

Remarks by Erica Reynolds Hager
Evening of Gratitude 2020

In a community, institutions become part of the fabric of the place, a key piece of how the various strands of a group of people, a town, a region are woven together. Indian Hill Music is such an institution. I was born and grew up and still live here in the neighborhood where the initial meetings were held to create this marvelous place. People who felt passionately about bringing excellence in music to this region met in the living rooms of the Blackmans, the Gierschs, the Salzmans, and mine—the Reynolds, to put the right talent, strategic thinkers, funds, and man and woman power behind the idea.

As many of us know, after you get your ducks in a row and have the right people in place, in this case, musicians, music teachers and leaders, you need to spread the word! In the tradition of making music accessible to all and gaining friends, Indian Hill was ahead of the times. They held chamber concerts in some of our living rooms way before living room concerts were a thing!

As the organization grew, my family stayed deeply involved, both nurturing Indian Hill from a strategic side, and as dedicated music students. Among the Reynolds and Hagers, we have taken violin, viola, harp, flute, drums, voice and piano.

Teachers, of course, are at the heart of the Indian Hill music school and teachers are magical people. I started my time in piano with Erika Boardman Kraft. She was as warm as person as they come, and kind and talented and, it turns out, quite a good actor! One day I arrived for my lesson and just as we were about to sit down to begin, she said, “Hey, you’re about the same size as my niece!” and before I knew it, Erika whipped out her tape measure and was measuring my arms and my chest for a sweater that she was knitting for her niece. Great! And on we went then with our lesson. Well, that Christmas, my gift from my mother was the most beautiful three toned blue Icelandic knit sweater that she had knitted me! Erika had measured me for my own sweater! My mom howled as she explained that on Christmas morning.

Eventually I moved on to continue studying piano with Marguerite Samoorian. I was selected to be one of a small bunch of Indian Hill students who played the premier of a piece by Robert Cogan in Boston! I had two movements to play. The piece was called “Algebra and Mornings.” By this time in my young life I had decided that I was very bad at math, and it so happened that this piece was completely modern and dissonant, with no time signature and lots of flats and sharps, kind of the way math sounded in my head. I didn’t really like the movements I had to play and I was playing with some very good young pianists and I was totally intimidated. I don’t remember ever resisting practicing before, because I loved making music. But I recall there were some pretty good pre-teen stomping and whining episodes when my parents had to make me practice “Algebra and Mornings!” Math was out to get me!

I don't ever remember Marguerite getting frustrated with me in the weeks of my less than enthusiastic preparation for that piece. I recalled that the sheets of music had LOTS of her pencil marks on them, so I opened the piano bench last night to look at the music. I knew it was still there. It was from 1981. Indeed, the now well-aged paper was as I remembered it. Covered in penciled notes from Marguerite! As my teacher, she did everything she could to write a road map for me to get me through my two movements! The premier concert in Boston was a very big deal. I remember standing at the piano after, during the applause, with Mr. Cogan, the composer. What a moment. He was very gracious to all of the young musicians and gave us each a crystal as a gift. I ended up feeling proud to be a part of the evening.

I also took flute with Andrea Mason Nolin. Now, during my lessons, I remember talking with Andrea more than playing. This was in my miserable middle school years, and I have concluded since that and I am pretty sure my mom had an arrangement with Andrea that it was OK for me not to become a premier flute player. She probably told her, "Andrea, just give this kid someone to talk to!" Though I do remember that Sue Gleason would pop in from time to time with a flute student of hers and we would sight read duets. And they were beautiful. As in the case of the Cogan piece, my Indian Hill teachers always had a way of giving me a little push and surprising me with my own abilities.

The orchestra, of course, is a centerpiece of Indian Hill and it has always been about excellence and community. My parents were always happily a part of all of the events. They held dinner parties before concerts and of course they attended every concert. I attended many, many with them. I remember how my dad was so deeply engaged in the concerts. We'd have fun discussions about the orchestra after concerts. He'd talk about who his favorite players were or we'd break down how the timpani player followed her part or we'd analyze the style of the guest musician of the evening.

And of course, everyone adored the Indian Hill Pops events in the years they were held! My mom and many of you worked tirelessly behind the scenes on the publicity, the food, and ran the event on the big night. One year, because I think he bid on it and won it at a previous Indian Hill fundraiser, my father got to live a dream and conduct the orchestra for one piece at the Pops! I think he got one rehearsal. He was so excited! After, I remember him telling the story on himself that while he was conducting, he could see the musicians in front of him just smiling and playing away, some chuckling at him, as he flailed about, but they played on without a hitch. After the piece, which I am sure brought the crowd to its feet, one of the members of the orchestra, it may have been Susan or Stuart, told him, "Fred, we knew exactly what to do and no matter what you did, we were going to be able to play that piece just fine!"

The relationships that my family has made with the two esteemed conductors of the orchestra, with countless musicians and music teachers and comrades on the Board, have been a constant in our lives. My mother is still a committed friend of the organization and she ensured after my father's passing

that he would still be giving in a meaningful way, with the Bach's Lunch series. And it is delightful to be continuing these relationships in my own adult life. As a singer in my 20s and 30s, I played out with Harry Chalmiers for a while. An Indian Hill musician played at my wedding. My husband DJ and I brought our daughters here for violin and drum lessons. I picked Susan's brain about college vocal music programs for my own daughter. And now I watch the incredible new facility going up essentially in my back yard. And sometimes, Lisa, Susan, and Catherine, pick my brain. I delight in the excitement and the chance to engage.

In its role in this community, not just in my life over these many years, Indian Hill is a lot like that beautifully hand knitted sweater. Different stitches and colors are used, and all bring a beautiful whole together from a small but mighty start- just one piece of yarn. Indian Hill was an idea from a small group of people gathering in living rooms to bring this vision to life. And here we are now, each in our homes, once again in our living rooms, to connect on our shared belief in the incredible future of Indian Hill Music. What a moment. It's wonderful to be "together" tonight. May we all continue to nurture and benefit from all that Indian Hill gives to our corner of the world.