

#### Part 4. Wegg's return and departure and the Morris era begins. A Short History of the DRSO

Luck was still holding in the Fall of 1981, when Jim Wegg, now returned to Ottawa with the Heinz Unger Prize for composition and a Master's degree from the Carnegie-Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh, agreed to come back to conduct the DRSO again. He must have had a soft spot for Deep River, because at the time he was very busy with the conversion of the Nepean Symphony to a full season orchestra, the establishment of the Symphony School, and a consultancy on the design of the Nepean Centrepointe facility.

Jim found his first season already committed to a further collaboration with the Pembroke Community Choir, in a production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado", but he organized a December concert, with carols and the Deep River Ballet Club, some modern (and difficult) Russian pieces and Haydn's Symphony No. 100. "Mikado" played in February 1982 in Pembroke, Deep River and Renfrew.



**Jim Wegg**

Lack of financial support from the Ontario Arts Council kept the Executive busy raising money from music alone – no bake sales, but each season involved extra concerts from in-town and out-of-town talent. Adrienne Shannon (a colleague of Stephan Van Heerden) had given a piano recital in October, and in January the NACO again ended their North Ontario tour in Deep River. In addition, the DRSO now had a policy of offering a Children's

concert in association with every concert performance. This provided valuable publicity, a broadening of the audience, and a chance for the orchestra to discover and practice the tricky passages ahead of the final performance. Ruth McAlpin acted as compère and, incidentally, a guide to concert etiquette for the more restless in the audiences, for many seasons.

For the May 1982 concert, Jim persuaded Ian Aitchison to play a Bach violin concerto, and showed support by playing the difficult Weber clarinet concerto himself. Caryl Clark took the conductor's baton for the Weber, and the concert concluded with Mendelssohn's Reformation Symphony.

The 1982-83 season followed a similar pattern, with the December concert program augmented by the Ballet Club, a Pops concert in February and the NACO in March. Jim organized a Brahms Birthday concert for THEOP in March, with Steven Smith and Andrew Tunis from Ottawa, playing solos duos and trios. The Spring concert featured Peter Morris in his first viola solo with the DRSO and that concert was taken to Eganville for their Spring Festival two days later. Jim was not resting on the intermediate day. The Nepean Symphony filled in that space performing at Eganville.

In December 1984, Haydn's "Creation" was presented with the Choral Group. This expensive concert with professional soloists could not be repeated in Pembroke, partly because no one could be found there willing to sponsor a concert. The February 1985 concert date was shared with the Cantando Singers, Susan Butler (later Morris) played a Marcello oboe concerto (her first solo in Deep River) and Robert Palmi soloed in a Bach piano concerto. The final season concert was all-Beethoven, with Daniel Prefontaine performing the Violin Concerto, and concluding with the Seventh Symphony.

1984 marked the Ontario Bicentenary, and the December concert with Haydn's 104<sup>th</sup> Symphony was repeated at St. John's Lutheran Church in Pembroke as part of the ecumenical service held to celebrate the bicentenary.

Again in February (1985), the Cantandos shared the stage with the DRSO in a "light" music concert. Perhaps the most noteworthy event that spring was the sweeping of the string awards at the Pembroke Kiwanis Festival by Megan (8) and Matthew (12) Jones – a promise of greater things to come.

The April 1985 concert featured Tom Moyer (from the Nepean Symphony) as soloist in the Haydn trumpet concerto. And that stimulates the retelling of a story that was typical of the mercurial and inexhaustible Jim Wegg at the time. Jim drove to Deep River on Tuesday afternoon for the last regular rehearsal before the concert weekend. Afterwards he drove home to Ottawa, as usual, and would have been back there by about 1:00 am on Wednesday, to find that his sister had an audition scheduled for Thursday with the Atlantic Symphony in Halifax. Unfortunately she was going to have to turn down the opportunity because there was an airline strike on. Nonsense – said Jim, and at about eight they left by car for Halifax. Jim slept in Halifax that night and got up early to drive back on his own.

His sister was able to try out for a place as a bassoonist in the Atlantic Symphony, and Jim picked up Tom in Ottawa and was on time for the dress rehearsal of the DRSO on Friday at 7:30 pm. The program was quite tricky with pieces by Britten and Kabalevski, so there would have been a Saturday morning emergency rehearsal, then the concert on Saturday evening. After the post-concert reception there was a wind-down party at Hill House and at 2:00 am on Sunday Jim and Tom were entertaining those still awake with jazz riffs. At 10 am. Jim drove Tom back to Ottawa.

Despite great efforts by the Executive to get the DRSO back in the Ontario Arts Council's favour there was still no grant forthcoming and the 1985-86 season started with a budgetary shortfall of \$2000 predicted. Wegg was also concerned with maintaining the earnings of the Nepean Symphony players and in November proposed a Deep River Summer Music Festival. This would be of no direct financial help to the DRSO except in the way of general publicity for classical music. However, support of Jim was vital to the wellbeing of the DRSO, and John Hulbert rounded up some DRSO supporters to help organize a Festival, while the orchestra executive continued its separate responsibility for the current season and the DRSO.

The December 1985 concert was mainly Beethoven with some Bach and Schumann, and spring saw yet another Pops concert with the Ballet Club and Broadway music, which was replayed in Pembroke, after a delay of a month. The big announcement of 1986 was of the forthcoming Summer Festival of Music, with a Music School and concerts by the Nepean Symphony. The Town of Deep River advanced the Festival \$5000 and the



**Maestro  
Mayor Lyall Smith**

Mayor, Lyall Smith agreed to sponsor a fund-raising Brunch. The April concert, all Mozart, included the Requiem, with the assistance of the Choral Group and local soloists, and was also repeated in Pembroke to a packed audience.

The Mayor's Brunch in June was a great success, supported by musical interludes by the DRSO, and attempts at conducting by the Mayor, the Mayor of Nepean and Sean Conway MPP, and the

Festival went off with only minor hitches. Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" was performed in a downpour on the Campus on the August holiday

weekend. The Nepean Symphony kept dry under a large tent, where after a few moments they were joined by the whole audience – and the band played on!

Later in August the executive heard that the Ontario Arts Council had relented and the DRSO's grant was restored at \$1000 per season. This did not mean that the orchestra's financial worries were over, and an extensive concert season was planned. After a November 1986 Symphony concert, the spring of 1987 was very busy with a Pops concert in February, featuring lots of Gilbert and Sullivan with the "Valley Savoyards", and playing in Deep River, Pembroke and Renfrew. In April we had the NACO, Peter Morris' Valley Youth Orchestra, the Spring concert and the Second Mayor's Brunch, and in May those who had not succeeded in going into hiding played on the Campus for the Teddy Bears' Picnic for CHEO.

Back in April the first sign of bad things to come was the news that the School Board wanted to save expenses by knocking down Festival Hall in Pembroke, where the DRSO had performed on several occasions. The Valley Arts Council was able to fend off this disaster by taking over management of the Hall.

The Summer Festival finished in grand style with Handel's Firework music on a fine clear night on the Campus, complete with pyrotechnics.

As the 1987 – 88 season opened, Peter Morris began regular trips from Ottawa to give string lessons in the Upper Valley, a move that ultimately brought big dividends for the DRSO and the Pembroke Symphony. Joyce Moore and Peter Cowan put on a DRSO benefit performance of "I Do, I Do" in October. Wegg put Ives "The Unanswered Question" to the orchestra at the December concert – it remained unanswered. No one seemed to understand the question!

The new regime on the executive came up with new ways to raise money. The National Press and Allied Workers Jazz Band Ink was engaged for a benefit performance for January 1988, the Irish Play visited from Pembroke and Maureen Holden and Barbara Tatone's needles flew as they created a quilt - the first of many to follow - to be raffled in aid of the orchestra.

Also in January THEOP engaged the York Winds to perform and who was playing oboe, in her first professional ensemble? None other than our own Cynthia Steljes!

The DRSO gave a Pops concert in February, and the April 30 concert featured Matthew Jones as soloist in a Telemann Recorder Suite. The following day, May 1 the orchestra played at the Third Mayor's Brunch for the Summer Music Festival, and it was announced that the Town would support the Festival to the tune of \$10,000.

In June, the joint Nepean Symphony School and the Ottawa Valley Youth

Orchestra played for audiences in Nepean and in Deep River. For the Third Music Festival in August the Nepean Symphony played two outdoor concerts, and one indoors with a novel feature “Cartoons to Music”, Wegg gave a public lecture on the future of music, and there were two performances of “Iolanthe” by the Ottawa Savoy Society.

The next season, 1988-89 turned out a time of trouble for the Festival and the Nepean Symphony. The DRSO had presented a baroque concert by the Te Deum Concert Society in November and the usual December symphony concert, when disaster struck Wegg. The Festival had planned an expanded program and application had been made for a grant from Toronto. In the same week that Toronto changed its policy in midstream and invalidated the grant application, the Town decided that the Festival should henceforth stand on its own feet, and Nepean City threatened to foreclose on outstanding debts of the Nepean Symphony amounting to \$53,000. By the time that Nepean had decided to offer a limited extended line-of-credit to its Symphony, it was too late to organize the 1989 Festival. The DRSO had its second quilt and the Irish Play and was able to go ahead with the rest of its season. Mackenzie High School, led by Matthew Jones,

raced to the rescue of the Nepean Symphony, with a benefit concert involving the school ensembles, the Cantandos and the DRSO, and raised \$1200.

A much-attenuated Festival, consisting of a Mayor’s Brunch, the Music School and a public lecture by Peter Morris went ahead in August.

That October, the NACO took industrial action against its management and the DRSO was able to provide hospitality for a quartet of NACO players to put on a fund-raiser in Deep River. The DRSO also presented a first, in playing the entertainment for a IAEA Symposium on Reactor Safety Research held at Chalk River in October. The December concert, belying the gloom in



**Matthew Jones**

Nepean, was unusually light-hearted with a Mozart overture, a Hansel and



Gretel fantasy and La Boutique Fantasque.

The National Press ... Jazz Band Ink put in a second appearance in January of 1990, and Peter Morris led a joint ensemble of the DRSO and the Upper Valley Juniors in February concerts in Deep River and at St. John's Lutheran in Pembroke. Maureen and Barbara started on their third orchestra quilt, and at the May concert, Matthew Jones conducted a march by Pierné. Matthew and his younger sister Megan were both runners-up in their string categories at the Provincial finals of the Ontario Music Festival in Windsor.

The Deep River Music Festival had stimulated other ideas in the area and in the spring of 1990 it was announced that there would be a Summer Festival in the town. The dates chosen forced the Music Festival to become a part of the larger and more populist Festival, and unfortunately, despite initial assurances, in August the Music Festival found itself in direct competition



**Peter Morris**

with the Summer Festival for audience. As well, enrollment for the school was now too low to make its operation economic. The Music Festival concerts were played by the Festival Players, a smaller ensemble than the fading Nepean Symphony, but Mayor Lyall Smith came through with another enjoyable fund-raising Brunch. When the summer was over the Festival had lost a few hundred dollars, but it was clear that it could not contend with the popular competition from a more general Festival held at the same time.

Things seemed to be improving financially in Wegg's world for the 1990-91 season. The December concert of the DRSO was a light mix of Handel's Water Music and operatic overtures. In February 1991, the feature of the DRSO's presentation was Jim Wegg's "Deep River Suite",

the movements being titled "Up the Valley", Mount Martin Sunrise" and "Saturday Afternoon at the Elms". The Nepean Symphony provided an extra concert on May 4, with Mozart and Beethoven. The final concert of the season on May 11 started with Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, and

concluded with a concert version of “HMS Pinafore” by the Ottawa Savoy Society. Sir Joseph Porter of the Ottawa cast had gone to the Caribbean, so John Hulbert was dragooned into singing his part, open score in hand, at a very late hour (time for one rehearsal in Ottawa).

Then dawned the fatal season, 1991-1992. Peter Morris conducted a



**Megan Jones**

concert commemorating the centenary of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Pembroke in October. The December concert featured “Music of Our Time”. Just a few days before Christmas, the Ottawa Savoy Society informed the DRSO that they would not be fulfilling an engagement to play in the spring (an offshoot of the Nepean problems), and then

the dreadful news, the Nepean Symphony could not pay its players and owed the City \$59,000. After 17 years of operation the NSO was bankrupt and finished.

Wegg continued conducting the DRSO, and started an ensemble, the “Music Lab”, which was booked to play for a production of “Pirates of Penzance” in Nepean, but by summer 1992 the combination of professional and personal blows that he had suffered forced him to give up the DRSO. His last concert was on May 9, and on June 5, the orchestra said goodbye in a merry, but emotional party, looking back with gratitude to 15 seasons of fun and great music making together, yet sad to have it end so painfully. Jim’s final act in Deep River was to bequeath his orchestra to his friend Peter Morris.



**April Verch**

The Peter Morris era has not yet run its course, thankfully, and we must ask whether Peter’s years are really history or still material for Argus to

report on. Some high points we can look back on with pleasure include a joint Valentine concert with the Valley Arts Council in Petawawa in February 1993; Orchestra Weeks with Mayor's Receptions and Music in the Schools; collaborations with the Deep River Choral Group in the Vivaldi Gloria, Handel's Messiah, and Haydn's Creation; Megan Jones and April Verch playing a Bach double concerto in 1995, solo performances by Megan, April, Marion Arthur, Matthew Jones, Stella Callighen; two visits by Katie Stillman, and the solo work and support afforded by the orchestra's resident "visiting" principal oboe, Susan Morris.

And so, eleven years after Jim Wegg left, Peter is still here, working the occasional miracle with the material that Deep River and the Upper Valley provide him. From the beginning, Peter brought his family to live here, and now not only oboist Susan plays with the DRSO, but bassoonist Megan and violinist April have grown beyond infancy to take their place in the orchestra. Having fine string and wind teachers resident in the town has brought out a crop of good players, refreshed and enhanced with each new school year. Now, there are as many principal desks occupied by students as by adults, and the quality of the orchestra has improved by leaps and bounds, particularly in the string sections. Peter is able to pursue his goal of challenging the orchestra a little more each season, and to their constant surprise, the players meet the test each time, even if it is only a terrifyingly faster tempo thrown at them in the final performance. But the real purpose of playing in an amateur orchestra is to enjoy music by making it, and this gift Peter has given to everyone who has played in the DRSO over the past eleven seasons.

## **Last words**

This history has necessarily been selective. One day we may be able to fill out the story and look, beyond the conductors, to individual players, who each, in their time, gave their all to the life of the DRSO. We also acknowledge those, here unnamed, who over the seasons have given their devoted support to the business of the DRSO – the executive members who have organized resources to meet the conductors' plans, sought visiting players, found musical scores, conjured funding from sources both in town and out, and devised and distributed publicity; the members of numerous business committees who have worked hard to encourage the community to support the Orchestra, and not least, the faithful audiences who have come to share our music making. With the same community support we may look forward with confidence and expectation to the next 50 years of the DRSO. (JAH)