



Mini-Lesson: Meet Composer René Clausen

OVERVIEW

An important facet of learning a new piece is to know who created the music. Teaching this mini-lesson will provide students with background on René Clausen and his work as a composer and conductor. After viewing the “Meet Composer René Clausen” PowerPoint, students will discuss and share information about the Clausen’s background, events and circumstances that led to his musical career, what inspires his work, and his advice for young composers. They will then complete a Portrait of René Clausen as either an assignment or an assessment.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will read about composer René Clausen to learn about his life, compositions, and what influenced him to become a composer.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Composer Biography of your choice:
 - Intended for students: “Meet Composer René Clausen” PowerPoint or PDF version thereof (Found in the Interdisciplinary Lessons folder of this curriculum)
 - Intended for advanced students/teachers: [“René Clausen: The Composer of The Golden Queen”](#) reading
- Copies of [“A Portrait of René Clausen”](#) graphic organizer for students to complete
- (optional) Access to an interview with Patrick D. McCoy, host of “The African-American Voice in Classical Music,” <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/patrickdmccoy/2011/02/09/ren-clausenconductor-of-the-concordia-choir>. Start at 17:00 to hear Clausen talk about his most famous work, *Set Me as a Seal*
- (Optional) YouTube video (under six minutes) with Charles Brophy, conductor of the Kansas City Chorale, and Clausen. Both speak about the music of the Grammy winning album, *Life and Breath: Choral Works* by René Clausen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlriBymmTk>

PROCESS

1. Decide if you wish to use the graphic organizer “A Portrait of René Clausen,” as an individual or group assignment, or as an assessment of their knowledge about the composer.
2. View the PowerPoint “Meet Composer René Clausen” in class or post it on the band website and assign as homework. If you wish, students can also read the Composer bio for teachers, “René Clausen: The Composer of The Golden Queen.” And you can provide links to other web resources.

3. In class, discuss what they read and reflect on some of the events, experiences, and details of Clausen's life that they find interesting or significant. Tell students they will use the information from the PowerPoint, readings, and discussion to complete "A Portrait of René Clausen."
4. Students complete "A Portrait of René Clausen" individually or in small groups. If used as a group project, one student can act as the scribe for the group. The activity can also serve as a homework assignment.

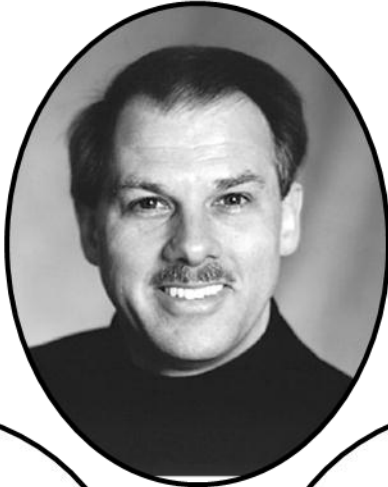
ASSESSMENT

The graphic organizer, "A Portrait of René Clausen," can be used to assess student knowledge about the composer either immediately after this lesson, or as a final assessment after completing your study and performance of the music.

A PORTRAIT OF RENÉ CLAUSEN

If you were going to introduce someone to composer René Clausen, what would you say to paint a picture of his life and accomplishments? Reflect on events, facts, and details you've read, found on the web, or heard from you teacher. Choose five and summarize them in the circles.

(You can write inside AND outside the circles.)



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Name(s) _____

_____ Date _____

RENÉ CLAUSEN: COMPOSER OF THE GOLDEN QUEEN



René Clausen's published works are sung by choirs all over the world. And more than 100 professional, university, community and church organizations have commissioned him to compose for their ensembles.

Early Years

As a youngster, Clausen itched to have a piano to play. Though his father was a church organist, there was not a keyboard instrument at home. Every time he visited family friends and relatives who had a piano, he spent a good part of the visit at the keyboard, figuring out how to play familiar church hymns and other tunes. He took his first formal piano lessons as college freshman.

Music was in his future, even without a piano at home. His San Fernando, California community did have a summer band program. The summer after sixth grade, Clause signed on and the program provided his first instrument, an alto saxophone. That fall, he continued playing the saxophone in the junior high orchestra. An encouraging band director allowed him to check out other school-owned instruments to experiment with at home. He taught himself how to play the trumpet and flute using beginner books with fingering charts and basic techniques. Knowing more instruments was an important milestone along the way to become a musician.



When Clausen entered Chatsworth High School in the San Fernando Valley, he found many more opportunities for music making - and he took advantage of all of them. He played trumpet in the marching band and sang in the concert choir. He also played sax in the jazz band and French horn in the orchestra. In 1968 Clausen marched in the Pasadena Rose Parade when the Chatsworth band was selected to represent the Los Angeles Area High Schools.

Clausen credits his school music teachers for opening doors to the wonder of music-making and inspiring him to pursue a career in music. In his junior year, choral director, Don Gustafson, provided Clausen with his first opportunity to lead a choir when he asked his young protégé to lead the high school girls' glee club. That experience led Clausen to include conducting in his future musical life.

College and Beyond



René Clausen with the Concordia Choir

Clausen went from California across the country to Northfield, Minnesota to attend St. Olaf College, a school famous around the world for its choral music program. Later he received a Master of Music Performance degree and a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Illinois, Urbana.

Choral music teaching and conducting filled his professional life. He worked in secondary schools, then went on to become the director of choral activities at West Texas State University, Canyon, and assistant professor of choral music at Wichita State University in Kansas. He also served as senior editor for Mark Foster Music Company and as the interim conductor of the National Lutheran Choir of Minneapolis.

In 1986 Clausen accepted a position as conductor of the Concordia Choir, and Professor of music at Concordia College, Moorhead. During his years at Concordia, Clausen's work as a composer flourished at the same time he developed a distinguished career as a conductor and teacher of college

students, music educators, and other conductors. Clausen's Concordia Choir regularly tours, both across the United States and on international tours to more than fifteen countries. He is the Artistic Director of the Choral Celebration, the world famous Concordia College Christmas Concerts. This annual event is a massive artistic and logistical happening with over 400 singers, a 90-piece orchestra, and an enormous mural backdrop that gives the Concordia Christmas Concert its special touch. Under his artistic direction, the 2009 Christmas concert, "Christmas at Concordia: Journey to Bethlehem" won a 2010 Emmy Award.

Clausen's compositions have been performed and praised across the country and beyond. A CD of his music, "Life and Breath: Choral Works by René Clausen," was envisioned and recorded by the Kansas City Chorale. The Chorale's recording won three Grammy Awards in 2013, including Best Choral Performance.

Some Thoughts on Being a Composer

The idea of making music and composition his life's work first occurred high school.

"When I was in 10th grade I did an arrangement of a pop song called 'This Guy's In Love With You,' originally sung by Dionne Warwick, for our stage band. I will never forget hearing something I had written performed for the first time—it was quite magical!"

When asked what the best thing is about being a composer, Clausen describes the creative life of the composer as being like that of authors. Authors sit with a blank sheet of paper upon which they can put down ideas as big or small as they wish—limited only by their



imagination. *"It is about expressing who you are."*

His advice for students who want to compose music are to listen to many different kinds of music as you can find, and keep learning and growing all of the time. Inspiration strikes at different times. It can be a special text, a special person, or something as practical as a commission for a new piece. And because composing is a discipline, it sometimes means that sudden inspiration is not always a part of the process.

Though Dr. Clausen's life is filled with music, he also has interests in science, astrophysics, and philosophy. *"If I was not in music, I may have become a scientist"* says Clausen. Clausen and his wife, Frankie, live in Moorhead where they raised their three grown children, Joshua, Katie and Rachel.