

It is a great honor for me to have been invited to speak today, and Rachel, I thank you for asking me. George had a significant impact on my development as a composer and teacher, and profoundly influenced my approach to listening to, thinking about and, especially, writing about music. While the sheer force of his intellect and vast knowledge of music and literature could be intimidating, and his wit at times biting, George also was one of the most fair-minded people I have ever encountered, and, in my experience, eminently capable of great kindness and generosity.

George was a superb composer, producing music that seamlessly reconciles modernist rigor, contrapuntal mastery and an essentially late Romantic sensibility. The pieces we are hearing today—*Suave Mari Magno*, with its dark, brooding lyricism, and *The Isle is Full of Noises*, with its lightness, liveness and lucidity, testify to the range of his expressive capabilities and the exquisiteness of his craft. I am privileged to have been present at the premieres of these and numerous other works of George's over the years.

Thirty years ago this past August, I arrived in New York City to embark on my doctoral studies in composition at Columbia. Notwithstanding the advanced degree to which I was aspiring, I was in some respects as green as any incoming Freshman might be. Hailing from a small Southern town, I found the city by turns exhilarating and daunting, no less so the sophistication and impressive accomplishments of my fellow students. My academic background, though respectable enough, could not—at least in my mind—match the cachet of that of many of my peers. I felt all right about my composing, but as a masters student I'd had only two very general analysis courses, touching on but a few essential tenets of the

Gospels According to Schenker and Forte. Suffice it to say that I believed there were serious lacunæ in my education up to that point, and, as a result, my tendency, in order to avoid being exposed as a complete fraud any earlier than absolutely necessary, was to hang back a bit in George's "Twentieth Century Styles and Techniques" class. And by hang back, I mean: barely say anything.

In my notes for the wonderful Albany CD of George's music, I wrote of the impressive and rather lengthy silences, legendary to many of us who sat in that classroom, as George would calmly await a response to whatever question he had just posed about whichever passage was under consideration at the moment. He was fully prepared to sit quietly, often with pipe in hand, for a good fifteen minutes—a period of time that often seemed to take on geological proportions, until it became obvious that no one had an answer. Finally he would walk over to the blackboard and dazzle us with an elegant exposition of his take on the music. On at least one such occasion, the nervous tension in the room became so palpable as to result in a remarkable moment of near rhythmic unison, in which, as if on cue, several in the seminar room, including George, hastily took out and began lighting their cigarettes.

Sensing my lack of confidence, George gently tried, with partial success, to draw me out, and patiently attempted to convince me that my ideas might be worth contributing to the class discussion after all. He encouraged me in my fledgling attempts at writing about musical subjects, from papers on works by Schoenberg and Berg to the essay portion of my dissertation, which, as my second reader, he helped me to shape. All of this stood me in good stead as I wrote my own program notes and, later, liner notes for several recordings. He taught

me the value of writing about music in plain English, or at least in the plainest English possible, often an elusive goal in our field. It is a goal I still hope to achieve someday, and whatever small success in it that I do manage I owe to George, who in his own prose invariably made it all seem effortless. In his brilliant series of essays, for example, he has an uncanny way of leaving you in no doubt whatsoever about his erudition, and yet the writing never comes across as pretentious—mostly, I think, because he had no need of pretense.

George taught me to question anything that smacked of conventional wisdom. More than once I heard him say to me or to other students, “Well, that’s what you’re supposed to think.” I am extremely grateful and humbled as well to be able to say that he spoke approvingly and encouragingly about some of my music. I also dare to hope that I learned from George to have empathy for that student who is inclined to “hang back,” whatever the reason.

Once, on a paper I had written for the “Twentieth Century Styles” course, George wrote, “There is of course much more to be said, but this is a good start.” The best I can hope is that I at least have made a good start today towards expressing my gratitude for all that George gave me. I shall always be glad that our paths crossed.