

Musical Treasure Chest #7

I have been quite fortunate to have some professional musical non-performing affiliations over my career which have brought me tremendous satisfaction. I mentioned in an earlier Treasure Chest of my years at WMHT-FM, but I have had a number of other “jobs” (I hesitate to call them that--they felt more like great privileges) Today I thought I would share with you my years as a recording producer for **Dorian Recordings**, where I had a chance to work with several very special musicians and ensembles.

As I transitioned out of WMHT in the late 1980s (my performing obligations had increased and the 5:45 am arrival time for my on-air shift did not agree with my schedule at all) the radio station moved me into production. One of my responsibilities was to interview guests and then edit and produce segments. A panoply of artists from singer Samuel Ramey to fiddler Mark O'Connor came through the studio. At this time production was still analog and interviews were recorded on 15 ips tape that was manually spliced by “cueing up” the reel-to-reel tape, moving it back and forth over the tape heads with your hands to find the exact spot you wanted to cut, marking it with a grease pen, and then making a long diagonal cut, which you then spliced into another section. I found it fun to do this type of editing and got very fast at it. One interview scheduled for me was with the founders of Dorian Recordings, Craig Dory and Brian Levine. After the interview, while they were still in the studio, I began to work on the editing (I could multi-task when I was young!). Unaware that they were scrutinizing what I was doing, they stayed for a while watching and chatting. As I finished up, they asked me if I would ever be interested in producing recordings. I didn't fully understand what was involved but was intrigued.

Dorian Recordings was sort of a boutique label. When I began working with them, they recorded pretty much exclusively in the Troy Music Hall and were in the process of both building their catalog and number of artists and ensembles. Initially I worked as a post session producer (picking “takes”) and with artists and repertory. From there I began to assist on actual recording sessions, observing and learning what went into the making of these very high end CDs. My first session as full producer was with cellist **Andres Diaz** and pianist **Samuel Sanders** recording the two Brahms Cello Sonatas, as well as repertory I had suggested by Dvorak. While Diaz was young and just starting his career, Sam Sanders was a legend. I knew his work with Itzhak Perlman well, among other incredible artists he collaborated with (such as Jacqueline DuPre and Jessye Norman). I have to admit that I was quite apprehensive about the session; to work with Sam on my debut as a producer was scary (plus he was known for being quite particular).

The first day of the session arrived. I had made up my mind that I wouldn't let Sam or Andres know this was my first time. My preparation was thorough: I knew all of the musical scores very well, and I had a plan for the flow of the session. We had five days allocated. The first was always devoted to capturing the sound. Dorian was known for its beautifully recorded CDs, and they prided themselves on tweaking it to perfection. This was a long, slow process that could be both frustrating and tiring for the artists. If you were lucky, it would go fairly painlessly, with the artists staying positive and energetic. Occasionally the engineers and the artists would get a “sound” they were satisfied with early on, and the actual recording of music could begin, but this was not the norm. My job as producer was to keep the morale up, to let the artists know that we cared tremendously about the final product and that it was worth being patient for the results. My job on this first day was also to develop

a rapport with the musicians and to foster a trust, so I could be their ears and musical arbiter during the session.

Sam had a congenital heart defect, in fact it is perhaps the main reason he went into music since his physical activities were quite limited as a child. The recipient of several heart transplants, Sam's health was fragile. At that time the Troy Music Hall had no elevator, and my first encounter with Sam was after he had labored up the four flights of stairs there, having to rest at each landing. At first he was a bit standoffish, but as the night progressed (we always recorded at night as there was too much traffic noise in Troy during the day), he loosened up. By the end of the five days, which were grueling (we often went until 2am or later), we had recorded an amazing artistic product. Both Sam and Andres were comfortable relying on me to draw out their musical best. After we "wrapped" the session, we went to celebrate with a drink. Sam asked me what other artists I had produced. I finally revealed this was my first session. He was surprised and told me if he had known, he probably would have asked for a more experienced producer. Sam went on to make several more Dorian CDs, with Andres and also with violinist Rachel Barton Pine, and he always requested me.

Sam passed away from his heart condition on July 9th, 1999. I still remember learning of it on NPR as I left a Glimmerglass Opera rehearsal, I was driving and had to pull off the road. The world lost a great musician and kind man, and I lost a special friend. He had a great sense of humor and was an incredibly positive and resilient person. Unfortunately the Brahms CD is not available on YouTube, but another CD we worked on together titled **Russian Romantics** is. This is a link to a Tchaikovsky short piece: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y94wKYatCCo>

Also on the Dorian artists' roster was the fabulous Canadian (but Czech-born) pianist **Antonin Kubalek**. While I did not actually produce any of his sessions, I assisted on several, and got to know Anton well. Aside from being a marvelous musician, he was also a great warm bear of a man. Down-to-earth, kind, sometimes rough around the edges in an endearing way, Anton was a pleasure to work with. Dorian's Brian Levine was determined to show to the world Anton's great artistry and the label recorded several CDs with him. Anton offered, when he was here for a session, to play a fundraising concert for a group which I co-founded, called the St. Cecilia Chamber Orchestra. Anton had been a soloist with us for the Martinu Sinfonietta Giocosa (we had even traveled to Boston to be on WGBH's *Morning Pro Musica* with the late Robert J. Lurtsema, you can read about here in an article by Byron Nilsson <http://baniilsson.blogspot.com/2013/08/musing-on-road.html>). For the fundraiser Anton performed a full-length concert for us in what was then the Arts Center in Troy in a beautiful brownstone on 2nd Street. The concert was staggering in its difficulty and musicianship. One of the pieces Anton performed was the Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 7. I was transfixed from beginning to end, his performance was spell-binding. I had hoped to find Anton on YouTube playing the finale of that sonata, but I did not. Instead I found these two:

Brahms Intermezzi op 117 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rO-WMSg0ZI>

Prokofiev Love For Three Oranges <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYBYNonTxG8>

During those years at Dorian, I met and worked with many fine artists and have great memories of those sessions. One of the ensembles that I worked with there and still collaborate with today independently is the early music ensemble **REBEL** (one of our CDs was in the Grammy pool). Run by husband and wife team Jorg Michael Schwartz and Karen Marie Marmer, this group is one of the most exciting in the early music world. I have been honored to produce virtually all of their CDs. Other members of the group include cellist John Moran and harpsichordist Dong Sok Shin. Perhaps some of you will remember Dong Sok performing with Musicians of Ma'alwyck (he directed our Bach Christmas Oratorio back in 2003 and he subbed at the last

moment on Brandenburg No 5 in 2017). They also work often with virtuoso recorder player Mathias Maute. If you have never heard REBEL, you are in for a treat. And if we ever go back to live performances with an audience, you should go see them (they have a recital series in Bedford, NY). The intensity and brilliance of their concerts are incredible.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2uri4GgzdE>