

Pioneer Stages, Pioneer Days, Remarkable Beginnings: The New Hope Singers International

By Randolph L. Remmel



Pretty well everyone in the “Family Federation for World Peace” knows of the New Hope Singers International. The name belongs to the Washington, D.C.-based choir established in in 1972 — during the “Unified Family” presidency of Farley Jones — to support the first public speaking tour Father would make to address audiences in seven major American cities.

The choir would accompany Father to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Berkeley, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.



What most don't know is that the ensemble's "official" name — dating from 1973 — simply arose spontaneously as of the ad hoc rearrangement of a phrase that figured into the Singers' first introduction in Baltimore that year.

Early in 1973, Neil Salonen had inherited the presidency, and when, in his capacity as "master of ceremonies" for Father's second speaking tour, Neil announced a few minutes' entertainment that would precede Father's appearance, he concluded his remarks with, "Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome the international New Hope Singers."

The audience response to an ensemble that had never before performed in Baltimore was as polite as could have been expected, but both the choir and the overall event would have benefited markedly from an introduction focusing attention more centrally on the uniqueness of the presentation the audience was about to experience.

As specified by a program note reading, "All music composed or arranged by members of the Unification Church," the selections about to be sung were the result of visionary young people's creative responses to the same message the audience was shortly to hear.

A mention of the performers representing nations as disparate as they were distant, moreover, would have highlighted the universality of the evening's message.

After the program I suggested to Neil that the international character of the group could be advantageously highlighted by a simple change in the order of a couple of introductory words.

I'd been thinking that, coming at the end of the title "New Hope Singers" instead of preceding it, the word "international" would

resound as the concluding element of an established ensemble's formal name — instead of sounding like just an incidental adjective.

Neil took the suggestion and changed the introduction from then on, and the title “New Hope Singers International” always rang strongly and memorably, making the distinctive point that it did.

It was a good name, and it stuck.

But there is a more obscure back story, still more intriguing, that dates from several months earlier. That one relates to the name with which the prospective choir was tentatively christened in its “pre-infancy” — when the “leadership” was just beginning to discuss the idea of formally establishing a performance ensemble.

That “working title pro tem and per template” — which must have come up in discussion as the idea of the group was just beginning to come together — was the “Unification Chorale.”

It is a name I smile to remember, not because there was anything particularly amusing about it but because the circumstances of my encountering it for the very first time were amusing enough in themselves (not to mention, just a little unsettling).

Father had come to Washington, D.C. late in 1971 after having been here for the first time in 1965 — when he had consecrated Holy Grounds in each state — and for a second time in 1970, when he'd blessed 13 couples in Washington, D.C.

Over the concluding weeks of 1971 and the early ones of 1972, he had spoken virtually every evening to the Capital's branch of the Unified Family.

By the time he returned to Korea early in 1972, Father had, among other things, changed the name of the Unified Family to that of the Unification Church.

He had also changed the entire trajectory of the American movement.

Before leaving Washington, Father had made clear his intention to undertake speaking tours that, over the next couple of years, would take him to the capitals of each of America's 50 states.

He had asked Farley Jones, then the movement's National President, to make necessary arrangements.

The extent of foresight and insightful planning indispensable to such an enterprise is inevitably massive, and far-reaching; highly consequential decisions must have had to be made very fast. There were itineraries, lodging and personnel decisions to make, as well as endless logistical and vehicular considerations; and, of course, there were publicity strategies to determine. There were advertising flyers and programs to design.

At some point in those feverish times it must have been determined — though at the time no one said a word about it — that a formal choral presentation would be a suitable approach, both agreeable and practical, to opening and closing each of the speeches. Music and texts created by members of the movement could affirm and enlarge upon themes related to Father's own.

In about April of 1972 I was just inside the basement entrance of one of the houses Washington's Unification Church Family occupied when I found myself noticing, out of simple curiosity, what could only have been a "specimen" program, posted on the wall, of the kind that Farley and his staff must have been considering for use at Father's speeches.

Apparently the specimen had been posted where it was with the idea of turning the members' attention to — and, likely, stimulating their comments about — the events in planning, and perhaps even their reactions to the printed program itself.

By that time I'd been editing professionally for about a year at the Music Educators National Conference in downtown Washington. I did incidental writing for the monthly *Music Educators' Journal* and edited everything destined for publication in the scholarly quarterly *Journal of Research in Music Education*, and I'd developed a keen pair of eyes. I read with guarded interest.

I'd gotten about halfway down the page when I suddenly paused, and those eyes of mine blinked, as I stared a moment at the text, unsure I believed what I was pretty sure I'd just seen. I started over and read again, more slowly, steadying and bracing myself.

Sure enough, right there, along with Father's name, were the name of Farley Jones, President of the newly christened Unification Church, who would officiate; the title of the series of speeches ("God's Hope for America"); and — just where I'd not been prepared to see it — a line announcing, "Music by the Unification Chorale, Mr. Randy Remmel, Director."

I swallowed and blinked again and read yet once more, this time getting to the bottom of the page. It said exactly what I was

either afraid (or perhaps glad?) that it said. (There are so many things you think; in a context like that, it was hard to be sure how you actually felt.)

I couldn't help wondering — since this “Unification Chorale” had clearly been in at least tentative planning for some time — whether I had been kept in the dark intentionally or whether my being out of the loop had resulted from simple oversight.

In the end I shrugged my shoulders, murmuring internally, to no one in particular, “I'm sure they were going to tell me. Or maybe they forgot to tell me. Or maybe no one thought to ask. Maybe they figured they didn't have to ask... .”

It's amazing what goes through your mind.

I was honored, on the one hand, by Farley's confidence in me, while on the other, I couldn't be sure that confidence wasn't at least a little misplaced.

Farley didn't know it (no one else apart from my wife did, either), but, since I'd never intended to become a conductor, my education had included only two incidental undergraduate choral conducting courses (granted, with an outstanding teacher).

Another reality was that — since I'd not begun studying music formally until I'd been of twenty, when I'd been almost miraculously admitted to one of the Midwest's finest conservatories — I wasn't exactly a “lifelong musician” or a “prime candidate.”

I was pretty sure God had to take what God could get.

But on balance, I figured I could do it.

Ever since graduating from the Conservatory of Music at Lawrence University — where I'd met a young lady by the name of Lynne Doerfler, who'd introduced me to the Divine Principle — I'd started "pickup" choirs wherever I'd gone — choirs for Christmas, choirs for weddings, choirs for Easter, choirs for Lent, a choir for a funeral here and there, once even for a service offered by a local Catholic prelate celebrating the silver anniversary of a diocesan pastor's ordination. Once during college I'd put together a choir for an actual Conservatory recital.

The pattern had resumed when I'd gotten to Washington. There, for a few months in the summer of 1971, I routinely spent Saturday afternoons on the front yard of the community's house on Sixteenth Street preparing two- to four-part choral compositions with piano accompaniment over texts I either remembered from scriptures or made up on the spot.

Since I'd brought my wife, Linda, along to the movement, and she was likely one of the finest pianists ever to have graduated from Lawrence, the "music making scenario" was a really very easy one. After Saturday evening dinners I'd invite anyone who'd like to do some choral singing for the next day's morning service to meet with the two of us in the spacious Upshur House front rooms where Sunday services were always held.

We'd spend about an hour and a half learning the music, rehearse once again in the morning, and sing toward the end of the following day's service. I'm sure that must have been where everyone had gotten the idea that I was something of a "natural" — or at least a logical choice for starting the movement's first formally organized choir.

But I'd say that Linda was — and remains, to this day — quite certainly the greatest gift of God the choir ever had. She'd studied piano since the age of five and was a far more accomplished musician than I was. No one else could have done what she did.

Along with her professional-level keyboard facilities, as a capable vocal soloist-pianist she not only sang as beautifully as anyone else in the choir ever did, but could hear from the keyboard when one or the other section of the choir was “losing its way” and, emphasizing that section's part as she accompanied, could (and often did) bring that section back on track without missing a beat (and without embarrassing anyone).

So we were a good team, and I decided — upon thinking of this suddenly manifesting-out-of-the-blue Unification Chorale — that this wasn't really going to be much different from what I'd already been doing for a couple of years. This would be just a long-term choir instead of just another pickup choir pro tem.

And when it came to considerations needing to be made about the speaking tours, I'm sure I thought subconsciously that I would be no newer at what I was to do than all the others involved would be at what they were to do.

Over the summer I began writing piano-accompanied choral arrangements of various songs original to the movement and sung frequently by members in Washington. The selections included, among others, a collaboration of Barry Cohen and Sandra Singleton entitled “Resurrection” and English-language versions of the Korean hymns “Spring Song of Eden” and “Shining Fatherland”; I also wrote a couple more scripturally based originals.

During the following months it became clear which singers in Washington, D.C. would be able to perform with the movement's first formally established ensemble.

Presently there also began arriving in Washington, from Colorado, Detroit, Ohio, and the San Francisco Bay area, members who would join in the campaign. Several from San Francisco — a young woman named Suzanne, Perry Cordill, James Wright, and David Lowe — to join the Unification Chorale. Others would include Washington members Joe Stein, Lokesh Mazumdar, John Harries, and Rick Hunter; Sandra Singleton, Kathy Goldman, Barbara Snell, Margaret Pease, Joy Schmidt, Diane Frink, and Barbara Ream. Susan Finnegan came from Ohio.

As I contemplated the prospect of presenting a formal choir in a “legitimate” public venue (this was not going to be taking place in just another church), it came to me that we should appear well and uniformly attired to present a respectable public image, and I told my thoughts to Farley.

Wishing to avoid presenting any kind of image that might prove ultimately misleading or could be interpreted as “deceptive,” Farley advised his feeling that we “shouldn't try to be something we're not” (ostensibly attempting to look, he must have thought, like the well established church that we certainly weren't).

If Farley was yet not exactly against the idea of “formal costuming,” he did have reservations and was, at best, ambivalent about the prospect. But I could not imagine our not at least looking the part of a formal ensemble — if, for no other reason, the potential that uniform attire would have for making us look as legitimate as we must one day become.

Farley had enough on his mind, so that felt like I oughtn't give him any more to think about. I decided I'd outfit the choir myself and just not mention it again. And I did, and I didn't.

As it happened I was still with the Music Educators National Conference in Washington, and the Conference's offices in the National Education Association (NEA) building were within ready walking distance of any number of places where I could acquire what I needed.

I did the necessary shopping over lunch hours. From a nearby "formalwear" rental enterprise I was able to make the purchase, very inexpensively, of enough well maintained black suits, white shirts, and tastefully striped formal ties to accommodate all the tenors and basses.

The single exception was one extremely tall singer for whom, no matter where I looked, I simply could not locate a pair of black trousers sufficiently long to ensure that most of his calves wouldn't be exposed cringeworthy bare (not to mention, pretty cold).

In the end, it was pretty easy just to cover for the deficit by having him discreetly take the stage behind the others as they entered. It also worked in our favor that anyone noticing him from the house would likely be so mesmerized by the six-foot, eight-inch extent of remarkable bass baritone that this particular singer was, that no one would notice, for even a second, the nicely tailored burgundy slacks he had brought from California.

A local women's wear outfitter had beautiful white satin blouses with graceful ruffles, and a nearby fabric shop was able to sell me enough black velvet and sewing patterns to tailor all the long black skirts necessary to accommodate the sopranos and altos. I also acquired a couple of yards, each, of scarlet and

gold and deep blue and forest green velvet to be worn by the women as sashes.

Linda and a few other women sewed everything, and — how appropriate could it get — we'd gotten it all “for a song.”

The appearance of the very first choir was really pretty good, and the cost for the totality had come in at only a couple of hundred dollars.



Over the months intervening between the earliest of such remote preparations and the actual February 3, 1972 start date of the speaking tour, there would be more choral arrangements to write, rehearsals to hold, and Sunday services to sing for. As weeks passed, it began to be more and more clear which singers in Washington, D.C. would be free — not to mention ready, willing, and able — to perform with the movement's first formally established ensemble.

It was a fine, manageable number, and each of those individuals was an invaluable asset in each one's own right. With Linda and me, we had a fine quorum.

Rehearsal time would be at a premium for the new choir. For one thing, the first of the speeches would be presented at Alice

Tully Hall at New York City's Lincoln Center, which meant that those who would sing for the tour were already there in New York — far from where I was — and already carrying responsibilities for a great many more things than singing.

They would be spending as many as twelve hours per day on the streets flogging admission tickets and promoting the event.

The prospective performers were among a total of 80-plus people that were housed — jam-packed together — at a church center located at 213th Street in the Bronx while I was working a full schedule as an editor-writer for the Music Educators National Conference in Washington.

The trick was going to be getting the singers and me together in the same place at the same time.

A pattern began developing in about October of 1971 that had me finishing work at five on Friday evenings and then taking a bus or a train to the “church center” in far-northern New York City, where we would learn the music while rehearsing for a couple of hours in a low-ceilinged basement space before retiring.

Linda remained in Washington, and I conducted rehearsals unaccompanied (and grateful, needless to say, for the presence of Joe Stein and Kathy Goldman, who, graduates that they were of the redoubtable Eastman School of Music, read music very well).

We would rehearse wherever we could on Saturday and Sunday — sometimes again in the basement, sometimes in the first-floor living room of the center, which had a piano; sometimes in a nearby Christian church in whose “social hall” the entire Unification Church contingent would gather for meals

and morning prayers, etc. There was also a piano in that hall, making it about as useful a rehearsal space as might have been secured under the circumstances.

I'd have to say our most memorable rehearsal was one that we held, one very shivery Saturday evening in about mid-November, in an actual old-fashioned school bus on that property in the Bronx. There was absolutely no available space in either the house or the nearby church; we had to work somewhere.

The vehicle was destined to be refitted-outfitted-retrofitted in the following spring, after the tour had concluded, to accommodate a group of 30 or 40 witnessing members who would be taking a northerly route from the east to the west coast of the United States, stopping at all the major cities along the way to proclaim and represent the "new age and new truth" to whomever would listen.

But at that point the renovation of the bus was still a long way in the future. Among other things, there was no heat, and as the singers remained (patiently if chillily) seated from the front to the back of the bus, in order of their voice-sections --- soprano, alto, tenor, bass — I taught them the parts by singing them, one by one.

As one section of singers would sing back a few measures, all the others and I were able to marvel at how, under the very unusual circumstances and in that very unusual venue, music — for one of those very unusual times in musical history — was not only audible, but visible; you could see everyone's breath as everyone sang.

As anyone could imagine would be the case in an even reasonably spacious one-family, two-story house with a

basement, sleeping arrangements for 80-plus residents at 230th Street in the Bronx were — if not exactly “catch as catch can” (everyone was always very civil) — at least a little cozy. Even the hallways and basement floor were strewn, a-crawl, a-toss and a-turn, with tightly packed humanity.

Coming from Washington and arriving in the middle evening and then leading a rehearsal before being able to retire — after making additional notes and adjustments to the sheet music — I was pretty consistently one of the last people to be hunting down a place to sleep.

By the time I was free to bed down — usually about two in the morning — snoring and unconscious bodies in sleeping bags, even below stairs, were hunched together and tucked down and away pretty well as tightly as eggs in a carton, side-by-side-snug, with no possibility of changing positions and definitely no space to move.

There was exactly one place where I managed, week by week, to find myself welcome because no one else wanted it. It was the place just in front of the electric clothes dryer in the basement that, as those same 80-plus people were obliged to share obviously limited laundry facilities, was in use literally 24 hours per day.

The result of the dryer being in virtually constant demand was that, pretty reliably within 30 minutes after I’d have dozed off, the appliance, off balance on the none-too-level basement floor, would swing into its rapid-motion spin cycle and begin rocking with a thunderous, gruesome howl-a-clamor monster-moan until — as momentum grew increasingly fierce — the entire unit was lifting, first, its whole left side, then its whole right side, higher and higher off the floor as, in its turn, each side had a go at slamming on back down good and hard again as the dryer

continued to scare-you-stun-you-silent-white as it went right on angrily growl-a-groaning, crash-a-moaning its overwhelming objections to the demands being made of it.

When the spin cycle was finally over, the owner of the laundry in the dryer would manage stepping over me to turn the monster off, open the door, and remove the terrorized clothing from the interior of the finally disindentured creature.

You could almost hear the dryer panting relief as it was allowed to settle down and the dried laundry was finally removed. (I know because some of the laundry always seemed to land on my head in the process before having to be fetched from there for return into the owner's waiting laundry-bag. I routinely kept my eyes shut as though nothing had happened, but I was inevitably awake, and I'm sure I heard the dryer murmuring in barely audible gratitude.)

And of course, by the time that load was finished, someone else was already there waiting, about to reload the dryer, and the cycle began all over. It would be another 20 or so minutes before the show resumed.

Wubba-dooba, Wubba-dooba, Wubba-dooba, stomp-a-dooba, womp-a-dooba! The dryer again would bellow like a terrorized, open-throated cast-iron rhinoceros bounce-a-bounding alternately off one and then the other wall of a harrowing, dark subway corridor where it had furiously realized it was hopelessly lost. (Could you blame the poor thing?)

I never quite got used to it, though I couldn't help being grateful for the reality that I'd only a few hours to sleep, anyway, so that I never had to endure the experience for more than three hours at a time.

The dryer and I actually became friends of a rather imaginative animate-inanimate sort.

Before long I'd actually also made peace, too, with the leaky overhead cold water valve that dripped intermittently down on my head whenever I slept in that basement.

After worship service on Sundays we all went together to different locations to knock on doors and attempt to sell tickets to the speeches. When we got back late in the afternoon, we'd hold one more rehearsal wherever we could, and I would head back to Washington, D.C.

The singers and I would see one another again the next week.

There were remarkable things happening virtually all the time in this whole process, very likely making the run-up to Father's first public United States speaking tour one of the most unforgettable periods in a good many people's lives. Everyone was learning.

Virtually none of the church centers in any of the four east-coast cities where Father would appear were at all prepared to accommodate the simultaneous descent, upon them, of 80 energetically devoted "witnessing" members at once, along with staff vehicles and publicity teams.

In addition to a few people's sleeping, from time to time, in vehicles, there arose contingencies of every imaginable variety (and a few that no one but the most mischievous wight could ever have either conjured or devised).

Even keeping everyone adequately nourished was a process fraught with challenges no one in the movement ever had faced before. There were backyard breakfasts where members waited

in long lines for poached eggs that would be cold before getting to the serving tables; there were improvisations for every phase of every activity. Plastic cutlery and paper ware were the order of the day three times a day and, given outdoor meetings here and there, there were also a lot of hoarse throats afflicting leaders who had to shout to be heard.

The cold poached eggs were in Philadelphia, at the same center where, after arriving in the middle of the night in the company of, among others, Neil Salonen and Hugh Spurgin, I again found myself sleeping in a basement, though the experience was relatively luxurious this time because I had the basement all to myself — along with a four-by-six-foot sheet of half-inch plywood that served as a cot — minus a pillow or a blanket (but it was “all good”; once again, it’d be only about three hours).

Through it all, a similar “order of the day” — as I fondly remember upon reflecting on those unforgettable days, hours, weeks, months, and years — was a spirit of altogether reasonable good cheer for most of the time — whatever you did, wherever you went, however you endured what you had to endure. It was all for a cause we believed in — and still do.

One last hurdle to get over turned out to be another of those things you’d never expect. I — who virtually never got sick — began to experience, at the worst possible moment, what was very clearly a case of sudden-onset laryngitis. We were in a couple of vans on our way to Alice Tully Hall — through a driving-blinding snowstorm that Father would later describe as “Satan’s weather — when, in mid-conversation with one of the singers, I noticed my voice giving out on me. By the time we arrived at Lincoln Center, I could barely speak.

But ah, well; there's a solution for everything, and all the condition meant was that the choir would be having to pay very close attention to my every move.

We've all heard tennis, ping-pong, or bowling professionals and others speak of their specialties and tell others, very breezily, "It's all in the wrist." Change the context to a musical performance stage, and what do you come up with but, "It's all in the gestures and eye contact" (and just in case you're wondering, it is).

The program went well. Father had made a very decided start; had "drawn a line in the sand" (in this case — prevailing weather conditions being what they were — in the snow).

After what would have to be described as an at least credibly auspicious start for the Unification Chorale at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the singers accompanied and supported Father through Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. on the eastern extreme of the Northern United States before crossing the country and doing the same in the southwest — Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berkeley.

By the time the speeches had all been held in the east, I had to be back at my desk at the Music Educators National Conference offices in Washington.

Kathy Goldman, gifted soprano graduate that she was of Eastman School of Music who, like Linda, also played piano with grace and astonishing facility, proved also a more than competent conductor, and she stepped, capably and successfully, into the role of leading the choir through the cities in the west. There were nothing but good reports.

Since those very early days the choir, growing in always increasing age, a measure of grace, and an element of wisdom that can be acquired only through the sincerest trial and sometimes even the most amazing errors, grew right beside Father.

I think we were all proud of that.

During the path of its travels in that very first tour, the choir — in just the way the “Unified Family” had been rechristened the Unification Church — transformed to emerge as the New Hope Singers International.

It’s a good name.

There was much more to come.

There was great hope there, and there still is.

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