



Featured Alumni: The 1975 International Youth Symphony Orchestra

Thirty-five years ago this summer, with Blue Lake's International Exchange Program fewer than five years old, the International Youth Symphony Orchestra embarked on a tour of Scandinavia, led by the camp's Founder and President, Fritz Stansell. Through the years, the members of that group, as well as the Blue Lake faculty and staff members who observed and participated, have come to recall it with special fondness.

"One of my all time favorite Blue Lake tour experiences was of touring with the 1975 International Youth Symphony Orchestra in Europe," said Fritz Stansell in his book ***Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp: The Early Years***.

Mr. Stansell recently recalled that "the program was still relatively new, but we managed to attract many talented kids. They kept the whole tour light and fun."

In addition to their talents as classical musicians, many of the members of that year's IYSO proved their versatility by playing in a full jazz big band that performed for special events at various points during the tour. This included the entire trumpet and trombone sections of the orchestra.

The group's sense of humor has become the stuff of legend. Percussionist Mark VanDerKolk appears to have been one of the principal jokesters. He was known for taking "far out jazz solos on his bare forearm while fingering wildly in the air and blowing into a wide-open microphone. The sounds were sort of a be-bop version of a Bronx cheer," says Fritz Stansell. VanDerKolk, along with fellow percussionist Don Emmert joined the strolling violinists one evening, having secured violins and bows. Fortunately, they chose to mime their playing, rather than letting the bows touch the strings.

Stansell also recalls that violinist Lynne Knobloch and cellist Lisa Lartz, both from the Chicago area, kept the tour members constantly laughing with their unpredictable antics. One such prank was arriving at a rehearsal one day with long braids wrapped around coat hangers in the style of Wagner's Valkyries.

Another incident which happened in concert showed the lengths to which members of the group would go just for the fun of it.

One of the pieces in the orchestra's repertoire was Aaron Copland's ***Lincoln Portrait***, which requires the participation of a narrator. The group's narrator, John Lartz, with the assistance of one of his host families and without the knowledge of Mr. Stansell or other members of the orchestra, surprised everyone at one concert by performing the entire narration in Swedish. "The

reaction of the orchestra was total surprise,” wrote Stansell, “although we all quickly recovered and the Swedish audience loved it.”

In 1975, the IYSO made tour stops in Oslo and Bergen, Norway; Eskilstuna, Goteborg, and Hassleholm, Sweden; and Aalborg, Denmark. Then, as now, most of the group’s travel was by bus. That year’s tour, however, also included travel by ferry between Denmark and Sweden.

According to Fritz Stansell there was also train travel and one particular trip in Norway that was memorable for the nervousness that it created in the students and staff of the orchestra. Mr. Stansell recalls that this trip began in Bergen and the group was to change trains in Oslo. However, the Bergen train was significantly delayed. By the time they reached Oslo, they were within moments of the connecting train’s departure. The orchestra members were obliged to run, carrying instruments and luggage, from one train to the other, literally boarding as it was pulling out of the station. A number of tense moments followed, while the staff ascertained whether all the students had made the transfer.



Fritz Stansell boarding the train in Bergen, Norway during the 1975 IYSO tour.

During this year’s second annual *Experience Blue Lake*—occurring from July 26 to 28, 2010, on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor—the 1975 International Youth Symphony Orchestra will gather to celebrate the 35th anniversary of their tour. The reunion will take place on Tuesday, July 27, prior to a performance by the current International Youth Symphony Orchestra, International Choir, and Alumni Choir of Felix Mendelssohn’s oratorio *Elijah*. The guests of honor will be Fritz and Gretchen Stansell. More information on the reunion can be found at <http://www.75bluelakeinternationalorchestra.myevent.com/>

Many of the members of the 1975 IYSO have gone on to significant careers in music, while all, thanks in great part to their Blue Lake experiences, have made participation in and appreciation of the arts a significant part of their lives. As this article was in preparation, a number of them shared their recollections of the tour and the impact that Blue Lake has had on their lives.



During the 1975 tour: (left to right) Paul Roache; his host father, Tobias Gedde-Dahl; and Curtis Booth (tuba)

Name: Paul Roache
Instrument: Horn
Hometown in 1975: Madison Heights, Michigan
Current hometown: Detroit, Michigan
Occupation: Freelance Trumpeter

“1975 marked not only my first tour with BLFAC, but my first trip outside of the US ever. So, the entire tour is a ‘favorite recollection.’ On the 1975 tour, I played horn. I was always a trumpet player; I doubled on horn. I will never forget my first host family, the Gedde-Dahls. It was absolutely wonderful to be with them in Oslo. I’ll never forget the impromptu crumhorn concert given by my host family in Eskilstuna, Sweden, in their living room; or the best interpretation I’ve ever heard of the tuba solo in Gershwin’s *An American in Paris* played by Curtis Booth; or the opening two measures of Joseph Wil-

cox's *American Overture*. There are just too many wonderful memories to list.”

“Blue Lake has meant more to me than I can possibly put into words. My summers at the camp and on tour not only helped broaden my musical life, but also taught me so many other invaluable life lessons. I can't imagine what I would be like today if I had not gone to camp.”



Diane Yura Howlin

Name: Diane (Yura) Howlin
Instrument: Violin
Hometown in 1975: Dearborn, Michigan
Current hometown: Chelsea, Michigan
Occupation: Internal medicine physician

“One of my favorite anecdotes about the tour was when we went on a tour of the fjords and had to hear about the “vonderful wikingings’ who did all sorts of ‘vonderful’ things. Then there was the lush ‘vegetation’ in the parks we got to hear all about.”

“Going to the Munch museum was a highlight, especially seeing *The Scream* and being able to say that I saw it in person.”

“One of my families I stayed with was rather rural and the breakfast table included cold cuts on hard bread. There were so many flies on the meats that the dad would shoo them away and then pick up a slice of meat and eat it on his bread. It made me so nauseous to see the flies that I couldn't eat the meal. But, I had a jar of Nutella in my suitcase as a gift from the prior host family. I asked for a spoon. They asked me why. I stated that my Blue Lake suitcase was broken and I was going to fix it. Then I went to my room and ate the Nutella out of the jar, as I was so hungry. The dad walked in to help me with the suitcase and I was completely embarrassed for my lie. He was embarrassed, too, because I obviously was so hungry.”

Name: Julie (Handwerker) Larsen
Instrument: Cello
Hometown in 1975: Davison, Michigan
Current hometown: Marshall, Wisconsin
Occupation: Research Assistant (chemist), in the Dose Analysis department at Covance, Inc., in Madison, Wisconsin

“My memories of the 1975 IYSO include going to McDonalds in Stockholm and having the opportunity to meet the people of the countries we were visiting.”

“I was very shy going into this trip, but by the end I had grown and was starting to overcome some of [that] shyness. It gave me some self-confidence as I started school at Central Michigan University that fall.”

“I currently play in a community orchestra, the Beaver Dam Area Orchestra and a string quartet with friends.”



Sally Heffelfinger Pituch wearing the Norwegian sweater purchased on the 1975 IYSO tour.

Name: Sally (Heffelfinger) Pituch
Instrument: Oboe
Hometown in 1975: Vassar, Michigan
Current hometown: Troy, Michigan
Occupation: Member, Michigan Opera Theater Orchestra

“My little story [of the tour] doesn’t have much to do with music. For some reason in Bergen, Norway, I became interested in all the hand-made knitted sweaters. I bought one in a wool shop along with a few other girls. I have treasured that sweater and carried it to all the places I have lived even though I never wore it in Hawaii. Five years ago, I learned to knit and ended up taking a sweater class last spring. I was working on a Norwegian pattern, with Norwegian yarn, and a teacher from Norway. I showed the teacher my treasured sweater and she said she used to knit for a shop in Bergen (possibly the same shop) but did not make my sweater. What a small world! I finished my sweater and ended up winning the Grand Prize at a local competition. I have many memories from that trip, but my favorite is the sweater. Now I can knit my own Norwegian sweaters—35 years later. Never say never!”

“I have been a member of the Honolulu Symphony, the Jacksonville Symphony, and the Dallas Opera Orchestra before moving to Michigan and joining the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra.”

Name: Barbara (Hodges) Cripe
Instrument: Viola, Celeste (ISYO Staff)
Hometown in 1975: Lexington, Kentucky
Current hometown: Tampa, Florida
Occupation: Private teacher of violin and viola

“The 1975 IYSO experience was terrific. It broadened my horizons and opened my eyes to the Nordic culture and music. The memories are still there and I treasure each and every one from that tour. At times, I think about the orchestra members and wonder what they’re doing at this time. Blue Lake has enhanced my teaching and encouragement of camp experiences as well as tour experiences. As a private teacher who works with orchestra directors in my area, I appreciate all the work of the Stansells to ensure a smooth and enduring experience.”

Name: Michael Klaue
Instrument: Violin
Hometown in 1975: Bargteheide, West Germany
Current hometown: Ahrensburg, Germany

“Since 1975, hundreds of Blue Lakers have been in my home town Ahrensburg in Germany, and hundreds of German young musicians of my choirs and orchestras [have visited] the US. Only a few weeks ago, I met Fritz and Gretchen in my private home in Ahrensburg. They certainly are outstanding personalities!”

“I am sorry to tell that my plans for this summer are already fixed and I cannot join the concert July 27th. However, I will host the Blue Lake International String Orchestra and am planning to

visit Blue Lake with my Ahrensburg Youth Symphony Orchestra in the summer of 2011.”

“My best regards to all who still remember me from the 1975 tour!”

Name: Bill McFarlin

Instrument: Trumpet

Hometown in 1975: Galax, Virginia

Current hometown: Twin Lake, Michigan

Occupation: Vice President for Development and Public Relations, Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp

“I have many memories from the '75 IYSO Tour, but several stand out. I was commuting from southern Virginia to the monthly rehearsals prior to tour and, on one occasion, arrived with a high fever. I ended up staying in the Stansell home (Heidi House) for close to a week recovering and will always remember their kindness. Another memory is the all-night train ride from Copenhagen, Denmark (after flying all night and touring Tivoli Gardens). I can still recall that first taste of jet lag, which hit me like a ton of bricks when we arrived in Oslo, Norway, the following morning.”

“Beyond our musical achievements on that tour, including performing *An American in Paris*, one of the highlights was experiencing Scandinavian culture and history. From celebrating Midsummer in Sweden to touring the Viking Ship Museum in Norway, my eyes were truly open to the world for the first time. My daughter will tour with the Blue Lake International Choir this summer and I am so excited that she will now have this same opportunity.”

“Several of us, including Tom Stansell, Mark VanDerKolk and Janice Cooper, worked at Blue Lake’s elementary camp the summer following the tour (then called Camp Emery – now Camp Bernstein). Others went on to be counselors at the main camp and eventually became faculty members. It’s worth noting that a number of '75 Orchestra members have had children attend Blue Lake and maintain strong ties to the camp.”

Name: John Murray

Instrument: Trumpet

Hometown in 1975: Detroit, Michigan

Current hometown: Farmington Hills, Michigan

Occupation: Captain, Delta Airlines

The summer of 1975 with the Blue Lake IYSO was quite simply put, "Fantastic!" The sightseeing was truly remarkable and opened our young eyes to how big and how great this world of ours truly is. Undoubtedly, the majestic Viking ships and the towering Scandinavian churches stand out as memories of our tour. The home of Edvard Grieg in Bergen and "The Little Mermaid" statue in Copenhagen made our trip magical as our imaginations took off. Performing in magnificent concert halls and churches took us to new and extraordinary musical heights.

The culture shock was both exhilarating and at times somewhat uncomfortable and I can remember, as if it was yesterday, standing on a Scandinavian beach with my host family as they all changed into their swimsuits right there on the open beach. I kept turning around in circles unable to find any structure I could head towards to put my bathing suit on. What a pleasant

and welcoming surprise to find out from our host families in Aalborg, Denmark, that they too celebrate the 4th of July each year alongside America. The hardest part of the tour for me was the six times we had to stand next to and board our buses while saying goodbye to our host families and all the new people we had met. It was always a time with lots of picture taking, lots of goodbye hugs and kisses, lots of smiles, and lots of tears. Getting back on the buses and getting them moving down the road helped a lot, as we could then look forward to new sights and new people to meet and perform for.

As ambassadors for Blue Lake, for the United States, and for all young musicians our tour took us to places and new heights that opened our eyes, expanded our minds, touched our hearts, and enriched our lives in ways that were truly magical, remarkable, and wonderful. As we toured Europe, explored new cultures, met a host of new people, and grew closer to our fellow Blue Lake musicians, our parents could be proud. Our experiences enabled us to blossom, almost overnight, into very responsible, productive, and appreciative young adults. Thank you Blue Lake, thank you fellow Blue Lake campers, and thank you Fritz and Gretchen for the great summer of 1975.