

Tidings

The University of King's College Alumni Magazine

Summer 2004

PM40062749



Music professor Walter Kemp retires

Rebuilding civil society
in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Congo

The Shopping Bags' Anna Wallner (BJ '94)



'Music comes as naturally to me as breathing'

Retiring music professor Walter Kemp says keeping an open mind has always yielded surprises — for him and his students

By Laura Pellerine

It seems only logical to begin with *The Logical Song*. Perhaps playing the Supertramp hit annually during the final FYP lecture is not the most esteemed part of Dr. Walter Kemp's 39-year-teaching career. Yet it is a memory that lingers in the minds of FYPer: "Yes, won't you please tell [us] what we've learned?"

After spending seven months discussing Descartes' theory on the existence of God and the symbolism in Achilles' shield, Kemp's imploring song selection was welcomed with smiles and cheering. Meanwhile, Kemp would stand qui-

etly by observing the scene, amused by the students' reactions, enjoying sending off a new generation to stay awake when the rest of the world is asleep.

"A student came up to me once and said it should be the programme's anthem," Kemp says, laughing softly. Unfortunately, Kemp's afraid that the 1979 hit will no longer be heard by the next generations of FYPer. At 65, he's retiring as King's professor of music.

"Mandatory retirement," he says, as he tries to clear a path through his office in Dalhousie's Rebecca Cohn Auditorium in late June.

"I have until July 1 to clean out 25 years worth of papers."

Piles of folders, and shelves upon shelves lined with books showing off titles upon titles of Beethoven, Haydn, Russian music and light opera, smother his tiny office. At the far end sits his desk, a dusty computer monitor pushed to one side, and in the opposite direction, a record player and stereo hides beneath another stack of papers.

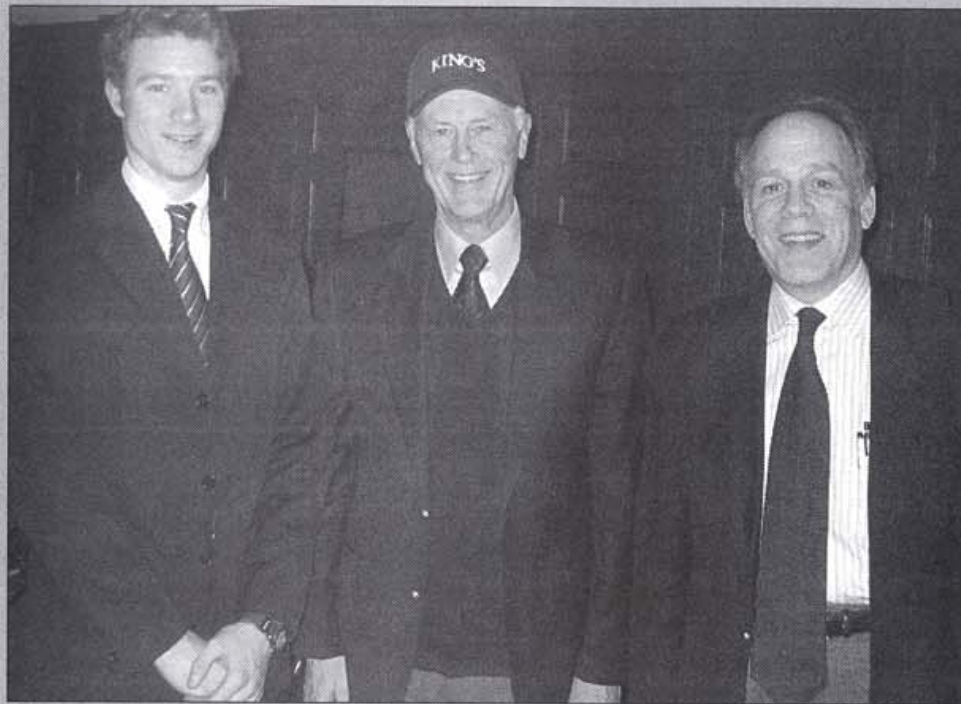
Kemp, dressed in a grey suit but comfortably sporting sandals, slides easily into his chair and leans forward, his fist cradling his cheek. He talks nonchalantly about being asked to start a music department at Waterloo Lutheran University

Kemp: "King's students seem to have a real hunger for classical music."

Photos:
Michael Creagen

Continued on next page

KEMP / Continued from previous page



Flashback

Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm (BSc '58) was the guest of honour at this year's KSU Awards Dinner to present the Bob Walter Award for outstanding contribution to student life by a male student. Hamm won the award himself when he was a student. Hamm (centre) is accompanied here by KSU President Colin Burn and King's President Bill Barker.

(now Wilfred Laurier University) at the age of 26, and then landing the job of Dalhousie's Music Department chair just 10 years later in 1977. He later continued his Dalhousie teaching while also becoming King's professor of music in 1985. He became part of the university's joint faculty, where he's been ever since, instructing students on the influence of music in western culture and directing them in the chapel choir.

Music has always played a large role in Kemp's life. He grew up in a musical household where his father was a vocal soloist while his mother played the organ. Even his grandmother played the ukulele and his grandfather mastered the trombone.

Kemp didn't stand a chance.

He jokes that his mother knew right away he'd be musical. When he was a baby she noticed that he would bang his head against the wall to the beats of songs. At four he began learning how to play the piano and fell in love with what would become his life's passion.

"Music comes as naturally to me as breathing," he says.

He pursued this love in his post-secondary education and his resume lists schools a parent could only drool over.

Kemp first earned a Bachelor's degree in music at the University of Toronto and then later did his master's in the same subject. He then made his way to Harvard University where he earned another master's degree in music history and then flew off to Oxford in England where he did his PhD in musicology.

Kemp was studying at Oxford when he was offered the position to start up a music department at Waterloo Lutheran University in 1965. He stayed for a decade, building what is now the Faculty of Music at Wilfred Laurier University, and developed a strong choir that now, 30 years later, has formed an alumni choir. More than 90 former

What's New?

Have you changed jobs?

Are you moving?

Have you married recently?

Send us your news and we will pass it along to your classmates in our next issue. Mail it to the address on p. 4 or e-mail: <jen.laurette@ukings.ns.ca>, or enter it on the Web at: <<http://www.ukings.ns.ca/for/alumni/alumni.htm>>

NAME _____ (MAIDEN NAME AT KING'S) _____

DEGREE (EG. BA '63) OR YEARS AT KING'S _____ HOME PHONE _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

ADDRESS _____

YOUR NEWS _____

Kemp plans to write books on music history

Continued from previous page

students from the years 1965-1976, came together for the first time last year to put on a concert that has since become an annual event. This year the group performed Faure's "Requiem" — Kemp emphasizes the correct spelling of the composer, carefully stating the F-A-U-R-E — to honour its former director.

Kemp says his positive experience with Waterloo's small student community was what eventually drew him toward King's after he moved to Halifax with his wife, Valda. He initially began giving a few guest lectures on music in the Foundation Year Programme. Later, then-president John Godfrey, along with former president Colin Starnes, asked Kemp to join King's as a joint faculty member in 1985, and from there he became King's professor of music — hired by King's, but primarily teaching at Dalhousie.

But it wasn't always easy. Kemp leans forward in his chair and his shoulders tense as he talks about a time in the mid-90s, when he was forced to fight for the music programme at Dalhousie. After coming back from a sabbatical he remembers being called into the dean of arts' office and told that the university couldn't financially continue to support performing arts programmes.

Music and theatre lovers from across the country sent in hundreds of letters to the university protesting the decision and demonstrators held a four-hour assembly in the Rebecca Cohn to show their support. Kemp remembers the late Georg Tinter (former conductor of Symphony Nova Scotia) making an impassioned speech.

"He said, 'Such things cannot be. Otherwise we are going back to barbaric age!'"

Kemp says the conflict was even-



“Every year I learn something new about music from students.”

tually resolved when he proposed that students pay auxiliary fees for their programmes, thereby counteracting the extra expenses with added funding.

"It was a terrible time," Kemp says, reclining into his chair again, adding that he still has all of the support letters.

The highlights of Kemp's career revolve around the many choirs he's conducted, directed and founded: the Dalhousie Chorale ("Chorale is spelled with an 'E' at the end, not many people know that"), the Dalhousie Chamber Choir, St. Paul's Anglican Church's choir, The St. Paul's Singers, The Walter Kemp Singers, the Nova Scotia International Tattoo Choir.

But it's not until he starts speaking about the King's Chapel Choir that a faint smile comes over his face.

In 1991, he took over as director of the King's chapel choir and founded the Aquinas Choir in 1991.

"There is something uniquely special about King's students,"

Kemp says. He adds that, as a whole, the student body seems more aware of classical music than other university he's worked at.

"They seem to have a real hunger for it. Perhaps that type of passion is harder to maintain in a larger school, but here it's infectious."

King's enthusiasm for music has motivated Kemp to keep his position of chapel director for one more year after his retirement. This makes him happy as he admits that he will sorely miss staying "contemporary."

"Every year I learn something new about music from students," he says, "whether it's a new pop group that deserves a place in musical evolution or a movie they think I'd like."

Kemp used a song he learned about from a student in his closing FYP speech this year. He ended his talk Paul McCartney's "Someone's Knockin' At The Door."

He sings some of the lyrics: "Someone's knockin' at the door, Somebody's ringing the bell, Do me a favour, let them in."

That's the message he's always tried to instill in his students, he says. Keep your minds open; always be watching for new opportunities.

Kemp says he has a few new areas he'd like to explore himself, along with directing the chapel choir, continuing his Saturday morning CKDU radio show and conducting the Tattoo's choir.

He'd like to write a few books. In fact, he's already sketched out three — one on music in the church, another on the history of Canadian music and a third on the role of surprise in musical compositions.

He jokes that he's supplying the details of his obituary. But there promises to be a lot more surprises to come from Dr. Walter Kemp; musicologist, organist, choir director, composer — music lover.