

## **David Beyer Tribute Story**

*October 31, 2021*

### *David Beyer Spoke Our Language*

Good afternoon, friends and family of David Beyer. My name is Claye Metelmann and I have the privilege of relaying a tribute story that I wrote in David's honor on behalf of the University Lutheran community. I'm calling it "David Beyer Spoke Our Language." While this story speaks to my particular experience of David, I'm sure many of you will find common themes with yours.

David was the first person to welcome me to University Lutheran when I started attending services here in 1989. I don't mean this literally – for surely others had audibly welcomed me, like Chris Pollari, who is probably our best welcomer, and likely then-pastors Susan Thomas and Fred Reisz. But I mean welcomed me in the sense of making me feel like I belonged here. He was UniLu's music director at that time, which was a solo gig back in those days, entailing organist, pianist, choir director, music selection/planning, and "musical-standards-maintaining" responsibilities.

For David, music was always a way to bring people together, so it is natural that he brought me into the UniLu fold through participation in the UniLu choir. I was fortunate to be in the same cohort as David Hoglund and Ann Ferentz – Harvard

graduate students at the time – and dear friends over these many years who we're all still privileged to sing with today. As music director and music director emeritus, David Beyer's investment in building a music program, singing in the choir, performing benefit concerts for the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter in our basement, and cultivating belonging at University Lutheran was a long-term engagement – lasting more than 50 years!

Despite his quiet demeanor, David was known for taking on big projects that often drew on his wide network of musician friends and contacts across greater Boston. The first project I participated in of this scale was Robert Ray's *Gospel Mass*. Here he convinced renowned local interpreter of gospel, Nick Page, to conduct, while David provided soulful gospel piano. Apparently, it was this concert that inspired Ann Ferentz to ask David about joining the choir. Ann also recalled David asking Ann and I to sing the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm antiphonally from the chapel for Maundy Thursday early in her years here. It was Ann's first solo gig. For those of you who don't know Ann, she turned her interest in vocal music, which was sparked in this setting, into an evening and weekend career as a soloist and light opera performer extraordinaire. David was a champion and confidence builder of all who stepped up to perform.

The second large-scale musical undertaking I remember was Benjamin Britten's Christmas cantata *Ceremony of Carols* – this was a collaboration between David and then-interim-director Joel Speerstra during one of David's rare sabbaticals. When the program was announced, I was stunned that we would take on something so ambitious. But David drew on his massive musical-favor rolodex – including finding an amazing harpist – and Joel drew on the endless energy of youth, and somehow we pulled it off. Karen Speerstra sang the lovely lullaby for the baby Jesus *Balulalow* and Ann Ferentz and Kristin Odmark sang the ethereal soprano duet *Spring Carol* that closes this most unusual of Yuletide Cantatas.

But word has it that David's most incredible musical undertaking happened in 1983, well before I darkened University Lutheran's doors: David Schwartz's *Godspell*. Apparently, it began as a whisper "maybe we should do some songs from *Godspell*" and ended with more than 700 audience members witnessing six full-scale productions over two weekends right here in Uni Lu's chancel and nave. There was a band, there were costumes, there was dancing (yes, dancing!) and there were lighting experts. This effort left such an impression that congregation members were still talking about it when I joined nearly 7 years after it happened. Interestingly, 1983 was also the year we first agreed to open our basement to people experiencing homelessness in Harvard Square – a ministry that continues

to this day and a ministry for which David did many fundraising concerts in the years following his retirement as music director.

The last David-inspired musical extravaganza that I had the privilege to be a part of was his wedding ceremony. He and fellow UniLu professional musician Gisela Krause were married here in 1995. I remember being awestruck by the talent the two of them assembled for the event. In particular, I remember a setting for recorders of *The Hornpipe* from Handel's *Watermusic* that was played with remarkable virtuosity. The UniLu choir performed David Wilcox's lovely arrangement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century English hymn *Christ the Appletree*.

Another favorite memory of late-vintage David Beyer was when -- during the quiet months of summer when the organ loft was too warm and the distance between musician and our smaller summer congregation too vast -- David would play the piano in the chancel for all of the service music. I remember the intimate elegance of these services and recognizing in those moments that piano playing was his first musical love.

David's style as music director was collaborative, welcoming of input from the musicians-in-training in the congregation. David respected our experience. David asked questions, rather than give orders. David sought input in areas where he

knew he wasn't the expert, frequently consulting his life and musical partner Gisela Krause, for example, on German text pronunciations. He would always ask Gisela to read and translate the texts for us. For David, the poetry was music and the music was poetry. In fact, I think he loved the German language as much as he loved the music. He always seemed to relish its onomatopoeic character. When I went digging in the choir shelves in the balcony last week for what we fondly called "Das Bach Buch" I found Bach's chorale setting of *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein* bookmarked with a clip. I decided it was destiny that these words be read in David's honor in their original poetry at the close of this story. It has been said that Bach himself found comfort in this work in his final hours.

Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein  
Und wissen nicht, wo aus noch ein,  
Und finden weder Hilf noch Rat,  
Ob wir gleich sorgen früh und spat,  
So ist dies unser Trost allein,  
Dass wir zusammen insgemein  
Dich anrufen, o treuer Gott,  
Um Rettung aus der Angst und Not.

When we are in highest need  
And we know not where to look for aid,  
And we can't find help or counsel  
Because we worry day and night,  
Then this our comfort is alone,  
That we may meet before Thy throne,  
And cry, O faithful God,  
Rescue us from our anxiety and need.

Yes, David Beyer spoke our language. The language of radical welcome and belonging, the language of striving for excellence, the language of poetry, the language of music, the language of love. Rhut wohl lieber David.

—Claye Metelmann