



## Lesson: *An Interview of Stephen Paulus*

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### OVERVIEW

Students will read, discuss, and share background stories and information about composer Stephen Paulus.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will learn about composer Stephen Paulus' life in music through reading, writing and discussion.

### RESOURCES & MATERIALS

Student copies of:

- [An Interview with Stephen Paulus](#) reading
- [Read & Write a Composer Profile](#) worksheet

### PROCESS

1. Divide students into small groups and direct them to read "An Interview with Stephen Paulus." They can read silently or out loud, sharing the reader's role within their group.
2. Direct them to discuss what they've read and write responses to the questions on the Q & A worksheet. All students can complete a worksheet or one student can act as the scribe for the group.
3. Their last task is to discuss and agree upon the most interesting fact or idea they learned about Paulus.
4. Reconvene as a large group. Each small group will share the most interesting fact or idea about the composer.

# An Interview of Stephen Paulus

## Composer of *Through All Things*



**THE CHORALQUEST™ WRITERS WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT COMPOSER STEPHEN PAULUS. HE KINDLY AGREED TO AN INFORMAL INTERVIEW. HERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS HE SAID AND SOME THINGS WE LEARNED ABOUT DETAILS OF HIS LIFE AS A COMPOSER.**

Stephen Paulus was born in New Jersey and grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in a musical household. His parents were his first teachers; they started piano lessons at home when he was eight years old. When he turned ten, he started lessons with a piano teacher.

*"I had some cool piano teachers – I liked them. They sparked my interest and I also liked the stickers for the pieces I learned."*

*"Like most kids, I practiced with the stove timer set for 30 min, but the funny thing was that by age 12, I was practicing a lot more each day."*

In high school, Paulus sang in the choir. His father also taught him to play the organ. While he was still in high school, he landed a job as a church organist and choir director at St. Paul's Dayton Avenue Presbyterian Church.

**WE WERE CURIOUS ABOUT HOW AND WHEN HE DECIDED TO BECOME A COMPOSER.**

*"When I was 13, I found some blank staff paper and started to write, mostly imitating pieces I played. At that time I was also reading a lot of composer bios and my piano teacher was very encouraging when I brought pieces in to my lesson. I didn't have a composition coach or teacher, but I was self motivated."*

Paulus also wrote for the Dayton Avenue Presbyterian Church Choir, a group with diverse backgrounds and varying levels of experience. This

led to his first published piece when he sent one of the pieces to a publishing company in Minneapolis, and they printed it! *"I made \$98 in royalties. That convinced my parents that it might actually be possible to make a living in music."*

**PAULUS TOLD US ABOUT AN INTERESTING CONCERT SERIES HE CREATED IN COLLEGE AND SOME OF HIS EARLY COMPOSITIONS.**

As an undergraduate at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, he and friend, Monty Mason, set out to do something new and different. *"We created a NONCERT series. This was our crazy concept about concerts. At first we called it 'Not a Concert.' but there was a miss-print in the college schedule when it was published. Some of the letters were missing and it spelled 'Noncert.' We liked it because it was what we were trying to do. Some of my pieces were on this 'noncert.'"*

Paulus wrote *Three Elizabethan Songs* for soprano and piano in 1973. It was his first "serious" composition. But Paulus thought it was more practical to be a musician rather than a composer. During his sophomore year of college, he had a conversation with the pianist Van Cliburn after a concert in Minneapolis. This conversation caused Paulus to decide that he would rather be a composer than a performer.

**AFTER COLLEGE, NEW OPPORTUNITIES CAME KNOCKING.**

*"In 1983 I was writing orchestra music and a one act opera 'The Village Singer.' So then I was considered an opera composer, but I didn't want to be locked into one genre (style) of music."*

And so he went on to fulfill composer residencies with both the Minnesota and Atlanta Symphony Orchestras. Such experiences *"carried me deeper into writing orchestral works."*

## HERE'S WHAT PAULUS SAYS IS THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A COMPOSER.

*"The best is being able to create my own music; be my own boss; wear what I want to work, and meet interesting people." The opposite of the best is being aware that composing takes "Hours of being alone interrupted by moments of turbulence."*

## OTHER COMPOSERS INSPIRED HIM.

*"Long ago, Ravel inspired me because of his great skill at using instruments in interesting ways. Also the Beach boys, Britten, and Shostakovich. A piece I wish I had written is the Duruflé Requiem. I admire these composers because of what they can do with sound and how they manage sounds."*

## WE WONDERED WHAT FUELS PAULUS' CREATIVITY

*"While I am working, I am envisioning the performers – the place this music will be performed. With Through All Things, I was imagining the kids I met and talked with and their energy for this piece – how they would perform it."*



## AND WE ALSO WONDERED WHY HE USED POETRY BY WORDSWORTH FOR THE PIECE.

*"My intention was to treat kids as deep interesting people. This poem is a 'thinking poem' on a topic which I think kids are capable of dealing with. I also wanted to write a piece with diversity of texture and this poem led to that."*

**WE ASKED PAULUS HOW HE GETS STARTED ON A NEW PIECE.** He writes with a bold pen on large pages of staff paper. At first Paulus *"finds a part of a tune to fit a piece of text and it grows from there."*

*"I write every day – and the text suggests what it is. The opening text for this one [Through All Things] has buoyancy and I used open 4<sup>th</sup>s to suggest it."*

## WE ASKED STEPHEN TO TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE HIGH POINTS IN HIS LIFE AS A COMPOSER.

*"The premiere of the Holocaust Oratorio: To Be Certain of the Dawn<sup>1</sup> at the Basilica of Saint Mary was amazing for me. The diversity in the audience, the many comments made by both musicians and audience members, all of it was wonderful. Equally memorable was the trip to Germany with performers from St. Cloud State University and the College of Saint Benedict & Saint John's University. They performed To Be Certain... in Germany, then went to visit the Natzweiler-Struthof Concentration Camp. It was so very moving to see the young students as they saw with their own eyes the reason for the music."*

*Performances are always a high point. One of them was the trumpet concerto I wrote for the MN Orchestra's Manny Laureano and Doc Severinsen. The audience response to a duet section between the two soloists was spontaneous rhythmic clapping, and very exciting.*

*Another wonderful memory was the premiere of the cello concerto I wrote for Lynn Harrell and the Grand Teton Music Festival. The cello is the instrument most like the human voice, and Mr. Harrell's performance was very moving."*

## LASTLY, WE ASKED PAULUS WHAT ADVICE HE HAD FOR KIDS AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN COMPOSING MUSIC.

Paulus was very emphatic when he offered this advice:

*"Start now. Don't wait. Don't waste time. Do something musical every day. Ask questions of people around you who might help. Even with pop creators, it's the 16 years before success that no one remembers, but that is when the learning takes place."*

<sup>1</sup> *To Be Certain of the Dawn* Commissioned by The Minnesota Orchestra and The Basilica of St. Mary.

Dedication: A Holocaust Memorial Oratorio to honor two important anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps and the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate* (Latin for "In Our Times"), the seminal Vatican II document that condemned Jews for the death of Christ



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## READ & WRITE A COMPOSER PROFILE

Read about composer Stephen Paulus (S.P.), then complete this Composer Profile with what you've learned. It's okay to re-read to find the answers.

1. Mr. Paulus was born in \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was S.P.'s first instrument? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who were his first piano teachers? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What instrument did S.P. learn to play in high school? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What year did S.P. write his first "serious" piece? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was it called? \_\_\_\_\_
7. After college, what two orchestras did S.P. have residencies in? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Name one high point in S.P.'s career as a composer. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What advice does S.P. have for young composers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Name one interesting thing you learned about Stephen Paulus. \_\_\_\_\_  
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