

The Legacy of Frank Jr. Continues in Fredericksburg by Phil Houseal



Frank Valentine Van der Stucken.

Frank, Jr.

Though you have passed by his birthplace many times, here's a story you probably don't know about a Fredericksburg resident.

When Frank was born in 1858 in the small Texas town not far from the western frontier, his family could not have imagined the path he would follow.

Frank's father trod a similar uncharted path when he arrived in Texas from Antwerp, Belgium, only six years earlier. Like many who feel the mystic pull of the Lone Star, Frank and his brother decided to move to the picturesque little town of Fredericksburg. Once in the Hill Country, they quickly started a business and found young brides.

Four years later, Frank's son arrived, the first of five children. Names being scarce in the old west, he named him Frank.

With the onset of the Civil War, Frank Sr. left his growing family to serve as a captain in the First Texas Cavalry. Returning to Fredericksburg, Frank was elected chief justice of Gillespie County.

For some undocumented reason, Frank Sr. decided to return with his family to his native Belgium. While there, their 8-year-old boy began studying violin. It became obvious that Frank Jr. was a musical prodigy. His family paired him with a leading violin instructor, along with starting him on studies of music theory and composition. Frank began fulfilling his destiny, completing two major works by age 16. Soon he attracted attention from other leading European composers, and struck up friendships with contemporaries Edvard Grieg, Giuseppe Verdi, and Franz Liszt.

While building his reputation and resume across Europe, Frank never forgot his American roots. At age 26, at the urging of mentor Max Bruch, Frank returned to America, where he directed a prestigious New York male chorus.

He quickly became a sought-after conductor, teacher, and composer. With his unique upbringing, Frank found himself serving the dissonant roles of promoting American composers, while introducing Flemish music to American audiences.

His reputation grew to the extent he was noticed in the White House. Nellie, wife of President Taft, was forming the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and decided she would recruit this new young superstar to lead it. Frank demurred, not impressed with the location or the salary. Nellie pressed the issue, exerted her charm (and also raised his salary and added the position of Dean of the Cincinnati College of Music), and Frank gave in.

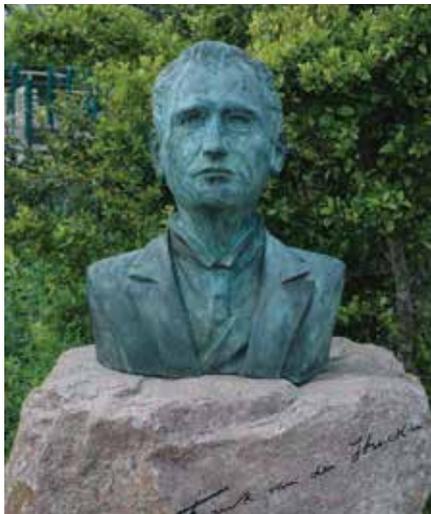
He spent the next part of his career moving between Cincinnati, New York, and Eu-

rope, scoring such notable feats as bringing Richard Strauss to guest conduct original pieces, and introducing the works of Mahler to American audiences.

For the rest of his life, Frank continued to create piano music, choir works, songs, and orchestral arrangements. His most famous piece is Pax Triumphans.

Frank Valentine Van der Stucken died in 1929, and is buried in Germany.

But his legacy continues in Fredericksburg.



He was known as Frank, Jr., in Fredericksburg, but grew up to be international composer Frank Valentine Van der Stucken.

In 1991 the Friends of Van der Stucken, led by Kenn Knopp, started an annual festival that bears his name, to keep alive the story and music of Fredericksburg's native composer.

The next Van der Stucken Festival will be held Saturday, March 21, 2015 7:30 p.m., at the Hill Country Evangelical Free Church, 107 E. Lower Crabapple Rd., Fredericksburg, TX. Hosted by the Fredericksburg Community Orchestras, the program features another Fredericksburg native, Soprano Brynn Bowyer, Van der Stucken scholar Dr. Larry Wolz, the Arion Maennerchor and Mixed Choir performing under the direction of Mark Hierholzer, another Fredericksburg composer, and the Van der Stucken compo



Soprano Brynn Bowyer will be one of the performers honoring Fredericksburg composer Frank van der Stucken this March.

Photo by Phil Houseal

sition contest winner. Admission is free and there will be cake.

If you can't make it, at least remember to hum Ein Kleiner Walzer the next time you drive by Van der Stucken's birthplace among the bakeries and bookstores in the 100 block of East Main.

Details: Fredericksburg Community Orchestras (FCO) and Friends of Van der Stucken will present the Van der Stucken Festival on Saturday, March 21, 2015 7:30 p.m., at the Hill Country Evangelical Free Church, 107 E. Lower Crabapple Rd., Fredericksburg, TX. The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served following the performances. Information is at www.fredericksburgorchestra.com.

Phil is a musician, writer, and educator, and owner of Full House Productions, a public relations firm that tells the story of your business or organization. Call 830-456-6849.

