

Post #5 – Jim Hild

THE FINAL CONCERT: JOHANNESBURG CITY HALL

August 18, 2018

It is Day 7. We performed at 3:00 in a "grand old hall"

It was gray, overcast and windy in the morning. The "singing runners" did not even attempt a run, as we were up late. While having a couple of glasses of wine, we had intense conversations about politics, religion and pedophilia. I went to bed at 2:00 AM. I ate breakfast at 9:30. Thankfully we did not need to be on the bus until 12:30.

The bus ride from Sandton to the center of Johannesburg was pleasant. The clouds thinned out, the sun shone, and the wind continued to blow. After de boarding, we entered the City Hall and walked into the "auditorium". It was breathtaking. The entire front wall was wood paneled with the middle third housing floor to ceiling organ pipes. There were four 4-person balconies on each of the side walls. There was a balcony in the back of the auditorium which seated around 200 people. The main floor had "movable" chairs, and probably seated 800 people. Hanging from the ceiling down the middle of the room were 2 immense chandeliers, with an additional four smaller chandeliers placed directly out from the four side balconies on each side of the room. City Hall was as elegant as Regina Mundi was holy.

The stage presented a challenge for seating. The chorale had to condense from six to four rows. I was placed in the first row (a first) and I felt very vulnerable. I could not 'hide' behind someone: I needed to show that I knew the musical pieces. Seated beside were two of the 29:11 gentlemen from Cape Town. There were ecstatic that there were performing Beethoven's Ninth for the third time. Psychologically speaking, these two young men, as are the other members of 29:11, are "invulnerable, resilient" persons. They have endured so much in their short lifetime. They are extremely talented, intelligent, sensitive people. They sang with the chorale in July in Minneapolis and In August in Soweto and Johannesburg. They are so enduring to the entire chorale. Our short rehearsal was reinforcing, and it heightened our excitement for the concert.

The program for the concert was slightly different than Friday night's program. We commenced with the National Anthems of South Africa and the United States. It was very powerful to see everyone stand and sing. Other than the national anthems, we were not in the first half of the program. Hence, we were seated during intermission.

Upon being seated I was struck by the lack of people of color. I immediately felt suspicious. (Remember, we are in Johannesburg, from which thousands of blacks and colored people were removed prior to and during the anti-apartheid era and moved to Soweto. I was not certain that white supremacy still did not rule here.) The second half of the program was the entire Ninth Symphony by Beethoven. Since the choir does not perform until the fourth and final movement, I had a good 35 minutes to study the audience. We gave an outstanding performance. People immediately and spontaneously rose to their feet and applauded for quite a while. However, it was not until we sang the first encore piece of music: "Usilthela Xcolo" (the chant petitioning Mandela for his commitment to freedom) that I knew that these people stood for freedom! They sprung to their feet and joined in singing and in doing the movements of this beautiful chant. My mistrust faded. I felt relieved. I felt hope. I was stirred by their rousing spirit. I

knew that the "walk to freedom" was still alive. There are people who still want freedom and peace for all.

After the concert we had two parties. We first celebrated with the Gauteng Choristers. It was such a privilege to sing with these men and women. They are outstanding musicians: they have sung with Renee Fleming and others who are extremely talented. They were instantaneously welcoming, sharing an ever-present smile on their face and having a glister in their eyes. They are fast learners; they had never sung in German and they "spoke" it well. They were inclusive, urging us to join them in their song about "hitch hiking and the car moving forward and backwards". I am not doing it justice, as I left the name of it in my music folder, now packed away. They begin the chant on stage, move off the stage, through the hallways, continuing to chant it, and once in the lobby they stop singing. I felt as did others in the chorale to be part of them for a few moments.

Our second celebration was with the MN Orchestra. It included a program of South African music by the group which sang for Mandela's inauguration, his acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize and at his funeral and numerous commemorative services and a dinner. The group's dancing and singing were intriguing, beautiful and very educational. The dinner included a program recognizing EVERYONE who contributed to the "Mandela Project": the MN Orchestra's Administrative staff, the orchestra's musicians and the technicians, the MN Chorale, 29:11 from Cape Town, the media, the Board members and the Corporations who underwrote the project, Classical Movements (the travel company which coordinated this immense undertaking) and Marilyn Carlson Nelson, the chair of the Board. As my wife says: " Jim, you were in your element". I was talking with Orchestra musicians and the Board members with whom I was seated, Kevin Smith, the retiring CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra, schmoozing with Dessa and 29:11, and dancing with a former Miss America from Minnesota and with my very special, talented, sensitive MN Chorale members. It was quite a gala event.

I left the Convention center in an adrenaline state, excited, physically tired (and full of perspiration from the wild dancing) not ready for bed AND extremely grateful that I was on the roster. I was proud to be an ambassador for Minnesota!

It took a few more hours before I could go to sleep.

Buona giornata!