

# THE MINNESOTA JCC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## JCC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Musicians, meet your trombone player Chuck Watt!

**Chuck** played with the JCC Symphony Orchestra as a ringer pre-Amir in 2012, then a steady musician since 2013. He's played trombone since age 11, and picked up tenor, alto, and bass trombone as well as the euphonium along the way.

Chuck graduated with a double major in math and music from Macalester College, and completed his PhD in music at the University of Minnesota. For many years he supported himself with a mixture of freelance performance and parttime church music. Private teaching supplemented carpentry and odd jobs, but with the birth of twin sons with large and uncritical appetites he began a career in IT at Travelers, where he worked in software development on both the web and the mainframe.

He also worked as a church musician for over twenty years, usually playing piano, organ, and harpsichord, leading choirs and assorted decidedly mixed ensembles. He's pretty sure he's the first and only church musician to play both the harpsichord and the didgeridoo in one service and improvise a piece for handbell, four-pound sledgehammer, anvil, and conga drum (at once) in another (true stories, both).

For decades Chuck has written and arranged music for all sorts of ensembles. He has a fondness for brass writing but has also won awards for choral music and has written several orchestral pieces. He's worked as a composer-in-residence for public school music projects. Though his compositions and arrangements have reached local and national audiences, he's happy to write for just about any combination of voices and instruments that will serve the talent and resource levels in a school classroom or small congregation.

While he enjoys playing standard orchestral repertoire (not to say "moldy oldies,") he's most interested in pieces a bit off the beaten path. One vivid JCC Symphony memory is the oratorio *Di Naye Hagode* by composer Max Helfman with lyrics from a Yiddish epic poem by Itzik Fefer about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. (Born in Poland in 1901, Helfman eventually moved to NYC, met Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, and became the music director at the Brandeis Camp.) Chuck recalls the piece was performed at Temple Aaron in collaboration with the Minnesota Jewish Chorale. This composition gratified his intrigue with music novel to him and special in its presentation with other musicians.

Does he play with other ensembles? Of course he does! Chuck plays with the Civic Orchestra of Minneapolis, the Capital City Brass Quintet, and the ever-popular Elk River German Band for Oktoberfest (and sometimes Maifest). He recently played HMS Pinafore with the Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company and has played in many pit orchestras. One of the more unusual pits was for a production of Lulu with Theatre de la Jeune Lune – it was twenty feet above the stage and swayed with every step the cast took.

Here are a couple interesting details about Chuck. He lives in St. Paul with his wife. He's musical, yes, but did you know he was a steady bicycle commuter? He still bikes a lot after retirement, and is not keen on e-bikes or recumbent styles. He reads literary fiction, plus books about baseball and the history of science. He loves his granddaughters and tries not to interfere in his grown sons' lives.

