LAWYERS WITH ARTISTIC LICENSE:

CHARLIE WARNER

By Joshua Cartee



Community.

Not a word often associated with lawyers. But, to me, it is the word that best encapsulates the spirit of Charles C. "Charlie" Warner.

You name it, and Charlie has done it. Over the years he has lived an incredibly productive, fascinating, and, from the outside looking in, fulfilling life. He has served on several cultural and artistic boards in Columbus. He has practiced law for more than 55 years at one of the region's most respected law firms. He has traveled the world with his wife. He has served in leadership positions in virtually every organization he has been a part of — from the Columbus Bar Association to the American Bar Association, from Opera Columbus to the Worthington Chamber Orchestra, and beyond. All the while, he has found the time to sing and to play clarinet.

But the unifying theme in Charlie's life?

Community.

Said differently: *The connection we feel toward one another, and the ways in which we live and express that connection.*

I have known Charlie for 13 years. He was assigned as my mentor when I matriculated into The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law in the summer of 2013. (We both have bass-baritone voices, which is why I think the law school put us together.) Monthly lunches quickly turned into an abiding friendship. I have visited the Warner family cottage in central Maine and gone sailing on the picturesque harbor waters nearby, and I have attended dinners and a musical soirée at the Warners' colonial-style home in Worthington, where they have lived for as long as Charlie has practiced law.

Long before our musical soirée, though, Charlie discovered his own passion for music at an early age. Born to a professor father and a classically-trained pianist mother, music was a central feature of Charlie's upbringing. His father taught history at Kenyon College in Gambier, where Charlie grew up. His mother studied piano performance at Vassar College and then at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Her piano playing on a mahogany-finished concert Steinway often filled the home. His parents' madrigal singing in the evening first introduced Charlie to music in a communal setting.

Charlie began playing clarinet at age 11. He continued taking lessons throughout high school at the Western Reserve Academy in Hudson, where he also sang in the school's barbershop octet. His clarinet teacher was primarily a violinist, which, Charlie says, smiling, "did not help my embouchure."

But that didn't stop Charlie. He continued playing and singing, attended music camp in upstate

New York, followed by summer school at Yale, and learned some of the challenging pieces in the classical clarinet repertoire. By the end of his high school career, Charlie was first chair clarinetist in his school orchestra and was the featured soloist in the *Clarinet Concerto in A Major*, K.622, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

No easy feat.

After high school, Charlie attended Yale University because of his experience during high school at Yale's summer school as well as Yale's history of music education and excellent French department. In college, Charlie continued his clarinet studies, including with longtime professor of clarinet, Keith Wilson. Charlie was part of the Alley Cats singing group, which went on tour in Florida. He was also selected President of the Yale Concert Band, which went on tour in Europe with the Rutgers Glee Club, including performing on German public radio. He graduated with a B.A. in French Literature in 1964.

After graduation, Charlie spent 2.5 years in the Peace Corps teaching at a secondary school in Nigeria with his wife, Betsy, a Harvard graduate whom he met during college. (He did not bring his clarinet.) Charlie and Betsy were evacuated before the conclusion of their deployment due to conflict in southeastern Nigeria and calls for independence that led to a devastating civil war from 1967 to 1970, known as the Biafran War, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives through violence and starvation.

Is music there to remind us of the beauty of the world, when the world forgets?

I didn't ask Charlie this question, but it is one that occurs to me now.

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The musical soirée at the Warners' Worthington home was in March.

After dinner, we retired to the parlor, where three of us took turns on the Steinway grand piano previously owned by Charlie's mother. The entertainment started with Rosemary Pomeroy, followed by her daughter, Sarah Pomeroy (both lawyers, both pianists, both previous features of this column). Rosemary played a lovely rendition of a piece by Grieg, and Sarah played her signature arrangement of *Take Five* by Dave Brubeck — a work I have been enjoying listening to her play since our time together as students at Moritz.

As I sat in the parlor listening to the Pomeroys, I was struck by the connection between the words "community" and "communion." The intertwining of the words, I think, can be appreciated even by the secular reader. Both are derived from *commune*, from the original Latin root of *communis*, meaning "held in common" or "sharing burdens or services together." Both evoke a gathering, of people or spirit, toward something greater than the individual. Both emphasize connection: *communion*, with the divine; *community*, with each other.

Is there really a difference?

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Charlie has kept his connection to music and community alive throughout his legal career. After graduating from The Ohio State University College of Law in 1970, Charlie began his career at Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP in Columbus. He has been there ever since, first as an Associate, then Partner, and then as Counsel to the Firm. He was one of the firm's first attorneys to develop a consistent labor and employment practice, following the development of law from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other landmark pieces of employment legislation. He chaired the firm's Labor and Employment Department for several years, developed programs for the Ohio State Bar Association, and served in

leadership positions in the Labor and Employment field for the American Bar Association.

Charlie has also dedicated decades of his career to the local bar, serving on the Board of Governors for the Columbus Bar Association, including a term as President from 1991 to 1992, and on the Board of Trustees for the Columbus Bar Foundation, where he also served as President. He was the founder and president of the Ohio Management Lawyers Association, which served as a counterpart to the plaintiffs' labor and employment bar, and he served as president of a statewide consortium of the largest bar associations in Ohio during his service as Columbus Bar Association President.

While running a busy labor and employment law practice and maintaining his service to the bar associations, Charlie still ensured that his schedule was open enough for his artistic interests. He has been a longtime member of the Worthington Civic Band, where he has played clarinet for more than 30 years. He continues to volunteer his time on the boards of Opera Columbus (president twice and current member of the executive committee), Chamber Music Columbus (serving as president for five years), the Worthington Chamber Orchestra, as well as the Worthington Historical Society, serving as board member since 1982. Not to mention his service in various other civic organizations, such as the Crichton Club, which invites dignitaries and speakers to present lectures at the Columbus Museum of Art; the Alliance for Quality Education, which advocated for quality K-12 education in Worthington from 1987 to 1992, and where Charlie served as inaugural president and co-founder; the Yale Club of Central Ohio, where he served as president for many years; and Conestoga, a volunteer corps developed to support the Ohio History Connection.

His number of community commitments and level of

engagement might exhaust anyone else (author included). Asked how he balances it all, Charlie says: "Compartmentalize and persevere."

Amidst all his civic and professional obligations, one communal activity stood out to me as exemplifying all the rest: Charlie's longtime direction of the Orange Johnson Singers.

Charlie, along with several friends and acquaintances, founded the Orange Johnson Singers in Worthington in the early 1980s. The Singers were named after the Orange Johnson House, home to the Worthington Historical Society, and were composed of a mixture of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses. Charlie sang bass. The Singers performed annually at the Worthington Historical Society during the winter holidays, often in period costume, singing Christmas carols and other seasonal tunes. They also performed at the Kelton House and in the Short North, raised money for the restoration of an historical fortepiano at the Orange Johnson House, and were a staple of the community for 40 years.

In 2014, WOSU featured the Orange Johnson Singers in its *Columbus Neighborhood* series spotlight on Worthington. Toward the end of the episode, the group serenaded the viewer with an excerpt from "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," singing: *With peace on earth, good will to men.*

To remind us of the beauty of the world.

Charlie recounts that the membership of the Orange Johnson Singers was remarkably stable, at 10 members, for almost the entirety of the group's 40-year existence. Members included Columbus Symphony Chorus members, OSU professors, music teachers, and others — like Charlie — who were professionals that shared a love for music and singing. As members grew older and other obligations took precedence, the Orange Johnson Singers eventually came to an

end and disbanded. Charlie remembers the group fondly, and the only note I hear in his voice is one of acceptance, a tacit acknowledgment that all things must, eventually, come to an end.

I wonder if that is why music — to many — borders on the magical. It allows for expression beyond what words alone can convey. It has the power to transport: to a time, to a place, to a feeling — sometimes, perhaps, to another realm. It elevates the good and soothes the bad. And, if you're fortunate, you can find other musicians who share your passion to make music together. To be reminded of what is beautiful.

The words of an American folksong-turned-hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing?" capture, for me, the essence of music's power and promise:

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I catch the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul —
How can I keep from singing?

How, indeed.

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Community. *Communion*.

Through our connection to one another, perhaps, a connection to something larger than ourselves.

For Charlie Warner, the bridge between the two has often been music. From singing to clarinet playing to musical soirées, from Opera Columbus to Chamber Music Columbus to the Worthington Chamber Orchestra and Worthington Civic Band, music has been a constant for nearly as long as he can remember. What began with his mother's piano playing and his parents' madrigal singing led Charlie to a lifetime of his own musical journeys. Almost like an invisible, conducting hand, music helped to mark the wayposts of his life.

Musicians will understand. After all, the root of "music" comes from the Greek word: *muse*.

Guiding spirit.



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Charlie and the Orange Johnson Singers



Charlie with his dog, Sophie, on the water in 2007



Charlie and the Orange Johnson Singers



Betsy Warner listening to Sarah Pomeroy play piano at a musical soiree at the Warner residence, March 2026



Charlie and the Orange Johnson Singers