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Henri Temianka Correspondence; (tsmith)

Topper Smith

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LONG BEACH STATE COLLEGE

LONG BEACH 4, CALIFORNIA

September 16, 1964

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Professor Henri Temianka
Music Department
Cal State Long Beach

Dear Professor Temianka:

I want to take this opportunity to welcome you to this campus, and to Long Beach in particular. The institution and community have been in dire need of true professional guidance in the arts for many years; and the addition of your leadership to the existing undisciplined and under-developed human resources should prove to be stimulating to your colleagues as well as satisfying, and perhaps quite surprising to you.

Long Beach is rather a unique community; inasmuch as a tremendous amount of time and money is spent in building interest in instrumental and vocal music at the school level, yet much of this interest is abandoned as soon as graduation day is reached. Thus a large number of well-trained, semi-knowledgeable musicians is allowed to place its talents on the shelf, so-to-speak, to gather adult dust.

Few school districts in the state offer such a complete and competent elementary and secondary music program as is found in this community. One need only attend a concert or listen to a tape of Joe Berger's Stanford Junior High orchestra, or Mike Pappone's group at Millikan High to be immediately impressed with the high quality of technical proficiency, particularly in the string sections.

When the average high school orchestra can boast of a few out-of-tune fiddles and an occasional cello, this year Millikan will present a full complement of winds and brass, balanced by over thirty violins, fifteen celli and twelve basses. This is a typical local situation, and one about which a person with your background should smile in anticipation.

The sad truth, however, is that very little is done to reactivate and recharge this ability for the adults of the community. Certainly we have a symphony orchestra; but its work, considering it is ready to embark on the thirtieth season of dispensing "Culture" to beach society, is very disappointing, seldom rising above the class of post-high school sound.

Personally, I sincerely hope that you will feel inclined to place some roots in various musical endeavors in this community. The service which you can provide--that of the professional who can command professional attitude, response and result--could well be the catalyst to set in motion the tremendous wealth of untapped talent that has lain dormant for so long.

In 1935 the Long Beach Philharmonic, under the direction of an army bandmaster, Robert Resta, began a long and desultory partnership which resulted in little service to the arts. The programs (generally three or four a year) consisted of a steady diet of minor nineteenth century banalities, where individuals, mostly female, got in the way of discipline, and good intentions met with disaster repeatedly. Occasionally, an oddity appeared on a concert (one remembers Svendsen's Second Symphony, which was sent to the orchestra through a publisher's mistake); but mostly the violins' inability to count in "Clair de Lune," and the canonic section of the first movement of the Franck D Minor, which completely fell apart, bringing all concerned to a grinding cyclical halt, are examples we remember with a certain sickly fondness.

Lauris Jones took over the fortunes of local instrumentality a few years ago, and has upgraded the quality considerably. However, he is faced with the stigma of that of the school musician, and cannot command the work from his forces that a professional might.

Through the adult division of Long Beach City College, Royal Stanton founded a choral group known as the Schola Cantorum. It started in 1952 as an alumni offshoot from his LBCC undergraduate organization; but soon grew to such proportions that its membership included most of the accomplished singers in the area, allowing ^{him} to program the largest and most complicated masterworks of any amateur chorus on the West Coast. There were times when the results of the Schola could stack up against the Wagner Chorale, and its reputation was secure in the Southland.

Just as its goal of real professionalism was nearing fruition, disaster struck, as Mr. Stanton moved to Northern California to chair the Fine Arts Department of Foothill College. His replacement, a tympani player from Bakersfield, alienated much of the previous support and interest by announcing at the first rehearsal that the Schola was really going to move into the big time by performing "The Messiah" and "Elijah." In large numbers, talent fled from the Schola; and it has dwindled to practically nothing in the past three years.

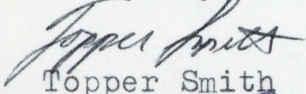
To answer the need for a chamber organization, both vocal and instrumental, the Camerata dei Musici was founded about five years ago, comprising the best singers from the old Schola, and players who felt that the Long Beach Symphony did not satisfy their needs. The singers achieved a certain artistic distinction when led by Henry Lewis in two concert performances of "Acis and Galatea." Later, jealousies about conducting and responsibilities led to a general falling out of some of the membership of this group. It is now trying to guide itself without dynamic leadership, has foundered, and appears to have little future.

Local music criticism has seldom transcended the ridiculous; as the present chief newspaper reviewer, Rachel Morton (an ex-ex opera singer) reveals a style that is unique in its content of opinionated mis-information. Instead of commenting on the musical merits of a performance, she is reduced to a series of horrendous word pictures, containing full-blown sentences depicting

"marching armies," "crashing waves," "cries of the dead and dying," "glorious sunsets," etc. To refer to such criteria as balance between parts, tempi, structural considerations, phrasing, quality of playing . . . , is really above her level of comprehension. However, as I don't care for comic strips, Miss Morton's weekly efforts, as well as Sunday column (which often deals with such relevant subjects as a trip to Hawaii, or the color of Piatagorsky's socks) provides a certain sadistic satisfaction on a dull afternoon.

With this somewhat bleak, and certainly over-long report on contemporary music in this city, I hope you will realize that there are many people with background and interest who will respond to sound and mature leadership. The talent is here. The fact that it has not been consistently harnessed is unfortunate, but not too late for change. I know that I speak for a number of people eager for another opportunity for musical expression and achievement. We were delighted in learning of your appointment at State, and trust that your stay with us will be long and mutually gratifying.

Sincerely,



Topper Smith
Adviser for Student Affairs