

NEWS RELEASE

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Noel Edison conducts an eclectic career

Waterloo (March 16) — It's axiomatic, he says: every good idea degenerates into work. And behind every good idea there has to be money. Noel Edison knows the score on both counts. Fortunately he's been able to persevere in the first and attract the second.

A 1985 graduate of the faculty of music at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Edison is now a part-time faculty member, teaching conducting and performing that function with the Laurier choirs.

He was one of the four founders of the Elora Festival and has been its artistic director since 1983; the budget has grown to \$535,000 from \$28,000 and this year he will guide the Festival through an extended season.

He's an organist at St. John's Anglican Church in Elora, which has one of the country's few paid (and recorded) choirs.

And he's mounting a performance of the "gigantic" Berlioz *Requiem* at Kitchener's Centre in the Square on Friday, March 31, that will involve about 350 Laurier students and alumni, and professional musicians.

The *Requiem* requires a mass choir and orchestra, four brass choirs, and a double-digit cohort of percussionists and timpanists. So great are the numbers and overwhelming the sound they produce that the last full production of the *Requiem* in Toronto was held in Varsity Stadium.

In pulling the local production together, Edison has solved a number of logistical problems both musical and extra-musical. Funding support (to the tune of \$30,000) has come from The Co-operator's Group Ltd. The idea for the production belongs to Co-operator's president Terry Squire. And when the opportunity came to connect the performance with the faculty's 20th anniversary celebrations, the time seemed right.

Edison has been getting to know the *Requiem* for about the past five months, with the attendant frustration of too much background noise. "You get so busy with the bureaucracy and organization of these things, it's really hard as a professional musician to get away and do your real work, which is your score work." Finally in February he took the score to Mexico where, he says, "it became a good friend of mine."

(more)

He typically "breathes and eats" a work during its preparation. "You try and learn as much as you can about the times, as much as you can of the culture, so you can get some further understanding of the score?"

His approach to a work of this complexity is "to go at the score in many layers" — marking the principal themes, basic harmonic structure, principal cues. "I do an overall thing at the beginning, then I pull it apart and look at the little bits, and then I try to put it all back together? The goal, he says, is to "get as much of the score into your head as you can so your head is out of the score for the performance? In the last few years, he says, he's been forcing himself to conduct smaller works without a score. "And that's helped me a lot, because it forces me at sight to grasp things more quickly?"

In the Berlioz, the full effect of the assembly is felt in three of 10 movements, and it's for balance of sound that the large orchestral and vocal complement is required: there will be a chorus of about 225 and an orchestra of about 130. "You've got to have enough vocal power and string power and wind power to balance the smallest brass power you're going to employ. A brass *fortissimo* is much more potent than a wind or a flute or a string *fortissimo*. It's far more penetrating. So the brass choir is your ultimate dynamic thermometer, and it's in relation to that that you balance the rest of your forces?"

Edison is still fine-tuning the placement of some of the brass players, and thinking about the potentially "horrendous" problem of time lapse when the performers are spread around a large hall — disparities between the moment of the beat, when the sound is articulated, and when it's heard. Those issues will be resolved during the last week of rehearsals, which will be held in the performance hall.

Edison says he knew from childhood that he wanted to conduct. "I've been either cursed or blessed, I'm not sure. It's a lonely profession. You can get a bit of coaching, but ultimately it's you and your score and how you will deal with others." He's studied with such luminaries as Helmuth Rilling, John Alldis, and Robert Shaw. "The best coaching I have found in studying with others leaves technique aside unless there are serious problems and just works the student as a musician."

Edison's principal work is as a choral technician, though he doesn't like to be referred to as a choral conductor; a musician is a musician, he says. He rarely listens to choral music at home. Instrumental or chamber music is more likely to allow him a moment of escape, he says. But not for long. "I often bring what goes on instrumentally in music-making to my choral work, instead of taking choral work to choral work. Musically I prefer the ebb and flow of a fine orchestra, most times, over a fine choir. With some orchestral players, you would like them to sing more through their instrument. And often with choirs, you want them to be more instrumental in their performance."