

Viva Voce



Rob Goodling, Music Man

By Carol Crocca



From tuba to tenor, Rob Goodling has made music so much of his life and shared it with so many. He is now retired from 28 years as Director of Vocal Music at Churchville-Chili High School. Rob was responsible for all types of vocal music: directing choruses and other ensembles, teaching voice, and directing musicals. He spent many years adjudicating the NYSSMA competitions, and is still called upon to judge those competitions as well as others. Rob says he loved his whole tenure there - it was so satisfying to watch students mature into young adults over four years and to see the part music played in this growth. Especially gratifying has been his long-standing relationship with Renée Fleming. He was her first voice teacher (after her mother) - they both started at the high school on the same day - and Rob has had many exciting experiences at operas and premieres through her friendship.

He came to his career from a very diverse experience as an instrumentalist, conductor, singer, and musical theater whiz. As a young music student, he played the violin, his first love, and piano. He saw his

task as learning as many instruments as possible, and took advantage of a scholarship at Lebanon Valley College to major in the tuba. But he was always a music renaissance man - he was asked there as a junior to take over the direction of an original musical production when the professor in charge was taken ill. As a pianist, he also acted as accompanist for many voice students. Taking enthusiastic and competent hold of every musical opportunity is a characteristic Rob has never lost.

Upon graduation, Rob was offered a position as conductor of the Corning Youth Orchestra, and he spent four years there, also becoming first violin in the Corning Philharmonic and leading the second violin section of the Elmira Symphony. During this period, Rob estimates that he participated in over fifty musicals, as director, singer and actor. Not surprisingly, he decided eventually that he had mastered the genre and had had enough!

It was while studying for his master's degree at Eastman that Rob had the opportunity to become a voice student. He was accompanying a young soprano and she asked him to partner her as baritone in a duet for her teacher, former Met star Anna Kaskas. Ms. Kaskas expressed interest in having him as a student, and so he became. At this point, all the foundations were laid for his pursuit of the many different ways he has enriched our musical lives.

Rob's first experience with opera was accidental. At the age of nine, he took refuge from some boring adult gathering and found himself watching an opera on television. His mother found him and asked if he liked it, even though he couldn't understand the words. He tentatively assented, and she arranged for him to attend a Met performance. There he sat with a kind lady who helped him appreciate what he was seeing and hearing. As an

adult he went on to serve as a board member for the Friends of Eastman Opera, writing for their newsletter among other responsibilities, and working with Susan Cotroneo at the Lyric Theater, judging competitions and promoting singers. Rob and his former student Jessica Best, a talented soprano now with an established career, presented the final fundraising recital in his home for the benefit of Mercury Opera.

He also became a friend of the Opera Guild, advising on the talent for the Annual Recital for Donors, and for many years taught music history at the Hochstein School, where his opera history course was appreciated by Opera Guild board members. His involvement in the Annual Recital resulted in his collaboration with tenor Mark Daniels, now well-known to us as a recitalist, who will be presenting our next Bravo Night, a virtual holiday concert, on December 15th. Their enthusiasm and dedication to the project make it a pleasure to work with them both. He and Mark will be the subjects of an article in the magazine "585 Rochester" coming up in January.

Finally, Rob is the benefactor of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra as the sponsor of the "Rob W. Goodling Tuba Chair, funded in perpetuity."

My last question to Rob was whether he had had any particular struggles in his very productive musical life. He answered, "Well, I have been fortunate in having had opportunities arise at each stage which offered me work I enjoyed." We agreed that it is passion for the work that leads to fulfillment, not merely the drive for success.