



ANDRÉ STRYDOM

M.Mus., LTCL

CONDUCTOR
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Biographical Profile

Born in South Africa, ANDRÉ STRYDOM received his first piano, organ, and clarinet lessons at an early age. Later teachers were Dr. Sofia Moshevich (Moscow Conservatory graduate) and Laetitia van Onselen for piano, and Nicholas Head and Charlotte van der Merwe for organ. He also studied composition with Professor Carl van Wyk and vocal technique.

Completing his High School and University careers in Johannesburg, André was on the fulltime medical staff of the Johannesburg General Hospital's Department of Cardiology from 1985 until 1991, leaving medicine to pursue a career in music. Having received his Licentiate Diploma (LTCL) in piano teaching from Trinity College of Music (U.K.), André came to the United States in 1992 to pursue a Masters degree in orchestral conducting and organ performance at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. His teachers here included Maestro Gerhard Samuel (who studied with Serge Koussevitzky and Paul Hindemith, and who was also assistant to Antal Dorati and Zubin Mehta), and Dr. David Mulbury (organ). Other teachers included Allen Sapp (a student of Nadia Boulanger and Aaron Copland) for counterpoint and composition. His studies at the University of Cincinnati were interrupted for a few years due to a concert career, but André eventually graduated with the Master of Music degree from the University of Central Arkansas.

In 1982, André founded the Johannesburg Chamber Choir and Orchestra with whom he conducted a number of very successful and acclaimed performances for the next ten years! As an orchestral conductor, he has directed performances that cover a wide range of music in the symphonic repertoire. Together with the renowned Cincinnati Philharmonia Orchestra and Gerhard Samuel, André participated in the world premiere recordings of Charles Ives' "Universe Symphony" and Franz Schubert's recently rediscovered opera, *Der Graf von Gleichen* (both on the *Centaur* label), and also conducted this orchestra in a number of other works in the standard orchestral repertoire, including ballet and opera. Together with the Cincinnati Contemporary Music Ensemble, he conducted the American premiere of Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph's "Masada" for bassoon and strings, a performance that has since been released on a compact disc entitled "Music of the Spheres" (*Claremont*).

As a pianist and organist, André has played recitals and performed as an orchestral soloist on occasion, as well as accompanist to singers and instrumentalists. In March 1993, together with South African violist, Elizabeth Rennie, André made his New York City debut as a pianist in a recital of works by South African composers. It was on this occasion that he and Ms. Rennie played the world premiere of the late Arthur Wegelin's Viola Sonata, a work that the composer subsequently dedicated to them.

Pursuing a career as a conductor and church musician, André was selected to participate in the 1998 Karelia International Conducting Master Class in St. Petersburg and Petrozavodsk, Russia. This event included coaching and master classes at the St. Petersburg Conservatory with Professor Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin, teacher of such notable contemporary conductors as Valery Gerghiev and Yuri Temirkhanov. In May 1999, André returned to Russia where he guest conducted the Yaroslavl and Sochi Symphony Orchestras in music by Mozart, Gustav Mahler, Richard Wagner, and Richard Strauss, and continued to work with Professor Musin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music until shortly before Musin's death.

Musin played a major role in the development of conducting as a true profession, developing his own system of instruction and training based on the philosophy of "making music visible with your hands." He also exerted the greatest influence on Strydom's development as a conductor.

Musin's approach requires a physical relationship with the music as if one were sculpting the sound, an approach that he developed after observing Constantin Stanislavski, the legendary founder of the "Method Acting" technique. This approach emphasizes emotional truth and inner motivation, and Musin would always tell us, his students, to create an event, to evoke an emotional state of mind when we were on the podium. Musin taught his students to develop gestures that emerged from the emotional nature of the music, describing the main principle of his method in these words: "A conductor must make music visible to his musicians with his hands. There are two components to conducting: expressiveness and exactness. These two components are in dialectical opposition to each other; in fact, they cancel each other out. A conductor must find the way to bring the two together."

Having held a number of church appointments, in October 2002 André was appointed the Minister of Music and Principal Organist at the First Presbyterian Church of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where he directed a large and diverse music program that involved around 120 people each week! He also served as the Director of the church's Music and Arts Institute, as well as Artistic Director of the First Presbyterian Concert Series.

In June 2007, André was made a member of the National Scholars Honor Society.

In May 2008 he conducted members of the Arkansas and Pine Bluff Symphony Orchestras in a program of music by Steven Amundson, Robert Hanson, Daniel Kallman, Mendelssohn, and Vaughan Williams in celebration of the First Presbyterian Church of Pine Bluff's 150th anniversary. For the same occasion, André conducted the world premiere of a commissioned choral work, "Great Is the Lord," by British composer Paul Leddington Wright.

In July 2009 André served as Music Director and Conductor for the Arts and Science Center of Southeast Arkansas's production of the musical, *Gypsy*, and returned in July 2010 to conduct their very successful production of the Rodger's and Hammerstein musical, *The King and I*. In the summer of 2012 he was the Music Director for their production of *42nd Street*.

From September 2007 until May 2013, André was on the faculty of the Music Department at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff where he taught Music History & Appreciation, secondary piano classes (beginner through advanced), administered the piano proficiency exam, and served as accompanist for the Vesper Choir and recitals given by students and faculty. During this time he was also Principal Pianist with the Pine Bluff Symphony Orchestra.

In June 2013, André moved to northwest Arkansas to begin a new appointment as Director of Music and Organist at the First Presbyterian Church of Bentonville, Arkansas, where, in addition to his other duties and responsibilities, he established the church's Music and Arts Academy in June 2014. He also performed as pianist with the Symphony Orchestra of Northwest Arkansas for two years, was Music Director of Ozark Bronze, a professional handbell ensemble, and accompanied various school choirs and the Men's Chorus of Northwest Arkansas.

In October 2018, André moved to Northern Michigan to take up his new appointment as Organist and Director of Music Ministries at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Petoskey. In February 2020 he was appointed Chorusmaster for the Great Lakes Chamber Orchestra and, in June 2022, was named Music Director of the Little Traverse Choral Society.