

**Interview for the Czech daily newspaper *Rovnost* (Equality)
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Interview by Josef Vojacek
Translated from the Esperanto by David Gaines

JV: Can you say something about yourself, your beginnings in music and as a composer?

DG: I am from the United States, and was born there in the state of Connecticut, not far from New York City, in 1961. I didn't become a musician until I was 13, at school, when one of the music teachers showed me a euphonium. I received a lot of encouragement concerning euphonium playing specifically and music in general from my teachers! Nine years later, in college, where I was studying music, I decided to become a composer and I began to write my own music. So I now perform in public very rarely, but I've been a composer for the last 17 years.

JV: How did you get to know Esperanto? Was that related to music in some way?

DG: It had nothing to do with music. When I was a teenager, I had already studied Hebrew and began to study Spanish. All languages interested me, and I enjoyed studying them. Somehow I discovered the word "Esperanto" and found a textbook for Americans (*Esperanto: The World Interlanguage* by George Alan Connor) in the local library. I taught myself, as was the custom in the United States at that time (maybe still!), and joined ELNA (the Esperanto League for North America). When I moved to Washington in 1985, I became an activist in the local Esperanto society there and president of the Esperanto Society of Washington, D.C. for two years. These days I'm a delegate for the World Esperanto Association, a member of ELNA, and conduct activities related to the Music Esperanto League.

I still believe that it is important to put Esperanto books in local libraries, so that others like me can discover the international language for themselves.

JV: How did you get into contact with the Moravian Philharmonic in Olomouc?

DG: The company that is producing my compact disc—MMC Recordings of Boston—has a relationship with that orchestra and others in eastern Europe. So MMC was the go-between.

JV: Why exactly did you choose Olomouc for the premiere performance of your Symphony No. 1?

DG: Well, I had a choice when I planned the project with MMC. Other possibilities were the London Symphony in the UK, as well as orchestras in Warsaw and Prague. However, I had a small amount of support vs. the possible costs, so I chose an orchestra which fit my budget. The other orchestras I just mentioned were, unfortunately, too expensive. But at the same time, I knew well that the eastern European orchestras are excellent and trustworthy, even though the expense is comparatively cheap.

JV: Texts in Esperanto are not customary for such compositions. What guided you to the use of this (certainly for some people) “strange” language?

DG: It wasn't a strange thing for me at all. The symphony was my doctoral dissertation, and when I entered the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore in 1992, I knew that I wanted to write something related to Esperanto, in order to give something special to the movement in terms of culture. I had that one chance to do it, so I said to myself, why not? So in 1994 I began the planning and compositional work, and began to write what would become the first symphony with Esperanto text ever composed, as far as I know.

JV: Can you say something about the creation/composition of the symphony and about its principal themes?

DG: Well, an exact answer to that would probably last for several hours! Briefly, I will say that I first decided on the instruments which would make up the orchestra. It is an unusually large orchestra, with saxophones and tenor tuba (euphonium), and a huge amount of percussion instruments. I wanted to have as many sounds as possible at my disposal, because I was dealing with a “world symphony” which expresses the usefulness of the international language, no?

The second step was to collect together appropriate texts to use for the voice. In 1994 I travelled to Great Britain and Bulgaria to do that, and had success in finding poems (one by Dr. Marjorie Boulton, the famous Esperanto writer, and one from a comparatively unknown Bulgarian woman, Penka Papazova). In addition, I decided to use an excerpt from Dr. Zamenhof's speech at the 1910 World Congress of Esperanto in the U.S.A., during his only visit to my country. Finally, I myself wrote a short poem for the last movement. All the texts deal in some way with the idea of freedom, which is a popular theme in the United States. Musically, the listener will be able to hear influences from various places....American composers from the middle of the twentieth century; Bulgarian rhythms and harmonies; a bit from Brazil, and perhaps other influences that have climbed into my compositional thoughts.

JV: Was it difficult to get such a well-known singer as Kimball Wheeler to sing the Esperanto texts?

DG: No, because a relationship existed between her and MMC Recordings. The head of MMC, William Thomas McKinley, is himself a very well-known American composer and had used her previously for some projects. He recommended Kimball because she has a strong mezzo-soprano voice, and the symphony requires that.

JV: What do you have to say about the recording of the symphony prior to the concert?

DG: Well, it's a very, very difficult work, and in a perfect world there would have been weeks of rehearsals, and we only had one day! But the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra is an extremely professional collection of musicians and they worked hard to produce as good a recording as

possible. Aside from some problems in that regard, it was excellent and I'm certain that the final product will be very pleasing to the worldwide Esperanto community.

JV: How was the concert paid for, since it was free for the audience?

DG: It is a tradition to have a free concert in Olomouc at the end of recording sessions for MMC. It's a pre-arranged part of the whole cost.

JV: Do you feel any sort of difference in getting to know people when you are, after a concert, surrounded by English-speaking people or Esperantists?

DG: Yes, undoubtedly the Esperantists were much more enthusiastic and congratulatory! Because of that I will always be touched and thankful. Without them I would have felt a little bit alone (outside of "Esperantujo" I am unknown in the Czech Republic). But it is always that way for contemporary composers, even when they attempt to write something that the ordinary listener can understand and enjoy.

JV: Would you like to add anything about the concert, about Olomouc, or about the Czech Republic?

DG: Just the fact that the concert even took place was excellent and praiseworthy. In the USA, in a comparatively small city [such as Olomouc], that would not have been possible. Also the ability to use one of your good orchestras, and to see the musicians working to create something excellent, with a conductor who believed in my music.....an incredible thing. Moreover, Olomouc is such a beautiful city and Czechs everywhere seem friendly to me. And I must confess that I like your beer very much. I will never forget the word *pivo* [beer]!

I want to thank Mr. Vit Micka, the conductor, for his work and friendship; Elliot McKinley of MMC for his knowledgeable guidance of the whole project; the experts Radek and Aleš, the producer and engineer, who will create the final compact disc master; everyone at the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra (I wish that I had been able to meet more of the musicians); everyone at the Moravian Restaurant and the Hotel Gemo and Hotel Flora; and finally all of the Esperantists who came from across the whole country to see the concert. I will never forget you all.