

The Men (and some women) of Note

Founded at DePauw in 1963 ... celebrating 50 years of original music:

In 1963 Kappa Tau Kappa, then DePauw's interfraternity council, asked Dorn Younger '64* to form a men's singing group for campus performances. Frank Jacobs '66** was recruited as pianist and also helped Younger recruit other singers. Dorn's several original close-harmony arrangements of popular music from the 1930s through the 1950s distinguished our group from both DePauw groups and other universities' groups.

Soon the KTK Glee Club was re-named The Men of Note at the suggestion of David Kingsley '64, a charter member singer and organizer of the DePauw Community Sing at Alumni Reunion Weekend. Numerous performances followed in 1963, mostly a cappella.

Frank took over after Dorn graduated in January 1964. According to The DePauw at the time, he focused on discipline to create a smaller, more functional group for performance and travel. Forty-four singers were reduced to twenty-two, and eventually narrowed to a range of 14-18 performers who regarded rehearsal as an almost sacred obligation. Rehearsals were fun, spiked with college humor, doubling as a gathering place for a rare yet healthy mix of independents and fraternity men, as well as music students and liberal arts majors.

Frank added string bass and drums to some of Dorn's songs and introduced the Quarternotes, a foursome with acoustic guitar, focusing on folk music and humor. I can still remember someone's mom approaching me after a packed Mother's Day concert in 1964, our first in Meharry Hall, the largest campus venue at the time. She enthusiastically exclaimed, "I heard the Purdue Glee Club a couple of weeks ago and you guys sound better!"

More innovation followed, including marimba accompaniment by Linda Coleman Johnson '66, a regular guest performer who met and married a Men of Note performer, Joe Johnson '66. Later came electric guitar and bass, and eventually strings; more original charts including "That Boy by the Beatles" and "Cherish" by the Association, arranged by John "Mac" Lawrence '69; and some experiments in staging and recording. Almost all the instrumentalists were School of Music students.

Younger's arrangement of "Little Girl Blue" was probably the most requested song when the Men of Note serenaded women's dorms and sororities before "women's hours" ended in the late 1960s. Under Frank, we expanded appearances off campus, from the prison near Terre Haute to Indianapolis TV and from Greencastle High School to performances with the Indianapolis Sinfonietta. Frank and the late Joe Hughes '66, the Men of Note's treasurer at the time, used campus concert revenues to produce a professionally recorded album of live

* Dorn Younger graduated in January 1964 from DePauw's School of Music with distinction and a major in music composition. In 1965 he earned his M.A. in composition from the University of Redlands in California.

** Frank Jacobs '66 earned a B.A. in Music from DePauw in 1966 and a B.A. in Psychology in 1967. He went on to receive a masters in Choral Conducting from Occidental College in Los Angeles and a DMA from the University of Illinois.

concert selections in 1966. Some aired on 50KW powerhouse WJR in Detroit, when AM still ruled radio. We offered an occasional alternative to the Motown Sound *in* Motown!

Back on campus, competition tightened with the Collegians, the coed group that had been pleasing student audiences with choreographed Broadway tunes since 1949. By 1965-66, the Men of Note and Collegians both were keeping track of ticket sales to see who would sell out Meharry Hall first!

David Cryer '58 became the Collegians star on Broadway (returning to campus in recent years to join students in performance), while ours became the late Jack McWethy '69, who brought down the house in Meharry with his original Duke of Earl student solo. Jack went on to become chief White House correspondent at U.S. News & World report in the late 1970s after ABC news and sports chief Roone Arledge famously spotted Jack at a news conference, said "Get me that kid!," and hired him!

In 2003, Jack retired after nearly 20 years as chief national security correspondent for ABC-TV News. He returned to campus often, serving on prestigious panels and working with students at the Center for Contemporary Media and The DePauw. I was news director at an NPR station when Jack and I got in touch a few times between the late 1980s and early this millenium, planning a possible get-together in D.C. That never happened but on 9/11/2001 Jack fled the Pentagon to report live from a nearby lawn. The irony of his 2008 accidental death on a Colorado ski slope at age 61, after being shot at in Mogadishu and other hellholes around the world, still bothers me.

The Men of Note and Collegians made peace, joining on stage in the spring of 1967 for a memorable concert that included strings and a jazzy joint performance of a Bach fugue made popular by the Swingle Singers.

The Men of Note also represented the USA in a summer performance at Expo '67, the World's Fair in Montreal. We had a great visit; just don't ask about the weather! (OK, it rained on our outdoor venue, but we sang anyway -- and on the way over we thrilled a group of English tourists on the train with our take on Old King Cole, complete with lyrics considered controversial by some at the time.)

1967-1968 was tough. After Frank finished his undergraduate work and half the singers graduated, the late Ed Williams '69 was left with far fewer men. But he persevered. The group thrived under him and numerous successors through 1988 and beyond, including Bob Hartigan '74 and Matt Patterson '81.

The Men of Note's 25th Anniversary concert in 1988 brought over 40 student and alumni singers on stage at Meharry. Three groups performed selections from three eras. David Kingsley remembers-- and a poor quality audience video shows-- singers gathered around Dorn whooping and clapping like a football team thrilled with their quarterback's last touchdown pass.

The last reported yearbook reference to the Men of Note appears in the late 1990s.

Fast-forward to Old Gold Weekend 2004: Dorn Younger and Frank Jacobs had no contact whatsoever for 40 years when they met on campus in 2004 for the Old Gold reunion concert, joined by the student group DePauw Capella. But here, their casual association as students was able to evolve into a much stronger bond that included included DePauw spouses Arlene Harlow Jacobs '66 and Patricia Gates Younger '63. Within months Dorn was composing music for the Summit Choral Society (SCS) in Akron, OH, which Frank founded in 1990. Frank remains artistic director for more than 300 singers including children's groups conducted by Arlene, who is in high demand as a conductor of children's choirs and guest clinician.

In one notable 2005 result, Frank and the State Department arranged for today's "Duke" and guest conductor, Tim "soloist-in-chief" Grodrian '67, to sing tenor solo with Frank conducting at a sold-out concert in Beijing, China. Tim sang Bach's Mass in B Minor at the Forbidden City Concert Hall, with the late Joe Hughes' daughter, Karen Hughes Beacom '05, joining him for a duet before an audience of 3,000. Tim's wife Marilyn Lightner Grodrian '68 joined them.

In 2007, Dorn and Patricia joined Frank and Arlene for an SCS concert tour of Europe, where Arlene conducted Dorn's new choral works for children in major cathedrals before enthusiastic audiences in Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic. Marilyn and Tim Grodrian made the trip, too.

More importantly since the pivotal 2004 alumni reunion concert, Dorn has composed over 20 new choral works for the Summit Choral Society, including a 20-minute piece with full orchestra commemorating Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday. Children with the SCS love his work, saying it's challenging and fun to sing. Recently Dorn also wrote music for a very talented trombone quintet which will premiere later this year by Tromboteam!, a professional ensemble which includes John Grodrian, Tim's son, who is joining us on stage for our Alumni Reunion Weekend 50th Anniversary performance.

SCS named a scholarship after Dorn for college-bound high school seniors, one of who attended DePauw this year. Currently SCS is producing a CD with all of Dorn's recent choral compositions. More recent works, one with the 23rd Psalm as its text, have arrived but have not yet been performed or recorded.

Dorn accomplished all of this despite being diagnosed with ALS in early 2010. He keeps Patricia busy and continues to write music in their Connecticut home. His, or perhaps I should say theirs, is an inspiring story for all, and all of us in the Men of Note are grateful for the recognition he is receiving from DePauw for his accomplishments as a "Composer of Note."

We hope our "then and now" story will inspire other alumni to return more often to campus, given that a large body of great new music -- not to mention fun traveling abroad! - - resulted from these fine men reuniting at DePauw after 40 years of no contact.

by John A. "Jack" Thomas '67

Charter member and successor to Roger Hunt '65 as business manager