

## Final Report

to the UNH Vice President for Research and Public Service  
on the making of Franklin Portrait (2006) sponsored by the 2005 Discretionary Fund  
by Christopher Kies

The culmination of my project, Franklin Portrait (2006), consisted of two concerts in April of 2006, the first at Franklin High School in Franklin, Massachusetts, and the second at UNH in Durham. As the year 2006 was the tercentenary of Benjamin Franklin's birth, there was much interest and excitement in all things pertaining to Benjamin Franklin nationwide--so much so that the US Congress established a special commission to organize, sponsor and advertise events of all kinds during this time period. I registered and advertised our two concerts on the commission's official web site. My project was intended to join in the general celebration of Franklin's achievements while riding on the coattails of a certain public interest in our local area. While Philadelphia, PA, was the national center for the commission's work, closer to home there was a lot of activity in the town of Franklin, MA, surrounding the tercentenary since this town was the first of many to name itself after Ben Franklin. (Franklin subsequently donated a large collection of his own books to the town's library. These books are proudly on display in this library, and the town of Franklin believes this to be the first public library in America!--see attached photos)

The music department of UNH has had a long-standing and personal relationship with the public school music programs in Franklin, MA, (one of the strongest in the state) and my project was also intended to enhance and strengthen this relationship in a very dramatic way. Looking back on the project with a year's perspective, I am happy to say that I accomplished all of the goals I set out for myself, the audiences for the two concerts were very appreciative (I would even describe the audience in Franklin as being somewhat ecstatic), and there were not too many surprises of a negative kind along the way. The work itself, the time involved and the intensity of it, required perhaps more than I had ever imagined at the outset, but I was happy to be busy with something that I felt was valuable and important for so many people. My only real disappointment was in the uniform lack of interest I found amongst the local New Hampshire radio and printed media in advance of the concert at UNH. The UNH News Bureau tried to help me with this aspect--there was a nice article in the UNH eJournal--but in the end it was my own personal "direct mail" e-mail campaign which accounted for most of the audience (outside of the 175 performers themselves) at the concert at UNH. The

audience in Franklin, MA, on the other hand, was boosted hugely by their local town and school media coverage. Added to that were the families and friends of the performers from the local high school.

In the ten months leading up to the concerts, I accomplished a number of things which were crucial to the success of the concerts. In the summer of 2005 I finished compiling an extensive list of excerpts from Franklin's writings which I wanted to use in the narration and in the texts of the choral movements of my composition, Franklin Portrait. By June of 2005, I had already been researching the popular music of Franklin's time and place for several months, so I had my musical "savings account" ready to go by this time (my composition employs a number of freely adapted revolutionary tunes). From May 2005 to November 2005, I worked steadily on the score to Franklin Portrait, and by December 2005 I was ready to make the instrumental and choral parts so that the music students at Franklin High School could learn and rehearse their parts. The manufacturing of these parts actually took a very long time (about four hours a day, every day for six weeks). The reason for this was that my composition had ten movements, lasted over 50 minutes, and there were three choruses (two at Franklin, one at UNH), a wind ensemble, a string orchestra, and vocal and keyboard soloists for which to prepare parts. Also during the months before the concerts, I made several trips to Franklin, MA, in order to scope out the potentialities of the various music groups in the high school. Eventually these trips turned into actual rehearsals at which I and my UNH Music Department colleague, Dr. William Kempster, directed or assisted. One special feature of both concerts, a feature which comprised nearly one half of each concert, was a lecture-recital by Alisa Nakashian-Holsberg, a nationally recognized expert in playing the glass harmonica, an invention of Benjamin Franklin's. I traveled to Ms. Holsberg's residence in Westford, MA, to discuss her repertoire choices for the concert (which included vocal selections sung by UNH students along with the glass harmonica) and the format of her lecture.

One positive byproduct of my work which I had not expected is that several individual movements of the complete 10-movement work have taken on independent lives of their own since last year. The UNH Chamber Chorus recently made a CD which includes two of the unaccompanied choral movements, and this past semester I reorchestrated the "overture", which I called Preamble, as a stand-alone work for symphonic band with none of the strings and far more wind players than there were in the original version. This new Preamble will be performed by the UNH Symphonic Band in the spring of

2008. The eighth movement, *The Drinker's Dictionary*, was originally scored for brass ensemble, two choruses and narrator, and I have recently completed a new version for French horn ensemble (12 part), double chorus and narrator. As I mentioned in my proposal in April of 2005, an important aspect of professional growth for me through completing the composition was that it was the first time I had ever composed music specifically for high school level music groups. I succeeded in keeping all of the parts at this level, and the performers from Franklin gave me their enthusiastic approval. In both concerts, the approximately 130 high school musicians were joined by 45 UNH student musicians, primarily to add bulk to sparse areas of the groups or simply to add better balance between the groups.

Along with this report I would like to share several visual and audio items with your office to help demonstrate what actually occurred during the process I have been describing above. These items are the following: The full score to *Franklin Portrait*; a concert program; a poster; a copy of an article in the *Franklin Times*, March 31, 2006; a copy of an article in *Glass Music World*, the official newsletter of Glass Music International; a DVD of the second half of the concert from UNH with the *Franklin Portrait*; a VHS tape of the first half of this same concert with the glass harmonica lecture-performance (the budget ran out before I could turn this half into a DVD--it was a low priority for me anyway); a CD recording of the *Franklin Portrait* made at the concert in Franklin--this audio is in some ways better than the audio from the UNH concert since the chorus was standing in front of the band/orchestra and the words sung by the chorus are easier to hear as a result; and a CD with several digital photos taken by me on the days of the concerts.

Most appreciatively yours,



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