

Sean Burton, conductor

Known for his unique level of versatility, American conductor Sean Burton epitomizes a philosophy on life as articulated by his idol Theodore Roosevelt: "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." Recent critical acclaim ranges from his "elegant account of Rossini's 'Barber of Seville Overture'" (Clifton Noble, Jr., Springfield Union News) and other works during the first half of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra's Pops season opener with Dionne Warwick to praise for his conducting of the Alaska All-State Treble Choir: "The conductor was great," with his "very precise and demanding" (Jenny Neyman, The Mouth of Kenai) approach resonating with vocal and instrumental musicians alike at all levels.

Burton's orchestral repertoire as of late includes the North American premiere of British composer Nigel Hess' "A Christmas Overture," piano concertos by Grieg, Mozart, Poulenc, Shostakovich, and Schumann, as well as works by Bizet, Chadwick, Delius, and Kallman with Members of the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra for Briar Cliff University's annual "Christmas at the Orpheum" program during each of the last six years. Concerning his skills on the podium, Eunho Kim, former concertmaster of the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra, asserts: "Sean Burton is articulate yet kind in the rehearsals, and solid yet artistic in performances. He understands the orchestra's ability well and leads effective rehearsals. His sincere care for every section of the orchestra and choir inspires to bond them tightly together. He is easy to follow and pleasant to work with." Robert Gorevic, principal violist of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra concurs: "Sean Burton conducted the Springfield Symphony Orchestra with musicality and efficiency, coupled with a pleasant working attitude. It was a pleasure to play under him."

Recognized for his long-term commitment to choral-orchestral repertoire, his conducting experience in that realm embraces many Bach cantatas, the Randol Alan Bass "Gloria," Duruflé's "Requiem," Dubois' "Seven Last Words," Fauré's "Requiem," Galuppi's "Dixit Dominus," Handel's "Messiah," Hasse's "Te Deum in D," Haydn's "Lord Nelson Mass" and "Mass in Time of War," Mozart's "Coronation Mass," Orff's "Carmina Burana," Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater," Rutter's "Gloria," Schubert's "Mass No. 2 in G Major," Vaughan Williams' "Dona Nobis Pacem" and "Five Mystical Songs," and a multitude of carol arrangements by John Rutter, Robert Shaw and Robert Russell Bennett, Mack Wilberg, and David Willcocks with choirs and orchestras throughout greater Hartford, Boston, Lincoln, Omaha, and Sioux City. Further, he has prepared choirs for the Omaha Symphony, Lincoln Symphony, Sioux City Symphony, Abendmusik: Lincoln, Wellesley Symphony, and Connecticut Concert Opera, performing such works as the Brahms "Ein deutsches Requiem," Duruflé's "Requiem," James Grant's "Eja! Eja!," Handel's "Ariodante," Orff's "Carmina Burana," Vaughan Williams' "A Sea Symphony," Walton's

“Belshazzar’s Feast,” opera choruses by Puccini and Verdi, and numerous shorter pieces.

Burton came of age in the rural north central Connecticut town of Suffield, where he first discovered his passion for music as a member of his school band and choir programs. Following these formative experiences, his professional training began at The Hartt School – University of Hartford, the preeminent performing arts conservatory in Connecticut. While at Hartt, he studied conducting with Douglas Jackson, the late Paul Oakley, and Edward Bolkovac, voice with Janine Hawley and the late Fredric Moses, was cast in Hartt Opera Theater productions of Johann Strauss’ “Die Fledermaus” and Verdi’s “La Traviata,” was selected as baritone soloist for Ernst Bloch’s landmark masterpiece “Avodath Hakodesh” with the Hartt Chorale, and enjoyed many engagements as baritone soloist in Hartford. Burton graduated *summa cum laude* with the Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from Hartt and was immediately hired as the Choral and Orchestra Director at Weston High School in southern Connecticut. While at Weston, he led the school’s string and symphony orchestras, five choirs, conducted musicals, taught courses in music theory and the history of rock and roll, and took all the ensembles under his direction on regional tours, often earning superior ratings at competitive adjudications. The choral and orchestra programs flourished during his tenure at Weston, though the opportunity to pursue graduate studies in conducting led him leave his home state of Connecticut for Boston.

Burton was the recipient of a scholarship and graduate assistantship at Boston University where he matriculated in the prestigious Master of Music degree program in Conducting, studying with Ann Howard Jones, David Hoose, and the late Craig Smith. While at BU he was handpicked as Scott Allen Jarrett’s Assistant Conductor for the Marsh Chapel Choir and Collegium, often conducting the choir and being featured as baritone soloist for weekly live radio broadcasts. At BU he also conducted graduate recitals with several music major choruses and was engaged as Music Director of the non-auditioned Boston University Choral Society, an ensemble whose membership of undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and community members doubled during his leadership.

After graduating from BU with Department Honors he was appointed as Assistant Conductor to the late Allen Lannom, and current Music Director Steven Karidoyanes, of Boston’s long-established Masterworks Chorale. During this period he also founded and conducted the Boston Orpheus Ensemble (a professional chamber orchestra comprised of Boston area young artists) and guest conducted the Wellesley Choral Society. In addition, he was chosen as a Conducting Fellow for Chorus America’s Choral-Orchestral Conducting Workshop in Cincinnati where he worked with Jorge Mester and other conducting luminaries, an experience that affirmed his desire to pursue doctoral studies in conducting.

The offer of a full tuition scholarship and graduate teaching assistantship lured Burton to the Midwest where he ultimately earned the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Choral Conducting from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A student of Peter Eklund and Therees Hibbard at UNL, he served as Assistant Conductor of the University Singers (the institution's premier choir) and Conductor of the All-Collegiate Chorus, an ensemble comprised of undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, and community members whose membership doubled under his direction.

While working on his doctorate in Lincoln, Burton was tapped to become Conductor of the internationally acclaimed Nebraska Children's Chorus Bel Canto, the premier youth touring choir of the Nebraska Choral Arts Society, an ensemble he led for four years. Under his direction, Bel Canto was selected for performance at conventions of the Nebraska Music Educators Association and Nebraska Choral Directors Association, the 61st National MENC Biennial In-Service Conference in Milwaukee, the North Central MENC Division Conference in Indianapolis, the Pacific International Children's Choir Festival, and the Oregon Bach Festival. Further, he led Bel Canto on tours throughout France, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, Mexico, the Pacific Northwest U.S., and Italy, singing in major venues such as Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Mexico City's Basilica de Guadalupe, Munich's Frauenkirche and Michaelskirche, Salzburg Cathedral, St. James Cathedral in Seattle, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, and the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi. As Bel Canto Conductor, he facilitated performances with the Coro Polofonico Multietnico "Daniele Manin" di Roma, Indianapolis Children's Choir, Instituto Superior de Música del Estado de Veracruz, International School of Zug and Luzern, Lincoln Boys Choir, Lincoln Civic Choir, Los Niños y Jóvenes Cantores de la Escuela Nacional de Música de Mexico, Northfield Youth Choirs, Northwest Boychoir, Omaha Area Youth Orchestras, Omaha Performing Arts, Opera Omaha, and for several programs with the Omaha Symphony. Regarding his preparation of Bel Canto for a performance of Orff's "Carmina Burana" with the Omaha Symphony, guest conductor Christoph Campestrini exclaims: "The chorus sounded perfectly prepared and their fresh young voices blended beautifully into a first class choral sound." Concerning his preparation of Bel Canto for a performance of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" for a joint-concert with the Lincoln Civic Choir, music director Dr. William Wyman comments: "It was obvious that the singers greatly admired Dr. Burton and his expertise in working with young voices allowed this performance to be memorable for beauty of tone and depth of musicianship."

As he approached the conclusion of his doctoral studies, Burton was also hired as Director of Choral Activities at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, a position he currently retains. At Briar Cliff University, he conducts the Cliff Singers and Chamber Choir, teaches courses in conducting and secondary music methods, conducts musical productions, and serves as Artistic Director of Briar Cliff's "Christmas at the Orpheum,"

a multi-organization extravaganza for which he annually engages the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra. Burton began his tenure at Briar Cliff in 2007 and received the Emerging Faculty Scholar Award (the University's highest possible honor for pre-tenured faculty) in 2009. Credited with thoroughly revitalizing the music program at Briar Cliff, he has been personally responsible for leading joint-concerts, collaborations and/or projects with more than twenty different performing organizations. Under Burton's direction, the Briar Cliff Singers were the first choir in recorded history to be invited to sing the National Anthem on the site of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor in 2010 and toured Italy in May of 2012, performing concerts throughout Rome, Venice, and Assisi and singing for Pentecost Sunday Mass at Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. Regarding his preparation of the Briar Cliff University Singers for the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra's 2009 production of Orff's "Carmina Burana," guest conductor Peter Rubardt remarks: "Sean's contribution to our performance of Carmina was masterful. From preparing the chorus to handling the stage logistics to assisting with balances, he was a critical part of this exciting evening. And he's a great colleague; I hope to have the chance to work with him again."

Deeply involved in the Sioux City musical community, he also serves as Director of Music at Grace United Methodist Church, Founding Artistic Director of the Siouxland Choral Artists, the region's only auditioned adult chamber choir, and Director of the Abu Bekr Chanters. Believing in the need for a broad knowledge of the arts and humanities to be an effective conductor, Dr. Burton concurrently serves as Division Chair of Arts and Humanities at Briar Cliff University, overseeing the departments of Art, Mass Media, Modern Languages, Music, Theatre/Speech, and Theology/Philosophy.

A champion of new music, he has commissioned original compositions from American composers David Brunner, Paul Carey, Howard Helvey, Joshua Shank, and David von Kampen as well as Argentine composer Leonardo Lebas, Hungarian composer György Orbán, and Norwegian composer Jens Wendelboe. David Brunner described his experience of working with Sean Burton for a world premiere as follows: "Not only was this new work carefully prepared and beautifully sung...the entire concert was one of depth and variety, performed with artistic sensitivity and great spirit." Joshua Shank confirms this assessment, stating: "He is totally great at what he does."

An active scholar, Burton is the author of The Unaccompanied Choral Music of Pierre Villette: A Conductor's Analysis (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008) and has published some forty articles, reviews and performing editions. His presentation credits include state, regional, and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association, College Music Society, and NAfME: the National Association for Music Education. He has furthered his education through studies at the Eastman Choral Institute and was one of only five people chosen worldwide for the Vancouver Chamber Choir's 2010 National Conductors' Symposium, where he enjoyed a week-long residency in

Vancouver guest conducting the all-professional Vancouver Chamber Choir under the tutelage of Jon Washburn. Burton continues to coach privately with Duain Wolfe, Chorus Director for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who describes Sean as follows: “He is an incisive conductor with excellent technical skills that complement his impressive comprehension and projection of the heart of the music.”

Burton speaks English and Spanish fluently and is conversational in French and German. His diction proficiencies also include Italian, Latin, and Russian. Sean, his wife lyric soprano Shannon Salyards, and their son, Samuel, reside in a 1918 arts and crafts home in northwestern Iowa along with twin Siberian Huskies Niko and Nadia.