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Conducting herself with grace

CAROLYN EYNON'S SALES PITCH IS NOTEWORTHY



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Born and raised in Michigan, Carolyn Eynon grew up surrounded by music.

Her parents were both professionally trained musicians – her mother played the pipe organ and her father played the piano and violin – so it was no surprise Eynon started playing the piano when she was 5 years old.

She played piano for her church choir and at all the high school concerts. At 17, she won a scholarship to travel to Europe to study classical pipe organ music.

She earned her music education degree at University of Michigan and taught for a few years before going back to the university to work on her doctorate of musical arts.

She was almost done with her coursework when her husband was offered a job in Scottsdale, so she moved with him before finishing her dissertation.

At the time, she was raising three children, so it wasn't a priority to finish the doctoral degree in Arizona, she said.

"It was something I never thought I needed out here in Scottsdale," Eynon said. "I was offered the opportunity to go

CAROLYN EYNON

Title: Founding Artistic Director

Company: Carolyn Eynon Singers

Age: 68

Education: Bachelor of music education, masters in choral conducting and attended the doctorate of musical arts program in conducting, all at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Family: Husband, Dennis; three adult daughters; two grandchildren

Most important in job: Since I work with all volunteers, the most important part of my conducting singers is to show appreciation for their time and talent – always remembering they could choose to sing with someone else.

to Arizona State University but I turned it down."

She started her musical career in Arizona as a director of the choirs for the Scottsdale Symphony, which paid a small stipend. That job led to a role as president of the women's auxiliary of the Phoenix Symphony, where she continues to help raise money for the nonprofit.

In 1997, she created the Arizona Arts Choral, a nonprofit community choir of 60 singers, but by 2007 she was beginning to have different goals than the board.

"I wanted to do more serious music and they wanted to do more theater and Broadway music," she said. "I could not limit my artistic future to that kind of music. It was truly an artistic difference."

It came to a point in 2007 where she wasn't invited to a board meeting and found herself out of a job.

"I've always had the philosophy when one door closes another door opens," she said.

About a dozen of the choir members left the Arizona Arts Choral to join her new choir, the Carolyn Eynon Singers.

"I did not recruit them," she said. "When I was released, they just left and came with me."

Today, she celebrates the 10-year anniversary of her nonprofit choir, which she likes to limit to 24 to 26 singers, with four to six singers on each choral part.

She's gearing up for a March 18-19 Music of the Soul Concert in Carefree and Prescott, and is preparing to take her choir to New York, where it will perform at Carnegie Hall with the Phoenix Children's Chorus in June.

Looking back, she wishes she could have finished her doctorate, but that opportunity expired seven years after she left the school.

"It could have made connection with the choral music world a little easier than being a total entrepreneur," she said.

But now, with 45 years of experience under her belt, the doctorate doesn't really matter.

"Back then it would have helped, but it doesn't matter anymore," she said.

Eynon looks at her role in the male-dominated choral and orchestral conducting arena as providing a role model for others to follow, she said.

"I hope to inspire women to follow that path if they are passionate, hard-working, disciplined and thick-skinned," she said.

In 1980, Eynon was the first woman accepted into the University of Michigan doctor of musical arts program.

At the end of her preliminary exams, one of her professors asked what she would do with her doctorate. Her response: Would you ask that question of a male conductor?

"He went blank," she said. "No woman until recently has achieved an orchestral or operatic conductor position in the professional scene. There are only two female conductors in the USA who are 'professional.'"

Eynon makes it a point to only perform music composed by American composers, including Craig Bohmler, composer-in-residence with the Arizona Opera.

"She's terrific," Bohmler said. "Carolyn is tough, but in a good way. She wants everybody to be very good. She is deeply disciplined. When you're a choir director you must be."



Carolyn Eynon discusses her passion for choral conducting at PhoenixBusinessJournal.com