



Dr. Jeffrey Schoyen

Conductor of the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra

You have been a member of an orchestra in places such as New York, Pittsburgh, Louisiana and Mexico. Where and what have been your fondest moments?

My fondest moments have been at Tanglewood [Music Center], working under great artists like [Leonard] Bernstein, [Aaron] Copland, [Kurt] Masur, [Seiji] Ozawa, and [André] Previn. I remember the students there, of which I was one, wondering what was in the two silver goblets that Bernstein had. We heard that one was water and the other scotch! Who knows?

My wife, Sachiho Murasugi, who is a very accomplished violinist, and I performed as principals of an orchestra in Mexico for a season. The orchestra was called the Filarmonica del Bajío or Orchestra of the flatlands.

We had a great time there. One time a woman in a shop who had heard us at a concert came up and just gave us a cake! It was such an act of kindness and generosity.

Other stories that I like to tell are about singers that I worked with while playing in the Pittsburgh Opera Orchestra. [Luciano] Pavarotti was such a personality, as was [Sherrill] Milnes. I remember getting on an elevator with Milnes in it. He had on a long fur coat which made him seem gigantic. He's a big guy anyway. And what a voice. I tell my students sometimes that when these guys sing, you can actually see their backs and sides bellow in and out.

As an assistant professor at Salisbury University and the director of Salisbury Symphony Orchestra, how important do you think music programs are in college students as well as school-aged children?

Music programs at all levels are of the utmost importance. College

students playing in my orchestra may or may not be music majors, but they will probably play music for the rest of their lives. They may be a future Arts supporter, maybe a board member, or very possibly someone who uses their music experience to be better at their chosen job. Music studies teach responsibility, discipline, creativity and higher level thinking, all things that the future work force will need. Music keeps kids in school just like sports does. Just as many kids, maybe more, study the arts in school as kids who play sports. For me, music created ties to the world. Music involves history, psychology, math, science, etc. As a kid I loved this. I read books on Bach and books about Stradivari. I was totally hooked at about age 11.

I hear you serve on the faculty of Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Twin Lake, Mich., during the summer. What type of camp is this and how has it personally impacted your life?

Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp is a neat place. I get a little rustic cabin to stay in, and my family usually comes too. My daughter loves it, staying the entire time, running around in the woods, roasting marshmallows, etc. I teach cello during the day, and play in the faculty orchestra in the afternoons. The people there are very nice, and it's run very well. All the kids wear uniforms, and so does the faculty (if you don't wear the official blue you will be easily spotted as a stranger). If you are looking for a place that your child can go to in the Midwest, I highly recommend it.

Besides the cello, do you play any other instruments, and what has been the hardest piece you've had to learn?

I play a bit of violin, a good deal of bass (I teach bass at SU), and a whole lot of cello! When I conduct the Salisbury Symphony Orchestra, my approach is really one of a player. I never liked conductors who talked down to the orchestra, or tried to blame the orchestra for things. Being a professional cellist has given me the opportunity to see things as a player.

The most difficult piece I've ever played is the Carter Cello Sonata. It's got tons of notes, all over the cello (and piano), and it's a brainy sort of piece, yet, when you play it, the overall effect is very powerful and moving. It took me several months to just learn the notes, more time to really get to know it.

What would we be most surprised to learn about you?

I was the Georgia High School All Class Discus Champion in 1978. Music and sports have much in common but that's another interview!

Do you have a favorite childhood memory?

I have so many great childhood memories, but one musical one stands out. I had seen the demonstration by the new strings teacher at my elementary school. I came home and looked up the cello in the dictionary and saw a photo of a little boy playing it. I said, "that's what I want to play!" So, my mother went to rent it one day when I was in school. I knew all day that this was the day. When I got home I ran in and asked, "Mom, where's the cello?" She said, "In the car, but you can't touch it yet, you don't know enough about it." So, I went out to the carport and stared into the backseat to see the cello. There it was, in its cloth case. I was ten years old, and I didn't know it at the time, but I was looking at the thing that would shape my entire life.^M

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