

High *Notes*

SEVEN DECADES OF A
Journey in Music

BY PETER AVERI

Cover photograph: The Assembly Hall organ at Temple Square,
Salt Lake City, Utah

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By Peter Averì

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*Dedicated to the many hundreds of instrumentalists, singers,
orchestras, bands, choirs, music students,
arts administrators, broadcasters and producers with whom it
was my privilege to be associated.*

*And to the countless thousands who came to hear the music
in concert halls, churches, theatres and studios, as well as the
unseen audiences who listened on radio and watched on
television.*

*With my gratitude for being one of the performers through
seven decades of music making.*

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FOREWORD

By Alexandra K Averì

When my father asked me to write the foreword for this book, I was reminded of the unusual upbringing that my sister and I were privileged to have, with two professional musicians as parents. In our childhood years our family was part of a vibrant arts scene, where many local and overseas musicians were regularly hosted in our home. For us, the continuous cycle of rehearsals, concerts and private practice was our daily normality.

Working on various stages of the manuscript has brought back many recollections of names, people and places over the years, and has reminded me of the value of keeping so many jointly held memories and people's names alive, as well as of preserving the historical archive.

In his excellent book "Dominion" Tom Holland explores the word "saeculum". The original word, dating as far back as Etruscan culture, denoted a time period approximating the span of a human life or of human recollection, in which the living memory of a person or event would endure. After that, the memories would be consigned to text or images that would be harder to bring to life for succeeding generations who lacked the first-hand personal and emotional connection. We might now consider that a "saeculum" would be close to one hundred years, corresponding to the living connection to a person and their stories through the next one or two generations.

It was Augustine of Hippo who, after the destruction of Rome in AD410, coined the word "secularia" ("secular things") from "saeculum", to denote those things which would pass away, eventually being lost to the passing of generations.

Thus, "secular" can be better understood as representing the temporal as opposed to the eternal, rather than a looser connotation of the worldly as opposed to the sacred.

My father's 90 years are nearing the span of one such saeculum, with his living voice recording memories of life in the 1930s Depression era, and the advent of technology, media and ideological shifts that have helped shape the development of New Zealand's governmental, economic, information, business, church and community landscape as we now know it.

Not only has he worked in the "sacred" space of church music written to

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express the numinous, eternal sensibilities of worship, but he has had a career in the “secular” space of music written to capture the heart and emotion of how people and society function. And here the concepts holistically intertwine.

Musical fashions and trends have completely altered much of the church music landscape, although there are still many who treasure the felt connection to the divine in churches or recitals where the music from centuries past soars upward, like a Gothic cathedral, in its reaching toward the eternal God of the universe, however they conceive that to be.

In the “secular” music area, the organ, symphony orchestras and classical ensembles still awaken a sense of awe in audiences as they perform the towering works of great composers from one, two or three hundred years ago, but these sounds are being experienced by new generations in a culturally fresh way, whilst the trends of the multiple genres of “modern” music gain traction as they also have their moment in the sun.

The social commentary of the satirical Gilbert and Sullivan operas is nowadays being reinterpreted and updated for modern generations steeped in a different set of social norms and scandals. The great archetypal fables and stories told in classical opera are now frequently staged in fresh ways to make them more relatable.

Just as my father reflects on “High Notes” as a motif for life itself, I too have grown up knowing experientially the value of nurturing a lifelong love of music and music-making. Increasingly, social and medical research points to not only the direct brain benefits of learning a musical instrument, but also the value of music as part of the fabric of a healthy society, and as a community and social good.

Through my own career as a cello teacher, I have taught students of all ages with the aim not just to train them in technical skills, but also to instil in them a love of music as the inspiration to stay with the journey, through the low notes of challenges and frustrations, and the high notes of triumph and pure joy. My father refers to receiving a significant and affirming early word of encouragement as a young organist, which served as his personal north star throughout his career.

His life story recounts his lengthy career in broadcasting that charts a parallel course with the development of radio in New Zealand, with personal insight into how technology and the advent of television impacted that development and the opportunities it provided.

Alongside and interwoven with the broadcasting story is the development of New Zealand’s national orchestra, as well as my father’s career as an organist and conductor in multiple arenas of musical activity. The rich mix of community, semi-professional and professional groups and events in

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which he has been involved throughout his life, reflects the rich and diverse New Zealand cultural landscape of the last nine decades.

Today, in a post-covid world dominated by social media and on-demand entertainment options, it seems that our society is increasingly fragmented and scoring much lower on all measures of community, wellbeing, empathy and humanity. Perhaps more music-making might help us all to find a gentler way forward.

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