

June 23, 2015

It was a blow to hear of Gunther Schuller's passing on Sunday. He's been in poor health in recent years, but with an astonishing philosophical patience about his medical problems, Gunther remained positive and working at his lifelong marathon pace and produced a tremendous amount of music at his highest level. To speak with him would only give the slightest indication that all was not physically well with him.

I am very proud that Gunther agreed to be the New England Philharmonic's Composer Laureate. (When I asked him, he said, "Do you really think I would say, 'No?'" ) This resulted in our programming a work by Gunther every season, for the most part works that had not received recent performances and/or had never been performed in Boston.

I am comforted by the fact that Gunther was able to attend our performance of his very early *Meditation* on May 2 and that he found the performance beautiful – very high praise from the consummate, demanding musician he was. Moreover, although he planned to leave our concert after his piece, he decided to stay to the end because he was enjoying it so much. Gunther loved Rachmaninoff and he was very pleased with NEP's performance of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*. Gunther told me that he had conducted the *Symphonic Dances* five times in his life and always had difficulty getting the orchestras to play the syncopations accurately.

The last words Gunther said to me at the end of the evening were, "Vielen, vielen, vielen Dank." (Many, many, many thanks.) Since he and I were both German speakers, our exchanges were often peppered with "Germanisms."

On a personal note, Gunther brought me to Boston from the Eastman School faculty to start a second student orchestra (the Repertory Orchestra) at the New England Conservatory. Two years later he made me the Orchestral Conducting Teacher.

I could write volumes about Gunther's genius and his many brilliant talents and accomplishments. He was great at so many things. His greatest contribution to the world is the enormous number of great works he composed. For me his two most outstanding traits as a human being were his tremendous enthusiasm and love for music (unmatched by anyone in my acquaintance) and the seriousness with which he took not only the musical world but the entire world (human, political and geographical) and the way he worked long hours every day of his life to make things better.

I and all the musicians with whom I've worked have grown as musicians every time he attended a rehearsal of his music with us. He was a great man and left behind a rich legacy to all of us who had the privilege to know him.

Richard Pittman