A GREAT SONG

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Pacific Press®
Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho | Oshawa, Ontario, Canada
www.pacificpress.com

A Cosmopolitan Childhood

The past is never dead. It's not even past.
—William Faulkner

The call came as if it were marching orders: Pastor Adolf Blomstedt, who had immigrated to the United States as a fourteen-year-old Swedish orphan, should return to his homeland to train future pastors at the Adventist missionary school in Nyhyttan, along with his wife, Alida, and their two sons, Norman and Herbert.

The family went to visit Alida's parents one last time and say good-bye. They covered nearly two thousand miles on their journey from Springfield, Massachusetts, one of the oldest and largest towns in New England, to the small town of Golden, Colorado.

Almost forty years earlier, Olof and Maria Thorson had immigrated to the United States and settled on a farm near Denver. It was very difficult for them to deal with the fact that their only daughter, who had been born in the United States, was now returning to their homeland. Everyone knew that a trip between the Old and the New World in the late 1920s was extremely complex and expensive. They wondered whether they would ever see each other again. Little did they know that this move would be the first of many to come in the subsequent years for the Blomstedts.

Decades later, Herbert Blomstedt met another world-renowned conductor at the Vienna airport and commented, "We are gypsies." He added, as his colleague looked at him questioningly, "For here we have no continuing city," quoting Hebrews 13:14, a Bible text that Johannes Brahms set to music in his *German Requiem*. Constant travel and never lingering too long in one place—these are things Herbert became familiar with during his childhood.

Part of our interest in someone's life story is in knowing the things that

have molded him and where his unique traits and characteristics come from. In childhood lie the roots of a life; this is where the foundation is laid for the person's future résumé. If the life story is about an artist, our curiosity about his early years is great. How exactly did it all begin? Were there early indications of an exceptional talent? Was the person perhaps a child prodigy? Was his childhood very serious, overshadowed by long hours of practicing, which left too little time to play?

Measured by such conjectures and compared with many other biographies, Herbert Blomstedt's early years were rather unspectacular. One can indeed speak of him as a happy child.

His mother, Alida, was a trained concert pianist and had worked as a piano teacher at Broadview College and Theological Seminary near Chicago before she got married. Even before Herbert was born, she played Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt for him. She told him later that, as a young boy, he had sometimes refused to go to bed until she had played yet another Chopin prelude for him. For many years, his favorite place was the rug in front of the piano in the living room while his mother played the piano.

Herbert's brother, Norman, had a gentle, quiet nature. He kindly endured the sometimes-rambunctious behavior of his younger siblings. He was a real big brother in the best sense of the word. "I could not have wished for a better one," Herbert said after his brother's death in 2005, also saying that Norman was his best friend.

Herbert's younger sister, Marita, remembers the loving atmosphere in their home, where a strong sense of companionship prevailed: there were always loving arms in which one could hide. Their parents were caring Christians with strong beliefs in God; these beliefs naturally included times for daily prayer and worship. In a letter to the author, Marita wrote, "Our home was characterized by warmth, hospitality, lots of good conversations, and generosity. It was at the same time permeated by discipline and genuine piety. These are traits that Herbert has acquired and developed further. He is a strong and godly man. He taught me to stand up for what I believe in, to live out my faith, to form my own opinions and investigate to find my own answers, and not to judge people, but to be an example."

Because Herbert and Norman were born to Swedish parents in the United States, they received both Swedish and American citizenship at birth. In the 1920s, this was considered to be something like winning a jackpot. Norman was born on April 30, 1924, in Hartford, Connecticut, and Herbert was born on July 11, 1927, in Springfield, Massachusetts.

There was possibly something special about July 1927, because two other world-renowned conductors were born that month: Kurt Masur on July 18, and Michael Gielen on July 20. However, Herbert sees his talent—on the rare occasions that he thinks about it—exclusively as a gift from God that comes with an enormous responsibility: to work hard and to strive with all his strength to do his work as well as possible. Hence, throughout his life, he has always been convinced of the fact that it's not appropriate to be proud of one's own talent and skill, thereby following entirely in the footsteps of his great role model, Johann Sebastian Bach, who reputedly said, "Talent is hard work, nothing else."

Moving to a new culture

Originally from Värmland, a remote area in Sweden that was predominantly a farming community, Olof and Maria Thorson were both enthusiastic and talented hobbyist musicians. If young people in that area during the late nineteenth century wanted to listen to music, they had to play it for themselves. Rural minstrels typically memorized up to 150 ballads, earning some extra money at family celebrations such as weddings and baptisms.

Olof Thorson was an exceptionally talented guitar player and played "upscale" music, greatly simplified arrangements of popular classical pieces for guitar. "My grandfather would sit in the Nordic forests with his ten-stringed guitar and struggle to play the *William Tell* Overture in half time with his thick farmer's fingers," Herbert remarked after conducting a charity concert in aid of the United Nations Children's Fund, in which the well-known piece by Rossini was performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.[1] Now some of Olof's music and his guitar are in the possession of his grandson Herbert.

Grandmother Maria also played guitar—a normal six-stringed one—at dance events or as an accompanist in church services. She was a strikingly beautiful woman, but in particular she was smart and capable, as her grandson reflected, "both on the dance floor as well as at home and at school. As devout and spiritual as she was, she always had a funny remark up her sleeve. Sometimes she was mischievous, and she loved adventure. No, she even looked for it!"[2] Later in life, she loved to have Herbert play her favorite piece of music on the violin, the Sicilienne in E-flat Major.

Olof Thorson's father had been a well-known folk music fiddler for dances, weddings, funerals, and other events. He carried the title of *Riksspelman* (minstrel of the kingdom)—a special honor that was given to farmers with exceptional musical ability.

Later, when their grandparents moved back to Sweden, Herbert and Norman spent many weeks with them every summer, working hard to help out with the farm chores. One can still see that Herbert's hands are used to manual labor. Even though his childlike imagination tended to exaggerate and was not always completely logical, the fact that there was no shortage of fun on the farm is made evident in the following school essay, which Herbert wrote when he was eleven.

When I Once Had to Help a Farmer

During the summer, I was on Öland. I was actually not there on summer vacation but to "work." Naturally, my brother was also there. Since we had to work every day, I had no time to collect plants for my herbarium at school. But the good thing was, I had collected some before we left. On the summer day that we arrived on Öland, I had to ride a bicycle to a sugar beet field, which was over one mile away from the farm. And I had to hoe sugar beets. That was worse than I thought. My back hurt. It felt as if it would break. But that was not the worst. . . . The field had to be covered with manure. My shoes got covered with it as well. My nose was filled with the most disgusting smell I had ever known. Yes, it was terrible. That was my first time, then I got used to it. It was almost as good a fragrance as 4711 [a German cologne]. There is a saying that fertilizer is the gold of farmers. I also had to do other things besides hoe sugar beets and stand in fertilizer. I milked cows, used the harrow, plowed, and more. During harvesttime, I often drove the combine. I could see the whole rye field from my elevated seat on the combine. I do not remember exactly how big it was, but definitely six to seven "Doppelmorgen."[3] But I did not always get to sit comfortably up there; I had to stand a lot and tie bales by hand.

By the time fall harvest came around, I knew what I was doing. Once when we had such a large hay load that I had to walk, I ran ahead and climbed up a tree by the roadside, waiting for the load. As they drove below the tree on which I was sitting, I jumped down and landed with a thud on the hay. No one realized that I had hitched a ride until we were almost at the farm. Just as we drove into the farmyard, I swung myself on a tree branch. They looked for me but could not find me. When I showed up shortly afterwards, they were completely bowled over.

For one long day, I had to weed out the carrot field. That was terrible. . . . Five-sixths of the field was covered with weeds that were

very troublesome. Some weeds were up to one and a half feet high.

On our next to the last day on Öland, we just lazed around. We had to ride home to Jönköping on our bicycles. That took three days. In Emmaboda, we met Karl-Otto Nilsson [a childhood friend], who had been in Ronneby and had worked just as we had. On August 11, we were happy to be home again in Jönköping. After a month of "work" on Öland.[4]

In Sweden, the Thorson grandparents had been members of the state church, but in America they came into contact with and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[5] Herbert remembers them as "avid believers."

On the other hand, Adolf's parents had passed away many years before. His father, Carl-Otto Blomstedt, who had worked as an insurance agent, died of tuberculosis at the young age of forty-three. Just two years earlier, Adolf's mother, Greta Sophia, was buried. She had died of stomach cancer. So Adolf became an orphan when he was thirteen years old; his sister Alyse was only nine. Later, in Adolf's sermons, when he shared his personal conversion experience, he would enjoy telling the congregation that back then he was a real street urchin and a ruffian. Because he had a strong and robust physique, he used to love impressing his friends and also some girls with the fact that he was able to walk around an entire city block on his hands. Herbert is convinced that he inherited the physical constitution of his father, who up until a very old age still had lots of energy and vigor.

An uncle, who had immigrated to the United States many years before, took Adolf and Alyse in and made sure that they received a good education.

In November 2006, during a guest performance in Liverpool, England, Herbert sought out the famous Albert Dock.

I wanted to experience some of the atmosphere that my father Adolf witnessed in 1912 when he emigrated from Liverpool to New York. The waterfront of the river Mersey, which is here over one thousand yards wide, still flaunts the magnificent and imposing white buildings of the Cunard Line and other shipping companies, which were built in the late nineteenth century and gave a foretaste of the wealth of the great country in the west. Here my father embarked early September 1912 on the luxury liner *Mauretania* with its four powerful black funnels. At that time, it was the fastest

> steamer in the world. With its revolutionary steam-turbine technology, it made the crossing in less than five days. The steamship captured the Blue Riband for the fastest transatlantic crossing on its maiden voyage and then retained it for twenty-two years until the German ship [*Bremen*] won the title in 1929. The furnishings in first class were fit for a king. But Adolf traveled third class, in a six-bed cabin without a window. There was a sink in each cabin, which is something my grandmother Maria Gustafsdotter and her fiancé Olof Tholsson, who traveled a few months after her, could only dream about twenty years before. My father arrived in New York on September 9.[6]

The experience of losing loved ones early on in life and the lack of safety and security, together with all the ensuing potential risks, made deep impressions on Adolf. Rigor, discipline, and strict limits were important principles for him, which he tried to pass on to his children while raising them. Many who knew him described him as "remarkable" and having authority but also as rather distant and unapproachable. Adolf's granddaughters Cecilia and Maria remember that he was fond of children and could be warm with them. He took his faith very seriously, and he lived out what he preached. His enormous diligence, coupled with a high sense of duty, and his Swedish language skills were the reasons why he was considered an appropriate candidate for the education of students at the Nyhyttan seminary in Sweden, and so the family was relocated there.

After the family had traveled by boat to Gothenburg, the journey continued by train. The memory of their last train journey through the endless prairies of America stood in sharp contrast with the train ride from Gothenburg to Hultafors. The children felt as though they were driving through a green tunnel.

The family rested from their travels for a few days at the Hultafors Sanitarium. Soon word got out that Alida was a pianist, and she was asked to give a piano concert on one evening. On the designated evening, as she was about to open the door to enter the room and sit down at the piano, Sister Asta, the sanitarium's manager, stopped her, "Please wait, Mrs. Blomstedt. You cannot go in yet."

"Why not?"

"You have no rings."

"I've never worn rings. Why do I need to wear rings?"

Sister Asta pointed to Herbert and Norman. They would be considered illegitimate children if their parents did not wear wedding rings. In

haste, the manager found a few curtain rings and put them on Alida. But, alas, the rings were too large and rattled on the piano keys. There was a short pause, and then the piano music continued—without the rings.[7]

A visit to a goldsmith shortly afterwards ensured that Adolf and Alida were recognized as a married couple. They had entered another culture and tried to conform to it as best they could.

"Next stop, Järnboås!" The driver of the steam engine put on the brakes, and the screeching train arrived at the small station of a mining town, just over twelve miles from Nora. They drove in a rental car to Nyhyttan, which would be home to the Blomstedts for the next three years. They lived on the second floor of one of about a dozen houses that were scattered on the property of an old mine.

Alida worked thirty hours a week teaching piano at the seminary to prospective pastors. Often in small communities, pastors themselves had to accompany the church while singing. The young mother was already showing the early signs of arthritis, and it soon became apparent that she would not be able to pursue a career as a concert pianist.

Nyhyttan was a wonderful place for Norman and Herbert. There was a lot of space to play and explore, with nature all around them. During this time, they developed friendships that have lasted a lifetime.

Summer in Vienna

In the summer of 1932, Alida traveled with her sons to Vienna. From her modest earnings, she had steadfastly saved up enough money to take advanced piano classes from Hedwig Rosenthal. Hedwig was married to Moriz Rosenthal, who was one of the best pianists at the time and had received part of his instruction from Franz Liszt. Carin Gille traveled with them to take care of the two boys.

The foursome took the train to Trelleborg, crossed over to Sassnitz by ferry, and then traveled again by train to Berlin. Alida was enchanted by Berlin; it reminded her of America. There the small traveling company visited the Waldfriede clinic, which was directed by Dr. L. E. Conradi, son of the German Seventh-day Adventist Church founder Ludwig R. Conradi.

From Berlin, they journeyed to Prague and then to Vienna. They stayed in a small house in the Schubertgasse (Schubert Alley) belonging to a woman by the name of Mrs. Teckel. They all slept in one room with two beds, and the kitchen was shared with the landlady. Norman describes in his family chronicle how he shuddered at the sight of a wobbling calf brain, which Mrs. Teckel sliced into thin pieces and then fried

in a pan. Another less-than-pleasant experience was the many lice and fleas that climbed up the exterior walls and came in through the cracks in the drafty windows.

The excursions to Schönbrunn Palace and the Prater amusement park became unforgettable experiences for the Blomstedt boys.

The brothers were also deeply impressed by a visit to St. Stephen's Cathedral and its catacombs. When Herbert once again conducted the Vienna Symphony in 2006, he noted in his diary, "I was just at St. Stephen's. I thought back to my visit there in 1932—I'll never forget how I shuddered at the sight of a skull in the catacombs under the church."[8]

Carin Gille often took the children to one of the bigger parks that had a playground. War veterans were begging at the park entrances—many had lost arms or legs—a terrible reminder of the madness of the First World War.

Norman writes in "Minnen" (Memories) of an evening orchestral concert that took place in front of the illuminated facade of a castlelike building: "The audience sat on benches in the park facing the structure. There, for the first time, I became fascinated by symphonic music."

The years in Finland

After working in Nyhyttan for three years, Adolf became president of the Swedish-speaking Seventh-day Adventist churches in Finland. Another move lay ahead for the family.

This was a difficult time, right after the Great Depression in 1932. Finland was poor and had been independent for only fifteen years. Swedes could live quite inexpensively in Finland with their own currency, the Swedish krona, but Adolf was paid in the local currency—Finnish markka. At first, the family lived in a beautiful villa in the suburb of Grankulla (today Kauniainen, west of Helsinki). After one year, the family left the villa and moved to Helsinki.

Ascetic or a pleasure seeker?

Herbert's lifestyle, especially his eating habits, are an inexhaustible topic of discussion for many who know him. Even journalists, who have gathered a little information prior to their interviews, are repeatedly intrigued by this issue. In his diary, Herbert Blomstedt describes how after an interview, the journalist Christiane Irrgang from Norddeutscher Rundfunk (Northern German Broadcasting) accompanied him to his taxi and wanted to know more about his religion:

> "Adventists are known for their ascetic way of life: they do not smoke, they do not drink, and so on."
>
> I hear this so often and answered—perhaps in a slightly irritated tone, "This is not asceticism. It is common sense, you know that yourself! I am not an ascetic but a gourmet and an epicurean."
>
> She did not contradict me but confirmed, "Yes, nonsmokers can taste their food so much better; they can detect many subtle nuances."[9]

There are even cartoons on this subject. One of them shows Herbert in a plain monk's robe with a cord around his waist and a raised baton. The caption reads, "The conductor with the spiritual baton." It was released in the *Financial Times*, during the period in which he bade farewell to the San Francisco Symphony. Despite his great sense of humor, he felt that he was incorrectly depicted in that instance.

On the opposite side of the globe, in Tokyo, a cartoon was once published of a mosquito dripping with blood and just flying away from the conductor. A violinist enters from the right in a great hurry, her skirts billowing and her instrument under her arm. She runs towards the mosquito, wanting to catch it and get a blood sample to finally discover the mysterious substance Herbert Blomstedt has in his veins that, in spite of a vegetarian diet, makes him so agile and full of vigor. This amused him!

A Russian violinist even asked Herbert whether he really had four daughters. When the violinist was asked why he doubted this, the man stated, a little surprised and embarrassed, that it was because the maestro did not eat meat.

Even as a child everything had to be aesthetically prepared for Herbert, and the food on his plate needed to be clearly recognizable. He never touched an indefinable mass. "I'd rather grab a carrot that looked like one or tomatoes that were in season only from August to October and were prepared by my mother in every possible way."

Later psychological and ethical issues about eating meat came up: "How can one eat one's friends? To kill an animal in order to eat it is a reminder of cannibalism. I believe that the aversion to killing animals is a natural and healthy instinct, which is almost totally desensitized by cultural conventions. Actually, I don't see it as all quite that dramatic. Long ago I accepted it when my best friends and closest family members ate meat. They are not worse people for it."[10]

The Early Years

Near the villa in Grankulla, there was a Swedish elementary school where

Norman was enrolled in the third grade. At the time, Helsinki had about 250,000 inhabitants, a quarter of which were Swedish speaking. There was distinct hostility between the two language groups, especially among the children. As a very sensitive child, Norman suffered because of this. Herbert was of a more robust nature and later on could cope better with the situation.

Adolf's office was downtown, on 7 Annegatan (Anne Street). In addition to his administrative tasks, he also conducted evangelistic meetings where his wife played some piano pieces as a prelude. Adolf's secretary, Lydia Sandholm, quickly became Herbert's favorite aunt. "She was so loving, often gave us sweets and stamps and could invent an infinite number of small games. . . . And she could tell stories! . . . She was the ideal aunt for someone like me."[11]

While Norman attended the new Swedish school, Herbert, at five and a half years of age, entered the second grade in the *Svenska folkskolan* (Swedish elementary school) at the upper end of Anne Street. "It was decided that I should skip the first grade. I could already read, and they feared boredom and perhaps worse." This fear seemed to be substantiated, as young Herbert told his mother after she scolded him yet again, "One cannot live totally without pranks." Today he knows the full truth: "As a child, I was very headstrong and a bit dangerous in my parents' eyes. I would attack my older brother when something did not suit me. I hit him and bit him. He had strict orders that he was not allowed to strike 'the little one.' This was certainly not easy for him. Only my father was allowed to discipline us."[12]

As a second-grader, he proved to be very eager to learn and, in his own words, could not get enough of all school subjects.

Bobrikov's piano workshop

The apartment building where the Blomstedts lived still stands today as Herbert remembers it.

> Yes, I still know our old home by heart. We lived in Arcadia, and it was actually a pretty elegant residential area. . . . I'm truly amazed today that we lived so well. Perhaps the church officials in Finland had a particular respect for the new man from Sweden, who had received his college education in America and whose wife was an artist. Maybe my father asked for some consideration because his wife was already suffering from rheumatism and had some special needs.
>
> We even had a nanny, Edja, who would help in the house when

> "Mutchi," as we called our mom, was playing piano at Father's lectures. Edja made up a very special game with my brother and me: Bobrikov's piano workshop. At bedtime, she poked us with a hairpin between the ribs. It did not tickle or hurt, but we shouted loudly, and Edja then decided that the piano was not tuned properly. More twists of the needle, and then the sound was tested again. We found it incredibly funny and almost died laughing. This was probably our first game that involved music. What we didn't know at the time, however, was that Edja had not invented the name *Bobrikov*.[13]

Nikolai Ivanovich Bobrikov was the hated former Russian governor-general of Finland. Equipped with dictatorial authority by Tsar Nicholas II, he immediately arrested all opponents of his attempts to Russianize the then-Russian autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. In 1904, a patriot finally killed him. Unfortunately, Edja never told us why the funny game was named after the dreaded governor; perhaps because he had pestered the Finns so?

Edja also introduced the pastor's family in war games. "Under the table, we hung rugs to create a castle cave. We then fired at each other with folded paper balls that got real momentum from taut rubber bands. Or we settled down on the top shelf of the wardrobe and threw pillows at each other from there. Meanwhile our parents proclaimed, in words and music, the gospel of peace and love in the Sibelius Academy."[14]

A special encounter

One day in Helsinki, seven-year-old Herbert went with his father to visit the famous scientist Henning Karström in his villa on the island of Lauttasaari. Pastor Blomstedt gave some pastoral counseling to the brilliant biochemist who was tormented by difficult inner struggles. Herbert later wrote, "I held my breath in admiration when he and my father talked about profound things that I did not understand about God and the fathomless nature created by Him." Herbert remembers, "After we ate, Karström played 'Haydn's Serenade' on the violin. I have never forgotten this music. It was the first time that I heard music like that."[15]

Karström, who at that time lectured at the university and directed the laboratory of Professor Artturi Virtanen—later a Nobel Prize winner—was finally able to find inner peace and affirmation. In later years, he served as the rector of Finnish and Swedish Seventh-day Adventist schools and published numerous articles about healthy nutrition and natural remedies until he was very old.

First love

During this time, Wilhelm Sucksdorff and his family lived near St. John's Church in Helsinki. He was a popular physician with a private practice in Helsinki and was a leader in his church. Dr. Sucksdorff, also called "Sucken," was small in stature, had a sanguine temperament, often laughed loudly, and spoke with a slightly hoarse voice. He was a consulting physician for a medical institute where Alida was being treated for the rapidly spreading rheumatism in her limbs. Mrs. Sucksdorff was a quiet little lady. She was always well dressed; in winter, she wore a fur coat, so she made an almost aristocratic impression. The Sucksdorffs had three daughters: Hellin, Maj-Lis, and Ulla.

Hellin was then about thirteen years old and had long yellow-blond hair and lots of freckles in a round face. Herbert was only half her age but fell violently in love with her.

> I dreamed of her. And once luck was on my side, for a public lecture that my father gave at the Sibelius Academy, where my mother played a few Chopin pieces as a prelude to the lecture, I was simply taken with [the Sucksdorffs] since the nanny, Edja, was not available, and I was allowed to sit on the second balcony, next to Hellin. Oh, what bliss; what joy! Hellin took my hand—and I was in paradise. I can still feel that endless happiness today. Emotions, even to the smallest details, etch themselves firmly in my memory, while memories of external circumstances quickly fade. Just this one experience was in every respect unique. Never again did Hellin take my hand. She later studied medicine and gave her hand and heart in marriage to Leo Hirvonen, who was a professor of physiology at the University of Oulu and later also in Helsinki.[16]

First music lessons

When Herbert was six years old, he received his first official music lessons. "Aunt Aina," one of his mothers' friends, was his teacher. Aina Holm taught at a preschool of the Sibelius Academy and had a grand piano at home, which impressed her students immensely. Herbert has little recollection of the actual lessons as he writes in his diary entry. However, he very clearly remembers the embarrassing feeling as he walked the long road "to piano lessons at Aunt Aina on 13B Michelingatan [Michelin Street]. The lesson itself was not the bad part but having to carry my sheet music in the old black, worn leather case that belonged to my father; that was a disgrace. I was so ashamed and just hoped that I would not run into

any of my playmates on Runebergsgatan [Runebergs Street]."[17] Even the "embarrassing and shameful feelings" when he learned how to ice-skate and "fell on the ice, which today are dark echoes in [his] memory," were, in comparison, a minor embarrassment.

Otherwise, there are only good things to say.

> I could borrow sheet music from Aunt Aina, with her personal bookplate on it: a small yellow piece of paper, and on it was a pianist wearing a full skirt sitting at the piano, below which was written "Aina Holms Book." Later on she gave me music from her collection, which is now scattered about in my own library. . . . She was very pleased with the musical career of her little pupil, and we corresponded a number of times. I still saw Aunt Aina in the 1970s when I was invited as a guest conductor to Helsinki. However, when I visited Helsinki in 1983 with the Staatskapelle Dresden, Aunt Aina was no longer living. I received a small photo of Aunt Aina from my brother's estate; in [the photo], she is sitting under a large oil painting in her apartment on Michelin Street.[18]

The singing saw

Once during the Finland years, when Herbert accompanied his father on a pastoral visit, he met a coffin maker named Färm. Herbert remembers that

> he was a very unique and educated man. He played music on a saw, which impressed me immensely. He held the handle between his knees and produced the sound with a violin bow, which he played almost perpendicular to the straight edge of the saw. He varied the pitch by bending the upper part of the saw. He played with great vibrato—perhaps it was not possible to play it otherwise. The combination of coffins, saw, Färm, and music fascinated me in an unforgettable way. *Färm* means something like "firm," "determined," and it seems like it may have a deeper significance that five years later, the name of my esteemed violin teacher in Gothenburg was precisely Fermæus.[19]

In 1935, the family moved to Turku, a town of sixty thousand inhabitants, where Swedish was the mother tongue of one in six people. There, the Blomstedts bought their first wireless set, a crystal radio receiver. They listened regularly to broadcasts of classical instrumental music. If opera,

operetta, or even pop songs were played, it was turned off—one couldn't do much with that kind of music.

During the Finland years, the family spent their summers at the grandparents' farm in Värmland. The grandparents sold their house in Golden, Colorado, and moved back to Sweden in order to be closer to their only daughter and her family. They moved into a small house called Lyckan—meaning "happiness"—in the village of Kortlanda in the forests of Eda, in western Värmland. Eda, which is where the family originally came from and many of their relatives lived, borders on Köla and Skillingmark.

The grandparents owned a radio from the earliest of times. They also listened only to classical music, and when Herbert was about twelve years old, he experienced a key moment in his life. A German radio station broadcast a concert with the Staatskapelle Dresden, conducted by Karl Böhm, performing Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Mozart by Max Reger. The boy was, by his own confession, spellbound, and this orchestra remained for him "simply the epitome of harmonic sound." He had no idea at the time that almost exactly thirty years later he himself would perform with the Staatskapelle Dresden.

In Sweden again

When Herbert was ten years old, his family moved for the fifth time. After working for five years in Finland, Adolf was elected president of the South Swedish Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The family moved into an apartment with three rooms and a kitchen on the southernmost tip of Jönköping. The town in the province of Småland is situated on the southern shores of Lake Vättern.

Adolf's office was located in Gothenburg, but he was also the pastor in Jönköping at the same time. The Blomstedts soon made friends with several families in the city, including the Nilssons, whose daughter Brita and son Karl-Otto, Herbert's classmate, became lifelong friends with the Blomstedt boys.

Karl-Otto remembers that he noticed Herbert right away. "He was so different from the others, somehow living in his own world. Everyone in the class noticed that he was a member of a different church than the usual Church of Sweden since he did not come to school on Saturdays. He also knew an unusually large amount about music. Somehow I became interested in him. I soon discovered that he had a great sense of humor."

The two boys also shared a common passion: soccer. Almost every day they spent several hours on the soccer field. Karl-Otto remembers well how Adolf Blomstedt would sometimes come and fetch them from the

soccer field while chiding, "What will become of you two one day if you waste so much time here?" "But then," the now-retired doctor adds with a grin, "he sometimes did join us and played with us for a while."

The maestro still played soccer up until a few years ago but only with his grandsons and as the goalkeeper, where he once almost sprained his right wrist. "My grandson Oscar shot so hard! I could barely hold the ball. They are already talented [soccer] players, these boys. If they didn't have such good grades in school, I would be seriously worried as to what would become of them one day."

The "Butcher quartet"

In Jönköping, Herbert and Norman finally had the opportunity to study stringed instruments at the General Institute of Higher Learning. Norman chose the cello and Herbert the violin. But the instrument wasn't a good one, and the teacher was not very motivating. Herbert continued his piano studies with moderate enthusiasm under Enok Nilsson, the music director for the A6 artillery regiment, which was stationed in Jönköping. Nilsson was an excellent cellist, a good pianist, and at the same time, the conductor of the symphony orchestra of the city. After a while, Herbert took lessons from another teacher, who was also not ideal for him. Only in their third year in Jönköping did he meet an excellent teacher, an old German, named Boysen.

When the family moved to Gothenburg three years later, Herbert received violin lessons from the assistant concertmaster of the symphony orchestra, Lars Fermæus.[20] However, the lessons were expensive—the cost was about ten krona per lesson. Herbert had to explain to him that his parents couldn't possibly afford that. So they finally agreed upon three krona per lesson. Herbert cherished his teacher very much and practiced three to four hours every day, in addition to his daily homework. Soccer was forgotten! Herbert wrote in his diary in 2008: "How I secretly rejoiced when my father looked up from his books to watch his son playing music. He liked the fact that I exerted myself to learn. This sense of acceptance and appreciation meant a lot to me."

Fermæus advised his gifted pupil to complete his secondary education at all costs because he could not become a comprehensively educated musician otherwise. The maestro commented on this from his current perspective:

> That was what I did.
>
> I am very grateful to him for that kind of advice. It is one thing

> to train your fingers and your musicianship, and another thing to develop as a complete person. In the long run, that defines what you can do with the music. I think all important musicians I know are deeply cultivated and spiritual persons. It's not enough to know all the symphonies and string quartets and operas, or whatever. You have to know also about the painting and literature of the period, and so on, to make a more complete view.[21]

Playing music at home was a given in the Blomstedt family. Despite her severe rheumatoid polyarthritis, Alida still proved herself a good musician. Adolf was an excellent tenor; his voice reverberated not only at family worships but also at church events. Daughter Marita recalls as if it were yesterday, "the evenings at our house. The evening prayer was said and then the lamp put out, as my mother went over to my brothers to play with them. Mama sat at the piano, Herbert played the violin and Norman the cello. I could fall asleep to live music. When he was not out of town, Papa mostly sat completely absorbed with a spiritual book in his hand."

Brother Norman proved to be a gifted cellist. The family played trios and sonatas, concertos and other solo pieces together. On Sundays, violinist friends from Fermæus's music school came to play quartet music. With Herbert on the viola, they played all the quartets they could find. Norman reported in "Minnen," "We butchered one quartet after another, and we therefore called ourselves the 'Butcher Quartet.' " The maestro commented, "And that as a vegetarian!"

> It is good, to engage with chamber music very early on. There is no deeper, more expressive music than the string quartets of Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, and Mozart. Even after a strenuous concert, I know of no better way to relax than playing in a quartet. There I could still continue making music.
>
> Quartet playing is also a good school because you have to listen to each other and you can hear each other. One must not only express oneself, but must be able to be stimulated by the others. As a conductor, I also have to listen; I may not only lead and put myself in the scene.

While they lived in Gothenburg, the two brothers—now thirteen and sixteen years old—went at least twice a week to concerts. Norman, as a member of the orchestral school of the symphony, received free tickets,

and Herbert was able to acquire cheap student tickets. He earned the money by selling newspapers. Thus, over the years, they had the opportunity to get to know many conductors and instrumentalists with a large repertoire in the excellent concert hall. Herbert loves to tell how they "drank in" the music and how on the way home they talked as drunkards, raving over individual musicians and enthusiastically singing to each other the passages of music that they particularly liked. They spoke all the jargon and distributed praise and censure for individual musicians in the orchestra, the conductor, and the compositions. Once they heard the Piano Concerto No. 1 by Franz Liszt. On their way home, they disclosed their displeasure with the music and agreed with youthful impetuosity that this was truly "an emetic." Though Liszt still remains one of Herbert's least favorite composers, he learned to appreciate Liszt over the years and performed several works by him; however, when he thinks back to this episode, he has to smile over the arrogance of his adolescent judgment.

Herbert had quite a different experience with Anton Bruckner in those days. After hearing his Symphony No. 4 for the first time, he was "as if bewitched by this music. On the way home through a park, my brother and I tried to sing or whistle the melodies. At home, I then tried (with only partial success, of course) to write the melodies down, so as not to forget them. This music spoke to me immediately."

Sometimes the brothers even took little Marita with them to the concerts, which for her, in retrospect, was the highlight of her childhood.

Every morning at eight o'clock in Herbert's junior high school, a brief worship was held for everyone. A chorale was also sung, accompanied by a student on the organ. When this particular student graduated from high school, the music teacher, a virtuoso organist himself, asked the now fifteen-year-old Herbert whether he would like to learn to play the organ. Would he ever! In addition to the violin, the organ would become a favorite instrument. Even today, when his tour schedule allows it, he still accompanies the congregational singing at his church in Lucerne.

> Already in high school Johann Sebastian Bach's music was to me like a musical guiding star on which I oriented myself. Like someone possessed, I played all six of his solo sonatas for violin, from memory. As an organist, I was passionate about Bach. Becoming a conductor was something that fell into my lap later on, but initially I dreamed of performing a Bach cantata on the organ balcony of a beautiful church every Sunday. Nothing came of it, but in my debut with the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra the first piece that we

> performed was the Suite No. 2 in B Minor by Bach. With my first orchestra of thirty musicians, I naturally played much baroque and thus also Bach. With increasing orchestra sizes, Bach was gradually passed by. . . . But I always again returned to my "first love."[22]

During the middle of World War II, Wilhelm Furtwängler's performance as guest conductor was a very special event for the brothers. On this occasion, Herbert plucked up all his courage and asked the world-renowned conductor for his autograph—an unforgettable moment for Herbert and the only autograph he has ever asked for! For many years now, an autographed portrait of the revered conductor, colleague, and predecessor has hung in the office of the musical director of the Gewandhaus in Lucerne.

In school, Herbert was very active in sports. He enjoyed sports a lot, was athletically built, and achieved exceptional accomplishments in sports earlier on than in music. The first newspaper reports about him told of his remarkable success in high-jumping, long-jumping, and sprinting. He always won first place. Otherwise Herbert was rather a loner, who loved to spend time with individual friends but didn't feel as comfortable in a group.

The church congregation as a family

The Blomstedts' home was always open to others. However, there were few artists and musicians among the never-ending stream of visitors. Primarily, the guests, who came from all over Sweden and abroad, were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and came to attend meetings together with Adolf. The sons liked that in this way they could get a glimpse of what was going on in the world. For Alida, however, this meant that the various responsibilities of the church and those at home left her little time for music, especially since their third child, the youngest Marita, was born in Jönköping. Marita said in retrospect, "Mama's patience and positive outlook on life caused all who met her to love her. And there were many. We always had guests in our home, and there was always something good to eat, even though we were relatively poor. A pastor's salary did not go very far for a large family in the '40s and '50s in Sweden. But I always felt rich."

Their local church, writes Norman, was just like one big family where everyone got along, young and old alike. The Blomstedt boys were happy going to church, whether for the worship service or other events. Soon they participated by playing music in church. In addition, it was one

of the tasks of the younger children to recite a poem or read something during the worship service once in a while. On several occasions, when it was his turn to read, young Herbert experienced his father calling out from the last row of chairs, "Louder, please!" Adolf was known for his powerful voice, which he used effectively in lectures and sermons. Herbert, who was equipped with an equally good voice, did not find that he spoke too softly. Inwardly, he made up his mind: *One day when my father is up front, preaching away loudly, I'll also call out and interrupt. But I'll shout, "Quieter please!"*

To this day, Herbert still especially loves the quiet—in music as well as in his demeanor. As a conductor and orchestral trainer, he places great importance on the orchestra being able to produce not only as loud a sound as possible but also as quiet a sound as possible.

Although he became more independent from his father and gradually began to establish his own identity, Herbert's interest in religion during his teenage years remained strong, and it even grew. A few years ago while reading through old letters and essays of that time, he noted, "My religious zeal is very apparent and also a heritage from my parents, especially from my father."[23] He found the Bible "incredibly interesting" and helped himself to his father's extensive library to read about whatever was of interest to him. In 1940, he joined his father's baptismal class.

> Overall I was a very sensitive child. My sensitivity soon included music and emotions. I was totally enthused by music that spoke to me. Music that I did not like, I shunned and strictly refused to listen to or play. Such an attitude can easily lead to willfulness. However, since this was also connected with an awakening sense of quality and judgment, my parents did not really want to curtail it. Surely, it was also sometimes difficult, because I was overconfident. During adolescence, I became aware of this willfulness and stubbornness and how hideous it was. I realized that I had sometimes hurt other people, and I was terribly sorry. I realized at that time that I really needed to change. . . . I used to be very irritable, hot-tempered, and violent and tended to exaggerate. I had developed little social feeling or interest in other people, except for the very closest of friends and family. If someone else suffered, it rarely touched me. My interest in other people was only awakened later on and is still growing today. In the meantime, I find every person interesting, whether they have something to do with me or not. When I meet some listeners after a concert, I'm so curious about them that I sometimes have to stop myself.

Herbert did not, to use his own words, "have a miraculous conversion experience":

> But the inner change was very noticeable for me, and my hitherto pronounced tendency to be hot-tempered disappeared. I really feel that this is a miracle of God. One could also explain it as a maturing process that progresses little by little, even at times jerkily. Suddenly one no longer feels the old temptations but begins to think more about others and is no longer so self-centered. That was probably the beginning of a maturation process that everyone goes through in life, but it can be very individual due to different circumstances.
>
> For me, it happened simultaneously with a significant maturation in the religious, intellectual, and musical spheres. I suddenly became aware of how much there was to learn and see in the world and how fantastic it all was. Gradually, I also began to take an interest in the people that formed part of my expanding world. Before I would only notice an amusing teacher or someone who had unusual looks. For example, one boy we called "piglet" because he had such small eyes and a very pink skin—these were boys' pranks and typical for our ages. Now, Jesus' example gave me direction for my life. He was the great Maestro.

The contents of a letter, which Herbert received a few years ago, show that as a student he was able to empathize with others, or at least he tried to. A former schoolmate, Pelle Flodman, gave the letter to one of the orchestra members before a concert in Gothenburg. As Herbert read it, the story slowly came back to his mind: Pelle was an orphan and not very diligent at school. The class teacher had scolded him repeatedly because his homework was not done neatly. But that did little good. As a last resort to apply pressure to the boy, the teacher told him in front of the whole class to let his father know that the teacher wanted to speak with him. "But I have no father," Pelle said.

"Then tell your mother."

"But I have no mother."

"Then tell your sister."

Pelle Flodman wrote in his letter that on that day Herbert came to him on the playground during recess, put his arm around his shoulder, and asked him, "How does it feel to have no parents?" Pelle had never forgotten this, and throughout his life, he followed the musical career of his former classmate with interest.

Herbert was baptized in June 1941 and became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Gothenburg. Today he still has the Bible that he received at that time. It is very much used, full of notes and comments, and has had to be repaired several times.

As a schoolboy, young Herbert was already confronted with the challenge of having to appeal for an exemption of the regulations because of his Sabbath observance, as this newspaper article "High School Exam at Dusk" from the year 1942 shows:

> The school board has notified that a Seventh-day Adventist student from the local secondary school in Gothenburg, is allowed to write his Swedish essay exam (on Saturday) after "sunset." He should arrive at the same time as the other students at the school, but will only take the exam after 19:45 pm. Prior to that, he will be under the required supervision of a teacher.[24]

No time for girls

When Herbert was in the sixth grade, a girl began to slip little pieces of paper with small rhyming poems into his jacket hanging in the hallway. He had an inkling of who it might be. In any case, one day this is what was on the note:

Att älska en Blomstedt	To love a Blomstedt—oh my dear,
är inte lätt—	It is not easy—hear!
på många vis och sätt.	Sometimes it even brings a tear.[25]

In fact, he who was then so admired by girls "had on the whole no time for them. Of course, I had my crushes at school but only from a distance, just fleeting daydreams. I was far too interested in music and school subjects." After all, he was following in his father's footsteps—"a great moralist, in the best sense of the word, but sometimes also in a slightly worse sense." As a man in a position of leadership, he admonished *his* pastors when they, in his opinion, showed too little commitment to their work and wasted time. In retrospect, Herbert finds that this was not really an issue at home: "In this way, we had a clear idea of what was acceptable and what was not. One should be thankful that boundaries were set. When one is a bit more mature, then one can modify these standards; but for a starting point, it was very good that no one wasted their time."

Adolf had a pet phrase: "eternal value." Even in one's free time, one should only choose to do activities that had "eternal value."

> Of course, my father was not alone in this somewhat lofty requirement of "eternal value"—which may sound a little peculiar or crazy for modern ears—but it was a short rule by which one could judge, a kind of a compass. In 1942, I received a book by the Danish composer Rudolph Simonsen as a gift for graduating from junior high school. The title was *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*, and it contained musical essays considered from the element of eternity and inspired by Baruch Spinoza. I think it is good to put this notion above one's passing emotions, even if perhaps, at times, different things had eternal value for my father than for me. It boils down to the fundamental perspective, which is very well emphasized for Christians in two ways: belief in creation tells us that we are not a coincidence. And then the second coming of Jesus gives us hope and directs our thoughts toward the future! We live this pronouncedly exciting life in the middle of this very broad range: big tasks as well as little ones that become large enough, if we take them seriously. I am firmly convinced that we can undertake them better if we have a clear perspective.

Music as a career?

Herbert finished his *Abitur* (final secondary-school exams) at the high school in Gothenburg at the age of seventeen; he was two years younger than his classmates. For a long time, he had been thinking about what career to choose and had even written a school essay a year and a half before on the topic "The Future—Hopes and Fears." He is convinced of one thing: those who want to achieve great things must set a goal early on and then with "incontestable energy" strive to achieve it. In the essay, he confesses that his own goal is still not entirely clear, but he would like to learn as much as possible in school because knowledge is power. He writes about the fact that he started to love music in a very special way when he was five or six years old. One does not detect a sentimental tone here, but one of sober consideration as he asks whether he has a future as a musician. And he states, "In this profession, there is terrible competition." He is acutely aware of the fact that only very hard work—practicing daily for many long hours—"by the sweat of his brow," will bring about the possibility of being good enough. "Well, I am not afraid of work. It's fun to practice, although it can be very draining, both physi-

cally and intellectually. If one has not played for a few days, you naturally get out of practice . . . and then one finds virtually no pleasure in playing a very simple piece, because you feel that it sounds so bad. One can then only sit down and play some small important passages over and over again until one is satisfied. That is what practice means."

> I had found my old writing compositions . . . and also some letters to my parents as a teenager. . . . They show how my feelings about "good and bad" in music were formed at an early age. The tendency to make moral statements is precocious. Much of it seems of course "secondhand," almost ridiculously taken over from what I had heard from my father in his sermons and lectures. My religious zeal is very apparent and also a heritage from my parents, especially from my father. On the other hand, the sense of humor, which is also omnipresent, I think is something I got from my mother, and even more from my maternal grandmother, Mary Thorson.[26]

In his essay, Herbert sees rather slim chances for career opportunities as a musician:

> One or two centuries ago, the need for musicians was significantly greater than it is today. Not only the important but also the less important nobility had their own, often quite large, orchestras. For example, Louis XIV had 128 salaried musicians at his court in Versailles. Even a small count had a small paid orchestra. The great Joseph Haydn was the musical director for Count Esterházy in Austria. Now things have changed. The interest in really good and artistic music has decreased over the last half a century. Nowadays the demand for music, in whatever form, can partially be satisfied by the radio. . . . That's why only a few select musicians will be able to make a living from their music.

At this time, in the fall of 1943, the Second World War raged all about peaceful Sweden. As in many other educated, middle-class Swedish families, the Blomstedts held fast to the almost romantic ideal of the "old Germany" with its high culture of poets and thinkers. Many Swedes could not see the dark side of the Nazi regime even after the war was over.

In his essay, quoted above, the young Herbert worries about the impact of the war on society and culture, which "could possibly be devastating." An economic issue preoccupied him as well: can one make a living from

music? "That of course depends on how good the musician is. If he is talented enough to give his own concerts, then he can potentially earn himself a fortune. Even as a member of a symphony orchestra, he can at least make ends meet, maybe better than many others."

It is clear to him that the training and education are very expensive. But he also knows that "scholarships have become a great help. How many world-famous musicians have by means of scholarships received the opportunities to develop their talents!"

He states his most important thought in the conclusion of the essay—a love of music is crucial! "One's existence is boring if one just makes music to earn a living. No, one makes music for the sake of music itself and in order to give pleasure to and edify other people; something that noble music has always provided."

A champion of high culture

Young Herbert's views on music did not always fall on understanding ears among his peers. He remembers that some may well have perceived him as quite peculiar. He was the boy who never came to class on Saturday, constantly practiced the violin, and unilaterally advocated for classical music! In retrospect, Herbert feels that having to stand alone was a good lesson for him: "That was very good for me. It helped me many times in future years—a kind of schooling, just as the cubs of animals get used to fighting to develop their muscles and hunting instincts, so I had to get used to frictions. . . . I never really had any problem with my comrades, but I always felt I was kind of a loner, and I think that developed some spiritual muscles." For him, this meant not simply following the masses, but deciding for himself. He admits freely, "Perhaps, also, out of protest—that's a little bit in my nature."[27]

Even among the young people in his church, Herbert was part of a minority because of his high demands in music. To this day, he dislikes the sentimental hymns that originated and were popular in the nineteenth century: "It does not bring glory to God when we deal mainly with our own feelings and revel in them."

When he was about sixteen years old, Herbert got so upset at a youth camp over some of his opinions about kitschy songs that he made a bet about being able to compose a song of this simplistic nature on the spot in order to demonstrate its worthlessness. He composed a song in a very short time but not with the desired result: the people loved it!

Gösta Wiklander, now a retired pastor, recalled a campout when he proudly presented Herbert with his new accordion: "Herbert was at first

quite opposed to it. This instrument did not fit his understanding of cultured music. So I played some music on it for him, and he gradually became curious. Finally, he even took the accordion in his hands and tried it himself. I had the impression that he no longer thought it was so bad." Much later, in his early thirties, the now-tenured conductor set out to sift through a hymnbook with several hundred choruses and evaluate each piece. Since it just happened to be mushroom season, he chose the classification from a mushroom book:

Symbol	Mushrooms	Music
* * *	delicious	very valuable
* *	good	good
*	edible	sentimental or worthless—even if a favorite
+	poisonous	kitsch or otherwise distasteful
+ +	deadly	blasphemy, openly or covertly

He laughs now when he speaks of this type of classification. Yet this splash of humor, which he added to a serious evaluation, has remained one of his typical characteristics: one has to take things seriously, but one doesn't have to be grim about it. Herbert's daughter Cecilia later wrote, "My father has a very specific view about what constitutes 'good' music. As far as church music is concerned, the matter is even more complicated. My father says that over the years he has become more tolerant—and this is a good thing. Otherwise he would not be able to endure some church services today."

1. On November 28, 1999.

2. These and other unmarked quotations by Herbert Blomstedt are taken from conversations between Herbert Blomstedt and Ursula Weigert (UW) from 2006 to 2012.

3. Between seventy-five and eighty-six hectares (185 and 213 acres).

4. Herbert Blomstedt, "When I Once Had to Help a Farmer" (grade school essay, November 5, 1938).

5. Holger Teubert, the editor of the Adventistischer Pressedienst (APD), the Adventist news service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany, explains that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in the United States in 1863, and today has about

eighteen million members worldwide. The church emphasizes the separation between church and state and supports religious liberty. Its name highlights the second coming of Jesus and the observance of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as a day of rest. The Sabbath is observed from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

6. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, November 13, 2006. In the United States, Olof Tholsson changed his last name to Thorson and started a family under this new name.

7. In American Seventh-day Adventist culture at that time, jewelry of any kind, even a wedding band, was seen as a sign of worldliness and vanity. This episode was taken from Norman Blomstedt's unpublished family chronicles, "Minnen" (Memories). Translation of the excerpts from Swedish to German by Joachim Lippert.

8. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, May 4, 2006.

9. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, May 11, 2006.

10. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, July 8, 2006.

11. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, January 7, 2007.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Herbert Blomstedt to UW, personal communication, January 22, 2012.

16. Blomstedt, diary entry, January 7, 2007.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. A *concertmaster* is "a musician who is the leading violin player and the assistant conductor of an orchestra." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "concertmaster," accessed October 17, 2016, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concertmaster.

21. Herbert Blomstedt, quoted in Roy Branson, "The Song Is a Sermon: An Interview With Herbert Blomstedt," *Spectrum* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 19.

22. Herbert Blomstedt to Lord Mayor of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung, thank-you letter, October 31, 2010, after receiving the notification of being awarded the Bach Medal of the city of Leipzig.

23. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry, March 8, 2007; originally written in English.

24. Translated from Swedish into German by Joachim Lippert.

25. Translated from Swedish into German by Herbert Blomstedt.

26. Herbert Blomstedt, diary entry March 8, 2007; originally in English.

27. Branson, "The Song Is a Sermon."