



## PERFORMER CORNER

### The Joy of Teaching: An Interview with Jim Hainlen

by Mary Sorlie

*While the focus of the Performer Corner is to feature string players who primarily make their living from performing, the Stillwater School District recently honored a man who has helped many students to achieve that goal. After teaching for 28 years, Jim Hainlen retired from the job that he always considered a joy. His lessons extend beyond the classroom. In the course of this interview, two students and a parent warmly greeted Jim as we were talking. Congratulations and thanks to this remarkable man.*

In June of 2004, Stillwater honored and paid tribute to a man who tirelessly dedicated his time and his heart to educating and nurturing hundreds of orchestra students in the Stillwater School District. This man, Jim Hainlen, retired from the classroom, but left behind hundreds of students who are all the richer for their experiences under him. His orchestras have been honored both locally and nationally for their outstanding work. He led them by the baton, inspired them by poetry and literature and challenged them on a daily basis. The Stillwater Orchestra concerts are the second most popular programs on the Stillwater Cable Access channel, after contentious school board meetings. Many of his students have embraced music as an avocation, while many others have made it a livelihood. It all began for him in his 5<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra.

Jim grew up in Roseville, Minnesota, beginning the violin when he was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He continued playing through high school and ended up at the University of Minnesota, studying music and botany. Upon graduation, he headed for New York City, where he worked in a church. In addition to his church responsibilities, he taught private violin lessons. One of his pupils was Isaac Stern's secretary. After three years in New York, he returned to Stillwater where he was offered a half-time string position. He recalls that he was quite discouraged after this first year.

Shortly after this, he was introduced to Dr. William Jones of the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies. He says that it was at this time that he realized he didn't know anything about string teaching. He pursued a Masters Degree in String Development at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and studied under Marvin Rabin. He taught in Wisconsin for one year and

then returned to Stillwater. At this time, there were 15 students in the high school orchestra.

Believing that one is to "grow where you are planted," Jim began his amazing tenure at Stillwater High School in 1979. There are currently 150 students in the high school orchestra program. There are three full orchestras and one chamber orchestra. In the Stillwater District, there are 700 string students.

One of the biggest concerts the orchestra sponsors each year is the Lullaby program. This is a concert where young visitors and audience members get to see and touch the instruments first hand. Activities for these concerts are based on the theme for that year. Students brainstorm for yearly themes. Over the years, money from this concert has been raised for the Jacob Wetterling Foundation, the International Hearing Foundation, the Stillwater Public Library Children's Room and Courage Center. This has truly turned into a com-



Jim Hainlen

munity event.

In 1984, Jim became frustrated and did some soul searching. He figured out what he could do best and put that focus into his teaching. He says, "You cannot be something you are not." He realized that his strong points were creativity, poetry and working with kids. He began to tie the parallel between poetry and music to his classes on a daily basis. He would constantly ask his students, "What does this piece of music say?" Stillwater sophomore Lauren Anastos says, "He was able to tie the music together with poetry and teach us that all music tells a story."

Jim recalls that teaching has been a joy for him. He has summed up five areas that have been crucial in his teaching years.

- 1) **Identify and nurture talented students at a young age.** This should not be limited to string students. Talk with parents of young students. Encourage them to take private lessons, attend summer camps and participate in youth orchestras. Students will know from an early age that the teacher is supportive and encouraging.
- 2) **8<sup>th</sup> grade is a pivotal year in the development of string students.** This is a year where students *must* make great technical leaps. Stillwater holds a concerto competition for 5<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> graders where 2 winners perform with the High School Chamber orchestra. This can and does create a huge interest for the students.
- 3) **Expect and learn to deal with stage parents.** Work with those parents and show them what opportunities will be available. It is important to let them know what the boundaries are and not to let them dictate the use of orchestra

time.

- 4) **A student's success is shared by many people.** Many people are involved in a student's progress. Be quick to share the credit for what the students have accomplished. Parents, guardians, private teachers, summer camps, and youth orchestra directors are all involved.
- 5) **Teach high achieving students as if they are ten years older than they are.** Use technical musical language. Students need to know the musical map of the piece as the composer would have conceived it. Students learn that music is much bigger than they are.

The biggest problem that Jim has found in string education today is the lack of preparation. He has found that student teachers could not conduct basic beat patterns, nor did they know the clefs and transpositions in the score. Because of this lack of preparation, he stopped accepting student teachers.

The impact of Jim Hainlen's teaching has been broad and far-reaching.

World-class musicians such as Sir Neville Mariner and the Juilliard String Quartet have worked with Stillwater High School students. Graduates have attended the finest conservatories in the country, including Juilliard, New England Conservatory, Eastman School of Music, Oberlin College and Cleveland Institute of Music.

Jim looks back at his teaching years with a heart of gratitude. He is thankful that music and teaching have helped him to understand life better. He says, "Technical matters will find their place. It is not about teaching the difference between F natural and F sharp. It is the parallels between our musical journey and life that students will remember."

*Mary Sorlie is an active as a free-lance violinist in the Twin Cities. Mary is a frequent guest conductor and string clinician in the Midwest. She has been on the conducting staff of the MacPhail Center Suzuki program and is currently in her 4<sup>th</sup> season as conductor for the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies. ‡*

## Baton Grace

by Jim Hainlen (June 12, 2004)

*Hold up a stick,  
any white stick that is  
perfectly balanced and  
bounces to both  
Beethoven and Barber,*

*Ask the obvious.  
Why do they follow?*

*Why do these musicians  
connect the subtlest gesture  
of air, ear, and eye?*

*Playing fortissimo con moto,  
when the white,  
slashes the air,  
from head to belly,  
after one gigantic Brahms rest.*

*Why weep on a quarter  
and two eighths,  
where the right hand beats time,  
and the left,  
sculpts the infinite air into  
an hour glass of Beethoven and  
stillness?*

*If I knew  
or understood,*

*I doubt the meaning,  
could be contained by the moment.*

*To abandon hope.  
That is easy.  
Too easy.*

*But the gestures of hope,  
Half-formed circles of the hand,  
Arms arched in anacrusis,  
A Chickadee equally nimble,  
Feeding up or down  
In the fringes of the Birch branches...*

*To stand back in solitude  
And sing, "Komm susser Tod."  
To be old enough  
To have glimpsed  
sweet death and God  
in the same sunnigh moment,*

*First one voice,  
Then two,  
Then all of us  
Connected by a white baton  
Over all the years,*

*That is grace.*