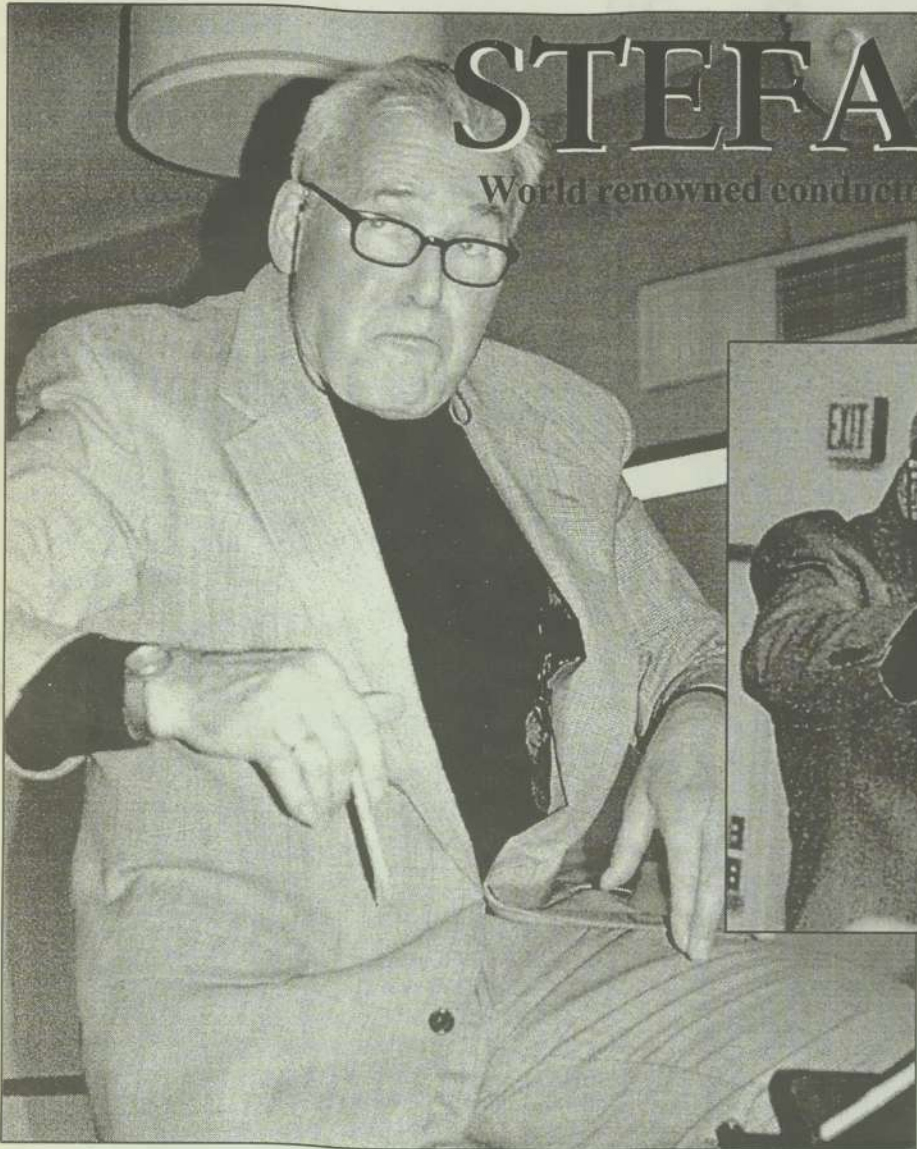


STEFAN MINDE:

World renowned conductor shares talent and charisma with Clackamas



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IT IS THE SPECIAL PROVINCE OF
MUSIC TO MOVE THE HEART.
~ BACH ~

SHELBI WESCOTT
Feature Editor

Stefan Minde, world renowned concert conductor and guest maestro for Clackamas' presentation, by the Chamber and Chorale choirs, of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, sits across from me and sips his black decaf coffee as we settle into our restaurant booth.

My nervousness about the interview faded when the first thing Minde told me was how he got lost on his way to meet me.

"I have the worst sense of direction," he said in his thick, almost indecipherable, German accent. "I was in the wrong building."

I look at this man with his black and white pinstriped suit, red beret and thick black glasses, and he doesn't seem at all how I would picture a *maestro* or famous conductor.

Perhaps I was expecting a brusque, staunch and pretentious man. Perhaps my vision was that of a recluse, with untamed hair and fiery eyes.

Minde was none of the above.

He is funny and refreshing. Beneath his exterior of 63 years lies an incredible, youthful vitality and effervescence.

The way he makes me laugh and his humanness cause me to forget I am sitting next to a man who has spanned the globe to offer his genius—when I asked him what countries he had been to, it was easier for him to respond by naming the countries he hasn't been to. This is a man whose name is known among the best choirs and musicians of today. I forget he is

Stefan Minde and I see him as a grandfather.

The waitress comes to our table and Minde looks at her curiously.

"Do you have apple pie?" He inquires.

The waitress nods.

"Do you want an apple pie?" He asks me. I politely decline, satisfied with my black caffeinated coffee, pen and paper.

"Two apple pies, then. We'll have two pies," he tells the waitress. I smile and figure that one slice of pie won't hurt.

A Lifetime of Music

Minde and I talk about his childhood in Nazi Germany. Born in Leipzig in 1936, Minde was only three when World War II began. However, his memories of that time are still vivid.

He was nine when the war ended and his home was located in what became East Germany.

"We were not taught English or French. . . they told us we could not learn those 'capitalist' languages," Minde says.

At home, his mother and his grandfather nurtured Minde's musical gift. With a grand piano in his bedroom, Minde had been surrounded by music from an early age.

In 1947, at the age of 11, he joined the St. Thomas boys' choir, a choir designed to sing traditional Baroque music. It was this choir that Johann Sebastian Bach had directed nearly 200 years earlier.

When Minde moved on from St.

Thomas, his career in conducting and performing climbed to amazing heights.

He found himself working with the New York Opera, Ring Cycle (a festival of Opera), various music festivals around the world and some of the globe's finest choirs and opera houses (including the Portland Opera).

Throughout his 40 years of conducting, Minde has acquired many stories to share about his moments on stage. Some are entertaining

and others allow us to peer into the soul of this determined and motivated man.

"Not one performance in the world is faultless," Minde tells me, as the waitress delivers our pie. "That's the salt in the soup."

And if

Minde's career were soup, it would be rather salty.

He recalls a time when, during the middle of an opera, the lead soprano forgot the words to her aria. Quick wit and sheer brilliance let Minde know exactly what he needed to do: With his hands conducting the orchestra, his voice took the place of that lost performer. He sang loudly and clearly, filling the auditorium with his own beautiful voice. The audience was none the wiser.

In 1972, Minde had a brain aneurysm during a music festival in Toronto. He was in a coma for several weeks and suffered temporary amnesia. And not too long

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ago, he suffered a heart attack two hours before he was to take the stage for a five and a half hour concert.

"I felt rotten, but I thought 'no big deal', the show must go on," Minde says. "But my wife called 911 and the paramedics came and tried to abduct me. I had no choice."

Minde's life almost ended that night and the first thing on his mind wasn't his heart or his health, but his music.

Working with Clackamas

We look at our watches. 6:30. Time to rehearse. Minde asks for the check and we walk out to his car.

"Why do you come to Clackamas?" I ask him. "You travel the world to work with choirs, what brings you to Oregon City?"

"I love these guys," he says. "Of all the colleges I work with, Clackamas is by far the best. I love to work here."

When we pull into the school parking lot, I feel like I have made a friend. We make jokes and laugh as we waltz into the rehearsal space 15 minutes behind schedule. Minde smiles and points an accusing finger in my direction and I announce that it wasn't *my* idea to order the apple pie.

It is then I notice the room is quiet. The chamber choir sits attentively and Lonnie Cline, the music director, bows a sincere welcome to the maestro.

Once again, I realize whose company I am enjoying. The choir gives him a warm welcome and looks at him with a sense of awe.

They direct Minde toward the stairs, in order to get on to the stage, but Minde tosses his brief-

case up and starts to climb the ledge.

Giggles come from the choir as they watch this esteemed conductor hoist himself to the stage.

Cline gives a gracious introduction as Minde shakes his head with modesty. "He makes music come to life," Cline concludes.

Bringing Music to Life

Minde steps in front of the choir. He directs the accompanist and then lifts his weathered hands to bring the singers to life.

The rehearsal hall fills with the harmonious sounds of Bach's Oratorio. Minde's eyes look intensely on certain sections as he mentally notes what needs to be reworked.

When Minde stops the choir they stand silent, awaiting his instruction. His intense eyes give way to dynamic energy; he skips along the stage, conveying his love for the music and his delight in their ability.

At the end of the rehearsal, Minde is surrounded by people wishing to talk to him and ask him questions. I push my way to the front and thank him for the interview and the apple pie. He kisses me on the hand and smiles kindly.

He is funny and charming. He is brilliant. This man, who has spent 40 years of his life traveling the world to bring it music, calls Oregon one of his homes and Clackamas a treasure.

However, it is Stefan Minde who is a treasure to everyone who has the pleasure of his company.

My wish is that everybody could sit down with this incredible man for coffee and apple pie.

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