

Darin L. Jolliffe-Haas



April 2008

“Take a picture of us all, what we've been and what we are  
 Look at that, and tell me I'm wrong  
 I believe that I came to know you for a reason”

Dear Ball State University Singers Cast of 2007-2008,

Wow!  
 Just plain... Wow!

It has been nearly two weekends since SPECTACULAR 2008, and I am late in writing my traditional letter.

Thank you! I had a terrific time!

I have so enjoyed seeing your photographs on the blog and Face Book. As I told Jeffrey, there is so much joy radiating from those pictures. What an experience you have shared as the current cast-family.

Each April I return to Ohio following SPECTACULAR, and I can never imagine how the show I saw less than twenty-four hours before could ever be topped the following year. Of course, the following year, I am amazed that the previous SPECTACULAR was topped. And this year's production was sensational. Normally, I am excited, ready to jump out of my seat. This year, I simply sat in my seat – in awe, amazed, and appreciating all the efforts combined to make this 44<sup>th</sup> year truly spectacular.

“The pure, the bright, the beautiful that stirred our hearts in youth,  
 The impulses to wordless prayer, the streams of love and truth,  
 The longing after something lost, the spirit's longing cry,  
 The striving after better hopes— these things can never die.”

I enjoy returning to campus each spring touch base with so much that has been a part of my life. I was born the same year Emens Auditorium and the Ball State University Singers were first introduced to the world. In fact, my mother felt movement with me during the inaugural performance in Emens Auditorium that featured Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians. Twenty years later, I would be one of Mr. Waring's Blenders – a ten-member show choir. Little did I know, even as a young boy watching SPECTACULARS throughout the 1970's and early 1980's that I would have a connection with Emens and University Singers. In 1983, twenty-five years ago, I became an Emens Scholar, and a member of the Ball State University Singers. For those who will be joining Mamma Jan and I on the other side of the stage as alums, be aware that the years will fly – fast!

When I was in Singers, I had a completely different perspective of the ensemble. I did not realize, then, the impact Singers would have on my personal life, family, and career throughout the next twenty-five years. When I first met Mamma Jan in 1983, I could not understand, nor fully appreciate her continued interest in the group. Now, as I meet each new cast, I know exactly why Jan has remained devoted all these years. As a charter member, she has an even greater connection; however, we both share a deep appreciation for each of you who have dedicated so much to a legacy that is near and dear to us.

Thank you.

“Who here among us has not been broken  
Who here among us is without guilt or pain  
So oft’ abandoned by our transgressions  
If such a thing as grace exists  
Then grace was made for lives like this.”

This production of SPECTACULAR, for me, was very personal in many ways. Last year, I arrived in Muncie for SPECTACULAR 2007 having experienced a hideous family tragedy that ripped my heart. My “Singers family” seemed to sing directly to me both nights, providing me with great comfort, and reassurance. As the year progressed, my life was hit from almost every direction with compounded moments of testing, and sheer ugliness. It was the first year I did not visit campus several times throughout the year to watch rehearsals, or other events involving Singers. I did not even get to see Jeff as often as I had in previous years.

Last September I was wheeled on a bed through the emergency room surrounded by the stroke team. To keep inner peace those first few moments of not knowing if I would see my son or other family and friends again, I concentrated on words to a song on my MP3 player that I heard at SPECTACULAR a few months before:

“Carry your candle, run to the darkness  
Seek out the helpless, confused and torn  
And hold out your candle for all to see it  
Take your candle, and go light your world  
Take your candle, and go light your world.”

That day I was surrounded by my guardian angel team, family and friends, and my Singers family, as well, guiding me through that terrifying moment with one of the best elements of healing – music. As the fall and winter brought on compounded health and family issues, I often found comfort watching University Singers' clips on You Tube, reading blogs, and scanning through countless photographs posted on Face Book.

“The longing after something lost, the spirit's longing cry,  
The striving after better hopes— these things can never die.”

This is a transition year for so many of us. Several of you will graduate, while others will move on for a variety of reasons. For those who will return next year, you will have a new director. For me, personally, my best friend and godfather to my sons will move to Missouri. The “Carter Era” will soon come to an end.

For those cast members who will remain, you have a transition year. It will not be difficult unless you make it so. I was a member of the group that experienced the last two years of the “Larry Boye era” and the first years of the “Fritz Mountford era.” The first year of the “Mountford era” was tense, and struggle-filled due mostly in part to the immaturity of the cast. Many refused to cooperate, continuing their allegiance to the “Boye era.” Fritz immediately established a new sound, and a new look that was originally deemed by many as “the end of Singers.” Fortunately, Fritz persevered, and transformed the new style that led directly into the “Carter era.”

“One beam of light is enough to see where you're going.”

And what a beam of light this past era has been for the Ball State University Singers! This was a tremendous era of growth. The “Carter era” was so much more than producing the best performance. It was also about producing the best individuals. When I was a member of the cast, we rehearsed singing and dancing, and that was basically it. No one held us accountable for our behavior, and we were not encouraged to be the outstanding individuals

exhibiting class and integrity. You, the students of Jeffrey Carter, have learned valuable tools that will carry you successfully through the remainder of your lives. The directors I knew were great men, and musicians – it was simply a different era, and Singers was still growing piece by piece, bit by bit. As an adult I have greatly benefited from the teachings of my mentors, Larry Boye and Fritz Mountford. As a father, teacher, and fellow musician, I have benefited from my great friend's (Jeffrey) talent, knowledge and values. I know you have been even more richly blessed as his students.

Therefore, those returning next fall will certainly have a great task – maintaining the vision of the Ball State University Singers. Try not to remain connected to an era, but do connect to the legacy. Simply be a Ball State University Singer, and all will be well. Remember, there is always a child in the each audience who wishes to be a part of this family... and we never know which little peep will one day join us.

“We are a family whose hearts are blazing  
So let's raise our candles and light up the sky.”

For those who are graduating, student teaching, or moving on... thank you, and bless you for being a part of our family. Thank you for sharing the dream of what it means to be in this family with the countless thousands you have touched with your music. Though you will be leaving behind your collegiate association as a Ball State University Singers member, you will still be a part of this wonderful family.

Thank you, again, for a brilliant performance. For those I know personally, should our paths never cross again, know you are always appreciated and loved.

“One beam of light, is enough to see where you're going  
One wrong turn, is enough to lose your way  
One choice, is all you have to make  
One ounce of faith could save the day  
I believe, that I came to know you for a reason  
I believe, that the things that you say will come true  
I believe that with you in my life I'll make it  
I believe in you”

Darin Jolliffe-Haas  
Ball State University Singers, 1983-1986

“Let nothing pass, for every hand Must find some work to do,  
Lose not a chance to waken love—Be firm and just and true.  
So shall a light that cannot fade beam on thee from on high,  
And angel voices say to thee— These things shall never die.”