

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF ROBERT F. JUDD

A tribute from Suzanne Cusick



Good evening. On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Committee on the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, I welcome you to this remembrance and celebration of the great gift it was to this Society to have had Bob Judd in our midst, and as our Executive Director for twenty-three years.

Sometime in the evening after I learned that Bob had died, I wrote to Cristle “to have known him even a little . . . was to love him.” For me, that love remains the starting point of how I remember him, even as it remains a silencing point insofar as the fact of loving a person one knows only a little opens one’s heart to the mysterious multiplicity of love.

I first knew Bob a little bit when I served on the AMS board, about 12 years ago. I knew him as a man who saw at once that I was shy, ill at ease in precincts of power I had never imagined visiting, and who zoomed right in to make me feel at home, with a few kind words, or a catching of my eye across the meeting table, or the choice to walk with me as the board went to dinner. Years later, after I’d been elected president, we met for coffee a few blocks from the AMS office; I knew that I would need him to teach me how to be president, so I spent some time listing for him what I thought my weaknesses for the job would be, in effect pleading for his help. Bob listened for a while, and then said in that quiet, grounded, calm way of his “you’ll be OK.” I remained anxious of course, but I was also consoled, encouraged, empowered to do my best by those few words. “To have known him even a little”—in the little gestures of encouraging and empowering kindness that were the fabric of Bob’s way of being with people—“was to love him” because it was to receive a particular kind of love that Bob’s presence offered everyone who knew him.

The capacity for that kind of love was, I think, the secret sauce of Bob’s executive directorship. What do people mean when they say (as they do, with complete accuracy) that Bob “loved the AMS?” As far as I could ever tell, Bob didn’t so much love the *idea* of the AMS that he encouraged and empowered as he loved the people who made up the AMS. He wanted to make our lives as scholars better, easier, richer, more fun, and almost every initiative he proposed himself or realized from the idea of someone else was aimed at doing just that. It made him happy to make the people who constitute the AMS happy—all of us, not just those accustomed to power.

Bob and I used to talk frankly about the elitism still embedded in some of the AMS’ ways of doing things, and he was always looking for ways to change our institutional behavior to eliminate it—particularly by devising ways to bring the annual meeting’s program to more of us; to give more voice, more responsibility and therefore more respect to every chapter and to empower the Council so that it could participate more fully in both the intellectual and the administrative leadership of the Society. Yet Bob was not in the least naive about other people: I treasure the moment he looked up at me, after a moment of reflection about some administrative thing, and said quietly “Not everyone is altruistic. We can’t forget the people who aren’t.” Bob’s love for the people of the AMS included everyone, and that’s why so many, very different kinds of people have recognized the truth in the notion that he was the AMS’ “heart and soul.” It’s why we still



miss him, why we will always miss him: more than anything else about him (and he had many other admirable qualities!) that capacity to be in a community—to lead a community—through loving all its people is the thing about him we need most to carry forward in his honor.

Bob was funny; had a great smile and a delight in weirdness or novelty that Steve Swayne has called “impish.” He was amazingly smart about an amazing range of things, and not only kept the AMS from going into a ditch more than once but kept it growing. In the generation of his leadership he was responsible for building an infrastructure that supports the work of many, many, many more scholars and types of scholarship than anyone dreamt possible in the late ’90s. He created the AMS as we know it (the only one most of us in this room have ever known), and that’s another reason he is well remembered as the AMS’ “heart and soul” . . . and brain.

Bob and I used to joke about the irony that the AMS we now led was a DIY organization, returned by fate to an office near the East Village origins of punk and DIY culture. More seriously, we might think of the AMS Bob built as hand made, with love, ingenuity and great intelligence—and therefore something unique and precious that will always, like a Stradivarius, bear the mark of its maker’s imagination and his hands. As with a Strad, it’ll only ever be as good as its players, the people whose imaginations and hands care for it, and tune its spaces, curves, holes and niches into music.

Bob’s was a brain that embraced technologies of all sorts—from the technology of pickling to the technology of digital communication to the technology of those motorized scooters some of us saw operating for the first time in San Antonio. The night the board went to dinner together, it was Bob who hopped on a scooter. Now ahead of the group of walkers, now zig-zagging right between the groups of 2 or 3 that we were, now behind us, grinning ear to ear above the snaking lines his scooter’s green light drew in the night, Bob led us to the restaurant that was our destination by gleefully using a new technology to be everywhere at once, guiding us and making the journey fun for everyone. It was a perfect performance of the way he led the AMS.

But when I think of Bob, the thing I remember most is our first lunch in a sandwich shop in Brunswick, Maine one August afternoon, back when the AMS office was there. It was the first time we’d ever talked about something other than the AMS. We talked about our love for early modern Italian keyboard music, about our common history as church musicians (and how that work taught a certain kind of leadership), about how much fun it was to be married to powerful women, to watch them be great at what they did in environments that were wholly theirs. But the most striking thing to me was the way Bob lit up and brimmed with pride and love when he talked about his daughters. I don’t think I’ve ever met a man, before or since, who was so open and unabashed about loving his kids. That was actually the moment when I thought I began “to know him, even a little,” and to love him for the love he couldn’t help but share . . . with them, and with all of us.

In the name of the love that circulated from and through Bob’s presence among us, and as a token of the love we bore him in return, the Society has prepared a memory book for Cristle, custom bound in a way meant to evoke the kinds of keyboard collections on which Bob worked as a scholar, but filled both with pictures and remembrances of Bob’s AMS life. At the end of the program, we will leave it here on the podium so that those of you who want to can hand write remembrances of your own. Right now, though, I’d like to ask Cristle to come up and receive it as a token of the Society’s love for your beloved Bob, and as equally a token of our gratitude to you and your daughters for sharing this remarkable man with us as generously as you did.

