve from 1st reading to the concert. Huge. It's thrilling. I hold the work that I do with the KWCO as some of my most important. I had an elderly violinist, the dear Ruth Erdman, say to me during a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony: "you know, Dan, I can die now". I asked her what on

earth she meant. She said, "All of my life I have wanted to play this piece. Now I have". She passed away this year. Some people wonder why I keep on with the KWCO. It's a silly question.

The KWS is amazing. As Resident conductor I am required to present concerts with less rehearsals than say, a Signature concert. As a result, the kind of technique required from me is that I must be a communicative of what I want musically just with my body. Not much time to talk (who wants to hear it anyway?) but all done with gesture. It's thrilling/terrifying for all of us sometimes but I know that we've done some really excellent performances on minimal rehearsal. I shared a meal with Bernhardt Gueller, the Music director of Symphony Nova Scotia last year. He admitted to me that he loved conducting - but only the concerts - rehearsals - not so much.

MT: Will conducting a wind band allow you to explore a whole new range of repertoire?

DW: I think this was my biggest concern about the WW. I made it clear that there were many conductors, steeped in the band tradition who would do a great job and would really know the repertoire. They hired me anyway! Some of the repertoire for band is brilliant. We have a pretty good mix of orchestral transcriptions and original band music in the coming season to help the transition. I think I may try my hand at arranging some pieces for the band as well. My predecessor, Michael Purves-Smith is really a master of this and we have reams of excellent arrangements that he has done for them in the WW library.

I think that my sound and articulation concept differs from the standard band concept. The gross stereotype is that bands play while marching. The 1st and 3rd beat of every bar are accompanied by a stomp of the foot (left, then right, I think). My experience with the symphony has shown me that if I beat my baton and have everyone play as my baton hits a certain 'plane' things are relatively together. This percussive baton technique gives musicians a confidence that they know when to come in and sometimes it helps. I know that with this the sound suffers. The sonority gets brittle - the notes short and pecky. With verbal direction you can counter this but not entirely. Real flexibility of phrasing becomes impossible if you are all focusing on the tip of a stick. The musicians in the ensembles I conduct would probably all tell you that my beating sometimes resembles the gyrations of a man falling out of an airplane. I'm not always too clear and that's ok. My effort is to coax a sound that is more sound and less attack than many are comfortable with. Not always or that, too, gets dull. The last concert I did with the WW was an absolute joy. I felt that the musicians gave me the opportunity to experiment with these things and it was very successful. I don't do it to make musician's lives miserable and I must say that there are times when I am very clear. It's more important that musicians are connected aurally with each other than visual-

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ly with me. Raffi used to say that when the orchestra was not together, he would stop beating totally. When he wanted a soft entry he would give virtually no beat. Well, I think there are ways to get what you want without giving the musicians chest pains but I understand what he means.

MT: Given that you play in the KWS, do solo performances, and now have three ensembles to conduct on a regular basis, what do you think a typical week will look like for you during the coming year?

DW: Every week is crazy. I love making music so much - I can't believe how blessed I am to do this for a living. Sunday evenings is WW, Tuesday evenings is

KWCO, I have KWS virtually every week either conducting or playing. Planning for 2010-11 is always being considered. I am guest conducting this year with the Hamilton Philharmonic and several weeks with Orchestra London. I'm involved with a summer festival in Campbellford and am doing 24 orchestral arrangements for an "Electric Thursday" performance with an Elvis act. Crazy ...



a comment from: the KW Symphony . . .



I had known Dan for about three years before I learned about his aspirations to be a conductor. He mentioned to me once while we were on tour that he had started studying with Raffi Armenian. From the time of what I think was his first "big break", when he conducted a piece by John Estacio, he had a solid technique. Since then I've seen him grow into a fine interpreter of music, with a keen sense of balance, always mindful of the big picture.

*John Helmers, KWS Principal Cellist
[seen here in rehearsal with the KW Community Orchestra]*

from the KW Community Orchestra . . .

Dan came to the KWCO like a refreshing breeze that follows a muggy summer's day. His musical credentials were very much in evidence, but he very quickly established a connection with the orchestra members on other levels. The musicians have always been treated as professionals. More than that, and Dan is sensitive to the fact that the players are part of the orchestra because of their love of the music and he has made rehearsals an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Over the years, Dan has raised the calibre of the orchestra, by building on the skills of the players, by attracting a better quality of player, and constantly challenging players with exciting repertoire. Our concerts always feature excellent soloists. He has also improved on the stature of the orchestra as a whole within the community, as he takes an active interest in working within Kitchener-Waterloo, through outreach programs and innovative concerts involving other musical groups. As a result, the orchestra has achieved recognition as an affordable alternative.

Having played under many conductors, in semi-professional and amateur organisations, I have found Dan to be an asset to the KWCO, and I am proud to say that he has been our conductor for over 10 years.

Cindy Wright, KWCO bassoonist



and from Michael Purves-Smith, founder of The Wellington Winds

MT: How did the WW go about deciding whom to choose as a new conductor when they discovered that you were going to step aside?

M.P-S: The Wellington Winds set up a detailed search process of which I am quite proud – not because I had anything to do with it, but because it engendered such good feeling among us all. There were a series of guest conductors. All told, five were considered. Personally, as either an observer or performer, I was struck by the high level of conducting skills and musicianship and I am sure that the members of the group enjoyed the

experience as much as I did. There were, of course, differing opinions on the suitability of the candidates, but I am sure that everyone is happy to have Dan on the podium.

MT: What qualities does Dan have that resulted in the band asking him to fill your place?

M.P-S: Dan is obviously an experienced conductor. He's easy to follow and he is a fine teacher. His ongoing KW symphony playing showed very clearly in his leadership, as it did with one candidate from the TSO. Their hearing standards are shaped thereby to very good effect. Dan is very funny in rehearsal, which greatly enhances the time spent together. His

humour stands out in communicating with the audience as well.

MT: Do you feel confident that the WW are being left in good hands?

M.P-S: Personally, I think that the Wellington Winds will be very well led by Dan, and I think that it is likely that he will bring a new momentum to the job which we all hope will carry the group to a new level of performance. He will face many of the same problems that I did, but there is real excitement about next season. I guess that it will take him a little time to get up to speed on wind ensemble repertoire and I am pretty sure that he is going to want, sooner or later, to

solve the lack of percussion players so that the winds can do more of the wonderful new repertoire that is now available for the genre. I suppose that if I had one word of advice to him it would be to remember, as a brass player, that the woodwinds are essential to the medium and that they need careful and demanding nurturing.



The Wellington Winds