

Conducting Business

Conductor Alexander Adiarte remembers his cat mask, St. Paul Academy, Yale School of Music, and reveals how a Philippine-American musician finds himself in Stuttgart.

Editor's Note: This is the second interview in a new occasional series on former Orff Schulwerk students.

Q: Your parents originally came from the Philippines and settled in the Twin Cities. When did your musical training begin?

Adiarte: After attending various musical trolley courses, trying out different instruments, I began violin lessons at the age of five. At my school we had regular Orff music classes as well as opportunities to perform in the school orchestra, choir, and yearly musicals. I took advantage of all of these.

Q: What are your memories of Orff training in school?

Adiarte: I remember the xylophones, percussion instruments, singing in circles, and various musical games. Above all, I remember the positive energy of my music teacher. In fifth grade, I was one of ten students selected to go to the Carl Orff Canada National Conference in Winnipeg. We performed "The Cat Came Back" (Harry S. Miller) and I was the cat with my cat mask continually surviving every disaster!



Alexander Adiarte

Q: When did you begin to think about becoming a professional musician?

Adiarte: As well as playing violin with our high school orchestra, I played in the MacPhail Chamber Orchestra. One year we toured in Lyon, France

where we had a partner school. My experiences during this exchange made me think seriously about being a professional musician. A few years later, after an intense and enjoyable summer at music camp I decided to pursue this career.

Q: At Yale you were a music major. How and when did you consider conducting?

Adiarte: During my studies, I realized that conductors must simultaneously incorporate both the analytical and performance aspects of music, leading to a greater understanding of the music. It was my music theory professor who suggested I try conducting. At first, I observed conductors from the vantage point of a violinist. Eventually, I became interested and curious enough to try it out. During my junior year at Yale, I founded a chamber orchestra, which I conducted, and have continued to conduct ever since.

Q: After a year working as a freelance violinist in Chicago, you went to Leipzig where you received a diploma in conducting. Now, several years later, you are still in Germany.

Adiarte: After completing my conducting diploma, I was lucky to be

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accepted at Tanglewood and returned to the United States to spend the summer there. However, I decided that I still had a lot to learn in Germany and went back to work as a freelancer in the Stuttgart area. After a few years, I was offered the full-time tenured position I have now as orchestra director at Stuttgarter Musikschule. I am now responsible for developing and organizing four different orchestras, as well as teaching conducting. In addition, I

continue to conduct a choir to maintain my connection to vocal music.

Q: How has Orff training affected your conducting?

Adiarte: Orff training was an important part of my musical training. The rhythmic aspect of Orff teaching has contributed to my development of a good sense of rhythm, essential to being a good conductor.

Q: What advice do you have for aspiring conductors?

Adiarte: Dive into music and get involved in music making as much as you can—as a performer, conductor, and listener. Take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. It doesn't matter what kind of ensemble you might be conducting. It's the whole process of learning to make decisions musically and personally that's important.

Q: How do you feel about your career choice?

Adiarte: I feel very fortunate that I'm able to make music as my living. It's a great way to live, and it's exciting to think about the path that has brought me to this point. I'm fortunate to have had teachers whose inspiration and passion made an impact on me. Now that I'm teaching at the school, it's exciting for me to be on the other side and to be inspiring others to make music.

Alexander's music teacher at St. Paul Academy was Jane Frazee, founder of the University of St. Thomas graduate programs in music education, recipient of the International Pro Merito Award from the Carl Orff Foundation as well as the AOSA Distinguished Service Award, past president of AOSA, international presenter, author of many books about Orff Schulwerk, and recently elected into the Minnesota Music Educators Association Hall of Fame. ■

Pam Hetrick is a member of The Orff Echo Editorial Board.