



Letter of recommendation for Frank Toppa

I have had the pleasure of knowing Frank Toppa for 20 years and of working closely with him for the last eight.

I met him in 1998 when I became active in the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS), a volunteer organization dedicated to the dialogue between religion and science. IRAS meets annually for a week long conference, which has usually been held at Star Island, New Hampshire, 10 miles off the coast of Portsmouth. Frank and his wife, Rev. Dr. Barbara Whittaker-Johns, a UU minister, had been active in IRAS for some time, and in the first conference I attended I found that Frank had also established himself as a fixture at the conferences, playing for chapel services and choir rehearsals and generally making himself useful to any musical endeavor which should arise among the conferees. He was a great favorite among the choirs over the conferences. Once in a while he would even join in the hootenanny that I led during happy hour.

I also knew him in Boston as a church musician at the Baptist Church in Arlington while I was serving First Church in Belmont. Our choir director Alfa Radford would often call on Frank to play bass for small ensembles in the musical works she engineered.

I was called to the UU Meeting House in Chatham in the spring of 2008, and shortly after I arrived the position of music director became vacant. Frank and Barbara lived only a couple of miles from the church and I naturally advised him the position was open. I was very pleased when he accepted. He has served as Music Director here for eight years, and we hope he will continue to serve in the future.

We have evolved a working relationship that certainly works well for me and I think, for him as well. I give him the theme of the service sometimes as late as a week in advance, and he always comes up with pieces that are spot on, adding a lot of depth to my liturgical treatment.

We are a small congregation with a small choir, and Frank's schedule has made mid-week rehearsals impossible, but within the limitations he is working under, he does a remarkable job with the choir. He often re-writes SATB (Soprano, alto, tenor, bass) music to SAB, because tenors are so hard to come by.

He is a consummate and passionate organist, and his tastes on that instrument run to the classical. However, Frank took on himself a lifetime project to learn all the instruments of the orchestra, and he finished just a couple of years ago on the bassoon! He is apt to show up Sunday morning with a shofar, an accordion, a mandolin or ocarina. Lately he has taken to playing piano ragtime as "exit music" after the formal postlude has ended the service.

He has a lovely singing voice, always on pitch, and when the occasion calls for a vocal solo, he is not shy about giving one. At the same time, he doesn't hog the limelight, and if there are other singers he invites them to perform as well.

He loves to teach and play music with children, and he has a natural aptitude for it. He knows what music the kids listen to, and he has been able to adapt it to church purposes. A couple of years ago, he started on his own a project of teaching the children in the Sunday school songs and instrumental music. He works on it for 30-45 minutes while the grownups are at social hour. He has formed the kids into a credible bell choir on occasion.

In all this, Frank is meticulous in his preparation. He is spontaneous when he needs to be, but he knows that good musical performance comes through preparation, and he brings in materials on which he has spent time adapting for the needs and skill level of the people with whom he's working. He pops in to the sanctuary Saturday sometimes for hours at a time to make sure that he has his parts down pat. Everybody makes mistakes, but Frank makes very few obvious mistakes as a musician. He cares.

He is an organ junkie – he has crawled around the inside of many a pipe organ, and even has reconstructed one in a barn on his property. Though we never had a pipe organ, Frank was very helpful to us when our old organ died. Some UU congregations, seeking to be less “churchy” in their musical appeal, might have put organ replacement on the back burner, but because Frank is so proficient an organist, and his love of Bach is palpable, he served as the rallying point for fundraising to procure a state-of-the art electronic organ, of which we are very proud.

Have I said he is a delightful person, much beloved of the choir and all who appreciate the music program at this small church? I wholeheartedly recommend Frank Toppa for any position having to do with choral direction, music direction, teaching voice, instrument, theory, playing organ, piano or other instruments. He is a consummate musician.

Sincerely Yours,



Rev. Edmund Robinson