

Stephen Strommen

City/Town of Residence: Glendale

Instrument: Cello

Tell us about your unusual cello.

I had it custom made for me by Peter Huiras in Grafton, Wisconsin. It features a bear's head, done at my request and to my design. [Ed. Note: Not only does it look cool, but it sounds great.]

How long have you been with Concord? Since 1984 (27 years!)

What is your earliest musical memory?

Playing a yellow 78 rpm record of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans singing "Happy Trails to You."

What is your musical background?

I started playing cello in 4th grade when the orchestra director said my fingers were too long to play the violin. I went to UW-Madison as a music major, but switched to business when I realized how talented the other music majors were. Nonetheless, I played cello in a variety of groups while in college. I also play the piano and recorder, and have played and dabble with guitar, accordion and other instruments.

Why do you perform with Concord?

I have an older sister who played in the CCO. In 1984, when I moved to Milwaukee from Madison for a job, I called the contact number for Concord and was told I should come to the next rehearsal. It was to be in a room at the old Italian Community Center on the Northwest side of Milwaukee. When I showed up for rehearsal, the conductor who was supposed to have reserved the room had moved to California... with no notice to the orchestra! We set up outside on the baseball diamond, so my first rehearsal with Concord was an outdoor improvisational one. Despite this, or maybe because of it, I have stayed with Concord ever since.

What has been the high point of your involvement with Concord?

I have so many wonderful memories after 27 years that it is hard to pick just one. If I had to, I would say the "East" concert at the Humphrey Scottish Rite Masonic Center in downtown Milwaukee on March 13, 2010. The marimba soloist was amazing, and we had the composers of three of the pieces we played present in the audience, one from Israel! Their compositions were interesting to play, and it was special having them there. One of them even started playing ragtime on the piano during the reception.

What do you do for a living?

I am an actuary working for Northwestern Mutual. I work on financial planning at the corporate level.

Tell us about your family.

I am married and have one adult child who is married and living in Connecticut. He played viola through the end of his high school years. My wife was majoring in church organ performance

when we met. Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with MS ten years after we were married and is unable to play.

My siblings are all musical. My oldest sister teaches private music lessons and performs in the Madison area. My younger sister plays violin in the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra, and is a two-time Minnesota fiddling champion. My brother is an exceptional improvisational pianist, and has released a CD.

What is your favorite recording?

Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra's recording of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony.

Who is your favorite composer?

It used to be Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, but lately I have been enjoying Johann Sebastian Bach, both on cello and on the piano.

What is one thing most people don't know about you?

I actually enjoy playing the piano more than playing the cello.