

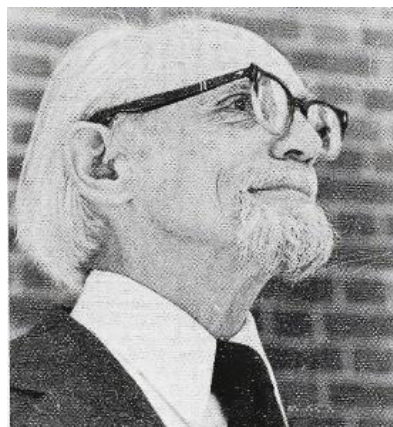
Richard Vogt and Some of his Favorite People



Richard Vogt
Director of Music



Ara Berberian



Herman Reissig



Cynthia Clarey



Jake Gardner



Hia Young



Seth McCoy



Peter Pears and
Benjamin Britten



Ben Holt

Memories of Richard Vogt on the 30th anniversary of his death, May 28, 1995

These memories are in response to an email from Jon Hunt to many of the people he knew had known Richard, plus others suggested by Lynn Woodman Hawxhurst.

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### **Subject: Richard Vogt, May 28, 1995**

(The original email:) Today is the 30th anniversary of Richard's passing. It's hard to believe as I almost expect to go up to the choir room and see him there. I think of him all the time and miss his presence. How lucky we all were to have known him!

(Added later:) Today, May 28, 2025, marks the thirtieth anniversary of the passing of Richard Vogt, my musical mentor, Director of the Greenwich Choral Society (GCS) for 22 years, and a good friend for nearly 30 years. For those of you who knew him, my words may feel bittersweet...for those of you who didn't know him, I hope you will get to know him shortly.

I first met Richard in the fall of 1966, when he came to Greenwich...more specifically to Old Greenwich, where he had just been hired to be the choir director at First Church. I was a thirteen-year-old in his children's choir. Richard sported a crewcut, no doubt left over from his stint in the U.S. Army in the 1950s. He had a blue VW bug with the NJ license plate JKT 741. Oh, by the way, his starting salary at First Church was just over \$5,000 per year.

It didn't take long for Richard to transform First Church as in May, 1968, he produced and staged the first of eight productions of Benjamin Britten's "Noye's Fludde" (Noah's Fludde) with the Metropolitan Opera baritone Ara Berberian as Noah. Richard's first love was opera (as a teenager, he was president of the Metropolitan Opera "standees") and these Fludde productions showed what an inventive mind can do when "unleashed"!

As our good fortune would have it, Richard took over GCS in the fall of 1973, and it was with GCS that Richard made his mark. He invented the modern Greenwich Choral Society by bringing in such budding soloists as Clamma Dale, Cynthia Clarey, and Jake Gardiner, and resurrecting the career of at least one fantastic tenor, Seth McCoy. He laid the groundwork for the GCS that we have today, enhanced along the way by his wonderful successors, Paul Mueller and Christine Howlett. Over time, the interest in GCS grew, as did the number of choristers. (So did the need for auditions, but that's always a sore subject!) In 1976, many in the chorus travelled with him to England where they met the famed British tenor, Peter Pears, and got a live glimpse of his partner, composer Benjamin Britten! (Britten died a few months later). I (along with David Heap) joined GCS in the fall of 1976 and right out of the box we performed the Bach B Minor Mass in December. I was one of only four tenors and of the other three, only one read music. I think the tickets were \$4 back then. The transformation was coming.

Along the way, Richard expanded his horizons by getting to know and work with such musical luminaries as Dave Brubeck. He also commissioned a new piece by a young and extremely talented composer, the late Stephen Paulus. His "So Hallow'd is the Time" was premiered by GCS in 1980. And strangely enough,

Richard also became good friends with William F. Buckley! I was lucky to be part of an octet who sang at Buckley's apartment each December for the Christmas party he gave for the staff of his magazine, National Review. Buckley was always in attendance at our concerts. A second GCS tour of England came in 1985 and we got our chance to sing at the Aldeburgh Festival, a rare and wonderful opportunity for an American chorus. Peter Pears was there again and a few of us got to sing "The Roast Beef of Olde England" in honor of his 75th birthday!

Now it's time to address Richard's temperament. Richard could strike the fear of God into each and every chorister. Yelling was part of his "teaching technique", a method no doubt he learned while he was a chorister with the Robert Shaw Chorale. He had several catchphrases: "Function!", was one and "Don't sit there like cement sacks!" was another. When my fellow tenor Bob McIntyre and I would sense a tsunami coming, we would duck down in our chairs as the tidal wave flew over us. We began to rate the eruptions. It wasn't just once that we looked at each other and said, "yup...that was a 7.9 on the Richter Scale!!"

Did the ends justify the means? The answer lies with a chorus who returned year after year and grew and grew. The performances dazzled. The musical selections were brilliant and fit so well together. Richard was a programming genius and the programs themselves...the ones the audiences received when they came to our concerts... were works of art. Everyone should have a look at one of those artistic printed programs from the 1980s.

The private Richard Vogt, was, well, mostly private. He didn't make friends easily but loved people's company. Needless to say, Richard was extraordinarily musical both in his ability to read music and to feel what few others of us feel. I often give him double credit for making his career in music. Why? He didn't play an instrument and that is a requirement in almost any musical setting. So, he did an end run around playing an instrument by doing everything else! Richard also had a very good sense of humor. Sallie Williams, a past GCS president and close friend of Richard's, used to say, "his antenna is always up", and for those of us who knew him well, we knew what she meant.

It is hard to end this without saying how much Richard did for me as a young singer, organist, and pianist, just out of music school. I got to sing in countless performances with many groups at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and elsewhere, thanks to him. I got to meet so many influential people in "the business", not forgetting the late, great, Alice Parker. But his personal kindnesses to me (we often had dinner together) were often voiced as his kindnesses to all of you through the Choral Society and the music and the people he brought along. I have always thought that Richard's greatest talent lay not in his music...but in his ability to bring people together, something unmatched by anyone else I've ever seen in person. I can't imagine what he would have thought of the state of our society and our nation today, but I know that Richard would be planning some upcoming concert to make sure that music was the answer...that music triumphed over all the rest!

God bless you, Richard Vogt. I love you.

**Jon Hunt**

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Dear Jon

I cannot believe that we have been without Richard for so long. The world lost a gem 30 years ago and is worse for it. He was a man who changed lives. RIP Richard.

Best wishes

**Peter Martin**

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Dear Peter, Jon and friends – First – Thank you for the memory. So many of us remember and still feel Richard's impact on our lives.

When he died - left us – like so many of you, I was bereft, in pain. Not because he was a sweet or gentle man, but because he brought so much to our lives, introduced us to new worlds of music, helped us to realize what we could do, become more than we thought we could be.

At that time, needing to fill a vast hole, I started writing to newspapers, radio and TV stations about Richard. CT Public Radio contacted me and asked me what I had in mind.

Back and forth, it led to my producing a program – sort of documentary – on CT Public Radio, with the help of our terrific sound man at that time, Ray Harrington. I spoke with many musical artists that Richard had worked with, from Opera to modern composers, and they speak on the program about their work with Richard. It was a thrilling experience and it alleviated the pain of Richard's leaving us. The program is on a 30-year old tape. It will eventually get moldy when I pass. I wish it were "connected" to the GCS website so that other, younger friends of GCS could connect with him and his magic.

(Ed: Polly is working on getting that tape converted to an mp3 audio file.)

**Polly Geller**

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I remember all of the conversations that I had with Sally Williams on how to deal with Richard in my President role. He spent time at the Williams' house and found some of those conversations on her phone.

He was tortured in coming up with programs but they were all magical and those last 2 weeks of rehearsal brought out the most passionate performances. We gave it our all! And then there was the tribute to RV in our summer program in the park led by Alice Parker who I picked up at JFK.

**David Heap**

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Richard was such a big part of my family life growing. He came to us when I was 10, Tom would have been 8. In his early days at First Church he was over for dinner, it seems like most Thursday nights between rehearsing Children's Choir and Chancel Choir. Porter Remington, too. He and other musicians would stay overnight after the Saturday morning rehearsals we would sometimes have before special services. Seth McCoy, Ara Berberian, Cynthia Clarey, Jake Gardner, Lorna Haywood, Elizabeth Humes, Tom Pyle and so many all became part of our family. We grew up with so many singers and their stories and laughter. It was magic!

My first strong memory of Richard was in the Children's Choir. It must have been for Music Sunday and we were to recite Scripture - Psalm 100, of course. He wanted us to Shout! And shout some words even louder. It seemed like he could never get quite enough noise out of us. Here's how it went:

MAKE A **JOYFUL** NOISE UNTO THE LORD ALL YE LANDS  
SERVE THE LORD WITH **GLADNESS**  
COME BEFORE HIS PRESENCE WITH **SINGING**  
KNOW YE THAT THE LORD, HE IS **GOD**  
IT IS HE THAT HATH MADE US AND WE ARE HIS  
WE ARE HIS PEOPLE AND THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE  
ENTER INTO HIS GATES WITH **THANKSGIVING** AND HIS COURTS WITH **PRAISE**  
FOR THE LORD IS **GOOD**  
HIS MERCY IS **EVERLASTING**  
AND HIS TRUTH ENDURETH TO ALL GENERATIONS

Thanks for reminding us Jon,

**Lynn Woodman Hawxhurst** ❤️

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Memories of such gifted people must be preserved. Richard had impact on me, too. When he asked for volunteer chorus members for Music Sundays, I'll never forget when we got the music for Bernstein's Chichester Psalms. I thought, "What?? It's in Hebrew??" LOL. I adored it and still remember many of the words. It was so dynamic it blew me away. With timpani for emphasis when the men sang, no less!

His 1979 Annual Report is an absolute hoot - one giant run-on sentence all in CAPS for a full page! It totally conveys the frantic life he sometimes must have had in putting his ambitious plans together.

And he didn't want just any artistic design for his first Noye's Fludde's poster. He researched what artists seemed to like depicting that theme and commissioned the best artist to do a delightfully ornate design. When Hilary Lawrence learned that the Worcester Art Museum was having a full month's display of the works by this children's books artist, Tad and I made a special trip there on our way to see our son David's family in Shrewsbury. We were astounded to see a giant 10-foot-high replica of OUR church's poster at the entrance to the exhibit room. The Art Museum had decided it was Ed Emberley's most important work! Richard brought out the best in everybody.

Tad and I participated in several Noye's Fludde events, with our son David playing Ham once, and several Music Sundays, one with Dave Brubeck's "La Fiesta de la Posada", another with excerpts from Bernstein's "Candide", which was glorious. For the month-long British Festival, five or six of us ladies each sewed one of the large heraldic banners hanging on a high wire across the Auditorium. Richard had picked out the fabric and made a different pattern for each one. Art Delmhorst drove into NYC to pick up Hermione Gingold to come here and talk about her theatre experiences. Richard knew she was in town. Everybody felt that we should support his big plans. He threw his heart and soul into each event.

**Pat Larrabee**

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So very many memories of Dick/Richard! I still picture him in his white jeans and blue shirt, and at one of our GCS first concerts at SUNY Purchase in his tuxedo, pointing to me to “do something” about the sound system crackling loudly after our soprano soloist had run the shower in the dressing room because her throat was sore. He asked me to “care for the soloists,” going to airports and train stations, provide housing at choristers’ homes and water for them. He advised us all to use our pencils to mark our music.

Don’t keep your music pristine.” His thoughtfulness was rich, providing apple strudel and apples from Tyce’s farm.

I loved his creativity! GCS had many sopranos and altos at that time and I’m ordered to all fit in the Christ Church chancel. Some of us had to sit out one of our 4 Christmas concerts. For one of those, I dressed as a lamb, schmoozing my way up the center aisle. I can picture him sitting in our library by the fireplace at one of our GCS Board parties, grinning after he’d let our cocker spaniel out of the crate “to visit with the guests!” And Richard’s messages including the weather, printed for each of us and placed on each chair at rehearsals was special, indeed, with his thoughts and comments. He worked to bring out the best we had.

Thanks, Jon and all for bringing forth these memories. We were blessed to know him!

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**Sue Grele**

As my sister Lynn said, Richard Vogt brought so much richness to our home. Music was so important to us because of Richard and the life and community he brought to First Church. The Boar’s Head Festival and all that beautiful music, Noah’s Flood, Music Sunday and the awareness and realization that music connects us across generations and social standing.

As a teen I began singing in the Chancel Choir and learned The Messiah and countless beautiful requiems. I’ve sung in many choirs since and no choir director has had the kind of impact that Richard has. He never shied away from a project because he thought that the choir couldn’t handle it. He brought us to it. He made it happen, drawing the best out of us. We wanted to be the best for him!

I am forever grateful for his influence in my life.

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**Andrea Woodman**

Richard is still very much with us all - it’s amazing how often his name comes up in our thoughts and conversations.

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**Gillian Patrick**

A huge part of our lives and an equally huge hole. I was driving to my house when I passed the church and saw the ambulance, et al. I will never forget.

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**Mandy Fry**

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