

From Sesame Street to Carnegie Hall with Judith Clurman

Interview with Judith Clurman Part Three



By [Katrina Schmidt](#)



[Singing Expert](#)

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The following is part of a four-part interview with [Judith Clurman](#), an Emmy-nominated and Grammy-nominated conductor and choral master. She is both an advocate for new music and great works of the past. In the words of contemporary composer Jennifer Higdon, “Working with Judith Clurman is always a delight. She's so professional and such a superb musician, that I always know the

end result will be incredible...a great thing for a composer to know.” She has collaborated and worked with numerous renowned organizations from Lincoln Center’s Great Performers series and the New York Pops to Sesame Street. Her past accomplishments are extensive and will be discussed in length, but what is even more important is her relevance in today’s choral world.

In this part of the written interview, Clurman answers questions about her experiences in New York, including audition secrets and more. Be sure to check out parts [one](#), [two](#), and [four](#) of the interview.

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Q: You spent fifteen years conducting The New York Concert Singers. What are some of your most memorable experiences with them?

A: I loved my debut concert, recording, and conducting the concerts. One musical moment stands out. I prepared this professional chorus for Sir Charles Mackerras for performances of Berlioz's *L'Enfance Du Christ*, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall. This was a true collaboration with one of the world's finest musicians. Sir Charles and I found time to talk about what made the Berlioz special and to discuss the dramatic elements of the pieces, the sitting and standing cues for the chorus, and Berlioz's compositional technique. He was one of the finest musicians with whom I ever worked. He taught me a lot. He actually found time to sit

I love Sesame Street, not only because of good memories from my childhood, but because of its high quality and mission, “to use the educational power of media to help children everywhere reach their highest potential and excellence.” Can you tell us about your experience working on Sesame Street?

I served as interim Associate Music Director for Season 39. I used every musical skill that I own for that job. I arranged and recorded scores, coached the performers, and worked on the TV set with both the Muppets and human cast members. Highlights included collaborating with the guest artists Feist, Paul Rudd, Neil Patrick Harris, and LL Cool J. (Would you believe that the [Feist recording](#) has over fifty million hits on YouTube!) You are right on about the educational value of this show. Every song I recorded had both a musical and an educational message, whether it be about counting, wearing different types of shoes, and/or saving the earth.

Q: Currently you conduct Essential Voices USA, which is in residence with the New York Pops at Carnegie Hall. Can you share with us more about your experience with them and the CD recording, “Celebrating the American Spirit?”

This chorus is unique because I cast the music. By that I mean that the music has to fit the chorus and the chorus has to fit the music. Every piece does not work with the same number of singers. And it is not the number. It is the quality of singers. For recordings, I assemble a group of about 14–20 professional singers, sprinkled with volunteers; I organize a large group of 50–75 volunteers for the New York Pops performances at Carnegie Hall; I have about 10–36 singers at workshops and “The Composer Speaks” classical chamber performances. In addition, we have also presented operatic performances and workshops with a small group of fine soloists.

“Celebrating the American Spirit” and my new CD, “[Cherished Moments: Songs of the Jewish Spirit](#),” are on the Sono Luminus label. Each is a composite of all the different styles of music that I enjoy working on and music that I love. They feature the chorus and some terrific soloists, including Kelli O’Hara, Ron Raines, Bruce Ruben, and Michael Slattery.

Q: What should singers know before auditioning to become a member of Essential Voices USA?

EVUSA is a unique choral model. It is comprised of seasoned choral professionals that audition through a contractor. Those singers record, sing as soloists, or sing in special projects in which I am involved. They are paid. They sight-read perfectly. The singers in the large volunteer group that performs at Carnegie Hall audition for me. They, too, should have had choral experience

prior to auditioning for EVUSA. I mix and match the singers depending on the music being performed or recorded.

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