

DIALOGICS

When coming out of my classes, I often hear students lament that a class they're taking is a waste of time because, I quote, "I'll never need to know this in the real world." The strength of a liberal arts education is the nurturing of a broad base of knowledge from which to approach specialized or professional study, but the peril is that the relevance of liberal arts requirements may be lost in translation between the professor, the course material, and the student. In an effort to help better translate the relevance of the liberal arts, this year the Herald staff is conducting faculty interviews across campus. Focusing on the humanities in the fall and the sciences in the spring, we hope to establish a dialogue between and among faculty and students that illustrates how knowledge in all fields is useful in the "real world." Our goal is to foster an interdisciplinary dialogics that puts all aspects of a liberal arts education in dialogue, continually informing and influencing each other.

The second installment in the series is an interview with Dr. Jim Waddelow by Sarah Haseeb and Vicky Pivitsiripakde.

-Amy Hruby, Editor in Chief

Dr. Jim Waddelow conducts Meredith College's Sinfonietta and is the Musical Director for opera workshop and musical theater productions in the Department of Theater and Dance. He has conducted over 50 operas and musical productions at the college and professional level.

Q: What's your musical background?

A: I have been an orchestra conductor for almost 15 years, working with everyone from elementary school students to professionals. I do a lot of different kinds of conducting--mainly orchestral, but I work with singers, and I also do a lot of Broadway musicals and a lot of opera. I've done band in the past, too, so I really do a little bit of everything.

Q: When did you become interested in music?

A: I got into music at the age of nine and I haven't stopped. I really enjoyed playing as a kid and by the time I got to high school, I was pretty sure that this is what I wanted to do. In the 1980s being a musician was a lot like being an athlete, and I had several schools recruiting me to play the cello. I got several scholarship offers and by the time I finished my undergrad degree I knew that playing and teaching was what I wanted to do.

Q: Was there a reason you chose cello?

A: There was this girl. I mean the only reason I got into orchestra in the first place was because all of my friends were doing it so I signed up for orchestra. I played the violin and the girl that I had a crush on played cello, and it

didn't occur to me that they would put cellos on one side of the room and all the violins on the other. So I went to the teacher and said "I want to be over there" and of course everyone in the room is playing violin, and they were only two or three kids playing cello, so when she saw this gangly, goofy-looking kid, she was like "yes, young man you can play over there." So because of this one girl I ended up playing the cello and it shaped my entire career. I wish I could say that I had this huge musical inspiration but it was really social more than anything else. And once I started playing, I really loved it, and I never put it down after that.

Q: What's your favorite period of music?

A: That's like asking a parent to choose between children; it's really hard for me! If you put a gun to my head and said I had to choose: maybe the era between 1770 and 1825--the era of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. But it's a hard choice because I also love music that's being made right now. I think that a lot of musicians are that way. I think if you ask them "what's your favorite composer?" or "what's your favorite era?" that's really hard. That's like asking a visual artist who their favorite painter is. There's so much great stuff out there; it's hard to choose one thing.

Q: A favorite piece from this period?

A: You guys are being so hard, again! I get asked this a lot and I have a rather evasive, political answer. Rather than say one piece, I'd say there are certain things that are transformational, most especially Haydn symphonies and Mozart operas. They're historically influential but also really good pieces of music in their own right. Within that category, probably the later Haydn symphonies and the last five or six Mozart operas are best because by the time they have really matured as composers.

Q: How do you see these pieces to be relevant today?

A: A lot of the things that were done then are still being done today. Mozart changed the way people approached opera, and it's almost as if what he did is still a template for writing an opera today. People took a lot of those ideas, especially the idea of music and how it fits with a play, and used them in everything from twentieth-century opera to Broadway musicals. You could make a really strong case that a lot of things that were done in Mozart operas, you'll see on Broadway today. Then with symphonies--the whole structure of them-- Haydn wasn't the person who invented the symphony but he's the guy who took it to the next level. Without Haydn there is no Beethoven.

Q: Who's your favorite contemporary classical musician?

A: John Adams is a man who has been consistently writing music that orchestras want to play since the early 1970s. Same with John Corigliano. I think

it's important that my generation--the younger generation of conductors, music teachers and performers--try to perform music by people of our generation, and Adams and Corigliano are the forefront right now.

Q: What contributions do you think they're making to your field?

A: Well, they're constantly premiering works, good high-quality works that are seen by a lot of audiences. John Corigliano crossed into film music, and I think that's an important thing. When you do a performance, there are weeks of rehearsals that go into one 90-minute performance and then it's done. The artist can paint or sculpt something, and it's always going to be there. Everything that I create is immediately done one time, and then we're on to the next thing. Even if you record it, it's still not the communal, live experience of being there in the room. So the fact that somebody can write something for a film--it's documented and it's something that they can share and continue to share.

Q: How do you feel about mainstream music, music on the radio?

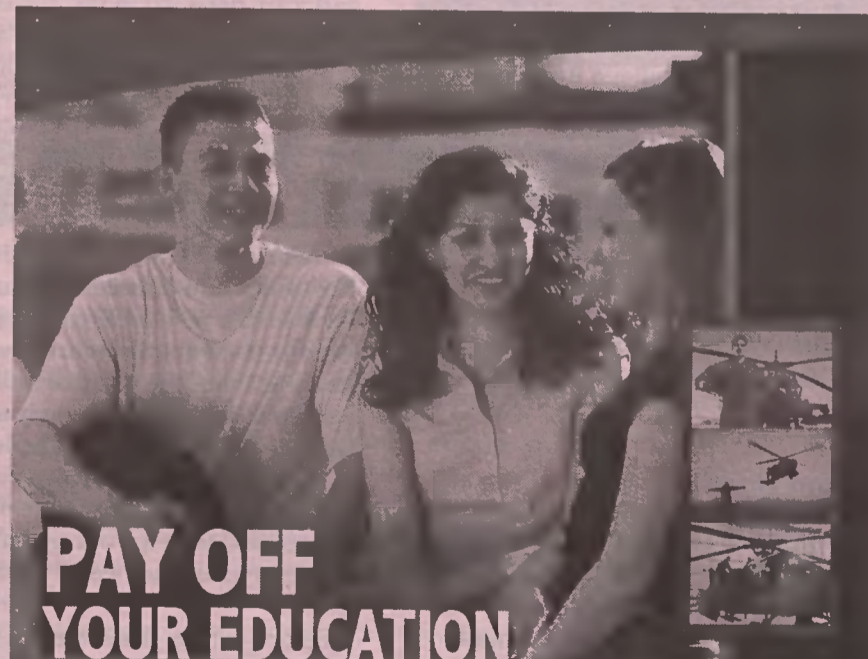
A: The pop industry has changed considerably in the last ten years. A generation ago, people your age bought a lot of music, but now record companies realize that people aren't buying CDs--what they're interested in is having one song that is going to be played over and over on the radio. I'll give you an example: there was a song that came out about five years ago by a guy named Daniel Powter. Now, you don't know who I'm talking about, yet you've heard his song every hour, on the hour, for a year--an entire year! His song goes "You Had a Bad Day." The radio played that song to death didn't they? When I tell you the song, you immediately recognize it

but you don't know who the guy is and that's the main problem with the record industry. It's American Idol syndrome. Record companies want that one song that they can make a lot of money out of, and they could care less if nobody knows anything else that guy sings.

Ten years ago, it was not just about one song but the whole album. Record companies cared for at least twelve songs because they realized that 17-year-olds were going to go out and buy a whole CD. Now that demographic downloads one song, and that's it. And it's not just teenagers, it's people like me in their early 40s that go and download that one song from the radio. We've become a point, click, instant-gratification society with then attention span of a three-minute-long pop song. Every once in a while, I think we're going to shift back; I think that the singer/songwriter is coming back. I would say there were a whole lot of people who went out and downloaded the entire record of Adele's 21 or got the entire CD. There are exceptions. I think that you're going to find more artists like her in the next 10 years, and I think you're going to see a shift away from one song disposability. I hope so anyway.

Q: What's your favorite artist or band today; favorite mainstream artist?

A: I'm not sure I listen to anything mainstream, unfortunately. I listen to a saxophone player named Jan Garbarek who has over 50 CDs and has been putting them out for almost 40 years, but he's only big in parts of Europe. I still listen to Tom Waits. The only radio I listen to is the Shaw University's radio station, which is a jazz radio station. I try not to listen to classical in the car--it's too distracting. It's like work, you don't want to take your work everywhere with you.



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