Eulogy for George Devine

George DeVine was a wonderful teacher and an even better friend.

The qualities that made him such a wonderful teacher, though, are somewhat elusive. He was not a riveting lecturer: on occasion, in his afternoon Music History survey class, it being about an hour after lunch, and partly because George lectured with his eyes closed, you might see the odd student here or there nodding off. He was not an intimidating or demanding teacher, the kind who openly challenges his students, forcing them to achieve things they didn't know they could achieve. He didn't dazzle his classes with his brilliant insights culled from his latest research soon to be published in Music Quarterly. George's classes were not the George DeVine show. He was much too self-effacing for that.

What he was, was this incredible resource, this bottomless repository of information that his students could draw from. George was like a library. He was a teacher who seemed to know everything about his subject, whether his subject was Gregorian chant or Bartok's orchestral works. Like a library, he was also a teacher of extraordinary depth: his intimate familiarity with the melodies, structures, orchestrations, and origins of what seemed to me to be the entire body of Western music was breathtaking. I still count as one of the most exciting moments of my music education the class when George, who was explaining the development of counterpoint in the Classical Period, took apart and, in painstaking detail, analyzed the melodies and motifs in Mozart's 41st Symphony, then showed us, with colored overhead transparencies, how Mozart put them all back together in the fourth movement.

For the most part, George's qualities as a teacher were qualities that you learned to appreciate gradually over time. He had a subtle, sly sense of humor that maybe 10% of his students caught onto, and it took those 10% a quarter-and-a-half to recognize it, because you had to know something about the period he was teaching before you could appreciate his wry skewering of particular composers and works. (Along these lines, I'll never forget the P.D.Q. Bach concert that I attended with other students from George's class. We knew that George was there—and where he was sitting—because he was the only one in the audience laughing uproariously at about a third of the jokes because he was the only one in the audience who got about a third of the jokes. And George had a cackle that was unmistakeable, even across the Civic Auditorium.)

George not only tolerated dissent in his classes, he encouraged it. During our study of motet in the first quarter of the survey course, either Grout or Lang referred to the medieval penchant for using texts in different languages for the various voices. One of them described this practice as demonstrating "a kind of polyphony of ideas that mirrored the polyphony of voices" in the music. I remember telling George that this sounded to me like the fanciful drivel of an academic who was out of touch with what it was like to actually perform and listen to music. George suggested that we each stand on opposite sides of the classroom, read aloud the discussions of motet in Grout and Lang, and see what the class absorbed from this "polyphony of ideas." The cacophony that followed, as you might imagine, made the point.

George's willingness to consider new perspectives was a key part of his personality, a key part of his teaching, and crucial to what he tried to instill in his students, many of whom he knew, one day would be teachers themselves. When he taught a cross-

disciplinary course in music and literature, he actively recruited my wife, Susan, and a few other music majors to enroll, because of his conviction that they needed to be exposed to the ways in which their future students (and audiences) experienced music. It was, as they say, an education. Where else could those music majors have been enlightened by the Nursing student who, when asked to describe the opening to Smetena's The Moldau, said it reminded her of urine spinning in a centrifuge?

Just because George was open to different perspectives doesn't mean he didn't have his own standards and opinions, sometimes strong opinions. A decade or so ago, the omnipresence of Pachelbel's Canon gave rise to some choice criticism from George about pedestrian musical ideas and undeserved canonization. (About this he was, of course, correct.) As everyone knows, he never missed an opportunity to insult saxophones and saxophonists. (About this he was, of course, incorrect). And he finally convinced me that Toscanini had completely butchered the Trio in the 3rd movement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony, barrelling through the tempo markings like a runaway train. George differed from many teachers, though, in that first, you never felt that he was forcing his views down the class's throat, and second, George always seemed to arrive at his views thoughtfully, and expressed them carefully and precisely.

The combination of George's tolerance for multiple points of view, along with his firm convictions, gave him a credibility that few teachers ever attain, and this is one reason he had a huge influence over many of his students. When Susan showed him the program for her upcoming piano recital of a late-ish Beethoven sonata and a few nineteenth century pieces, George acerbically remarked that it looked like a fine program of music-- from a 30-year-period. Susan hasn't done a recital with less than a 150-year spread since. And

then there are the standing ovations. As most of you probably know, George deplored the deplorable (Knoxville) practice of giving—almost reflexively—standing ovations to every single out-of-town performer, regardless of how well they play. As George always said: "what is the audience going to do when someone really surpasses himself—set themselves on fire?" As a result, I can count on one hand the number of standing ovations I've given since being in George's class. The parents and teachers at our kids' schools probably think that Susan and I are horrible parents, because we're the only parents sitting down (although we clap vigorously) when our kids perform at school concerts.

But the best explanation for George's wonderful reputation as a teacher came from the fact that he listened to his students. Really listened. He dealt fully with every question, he encouraged dissenting points of view, and he never stopped learning from those he taught. The clearest examples of this were the oral exams that he conducted at the end of every quarter in the survey course. How many college teachers take the time to meet with undergraduates—and underclassmen at that—individually for 30 or 45 minutes or more in addition to administering a written exam? And I always got the sense that George was doing this as much to get to know each student and hear what each one had to say, as to test their mastery of specific facts. Having a teacher pay that kind of attention to you was pretty heady stuff. Remember, we were just coming out of our teenage years. George was one of the first grown-ups who thought that what we had to say was worth listening to.

George's skill as a listener, and his openness to new perpectives, was also a significant factor in the friendships he developed. He was, as I've said, a life-long student,

eager to learn from his students in a way that few teachers are. As a result, I was able to introduce him to the Beatles, who he loved, especially the White Album and Abbey Road. He read The Chosen, and soon developed a liking for other Chaim Potok novels. This led to the Holocaust writings of Elie Wiesel. Next came his reaquaintance with Leo Rosten, who he had loved as a kid, as he now read The Joys of Yiddish. For years afterwards, he would regale us at dinner with some of Rosten's best stories. His willingness to be taught by his students accounts for the total absence of any generation gap, and we thought nothing of taking George to movies, to concerts, and even to Ollie's Trolley, where we taught him to play Space Invaders.

Some of my favorite memories of George are of just such incongruous, but somehow fitting, images: This dignified little elderly man hunched over a table madly trying to work the controls of a video game. Or George sitting in a History of Opera class wearing the flowery Dido and Aeneas t-shirt which a former student had hand-painted for him. I was part of another incongruous—but also fitting—scene the morning before George died. Keith McClelland came over to Shannondale with his bassoon, and at George's bedside, played through numerous bassoon solos from the orchestral repertoire, including Peter and the Wolf, Le Sacre, and Bolero. With a roomful of friends surrounding him, I can't imagine a more appropriate send-off for George, who, in his semi-conscious state, must have thought he had arrived in heaven ahead of schedule.

This is George's day, but George would have wanted me to mention one very special person. All of us who loved George owe a debt of gratitude to Brenda Kilby, who has cared for George for the last five years. And I do mean cared for. Because he had no family, George's colleagues, former students, and friends have had to step in and help

when help was needed. Brenda has filled all those gaps when even the scores of friends were insufficient. Brenda has provided George companionship, medical care, cigars, and love. George told me many times that she made his life worth living these last few years. One measure of a man is the devotion that he inspires in others. In Brenda, George measures out as a giant.

George DeVine was a gentle man, a person of great intellectual curiosity, with a wonderful sense of humor who appreciated people from widely diverse backgrounds. Through his teaching, and through the example he set in his life, he touched thousands of students and taught them the importance of these qualities. That's a pretty good legacy. We should all do so well.

Ken Brown

August 16, 1999