

IN MEMORIAM: ROBERT LUTT (1929-2011)

Death comes to all, but great achievements build a monument which shall endure until the sun grows cold.
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

What a blessing it is to leave a legacy of the love of music for future generations! While many of us who knew Bob Lutt feel a profound sense of loss at his passing, to be familiar with his accomplishments is to feel at the same time a profound sense of gratitude not just for having known him, but for what he has left us.

Let me first speak of the man. To say he was a master teacher does not begin to tell the story. Bob was one who understood that great teaching comes not merely from technical knowledge, but from the soul. I still marvel at the way he knew the precise proportions of instruction, discipline, and – perhaps most important in his teaching: humor – to obtain the best results with any group of students. “Sit up straight!” he would bark suddenly, and instantly a whole stage full of kids exhibiting classic “boiled shrimp” posture would practically bonk their heads on the ceiling. “Feet on the floor,” he would say, glowering around the room as they quivered just a bit. And then, without changing his facial expression in the least, he would add, “eyes in your head, teeth in your mouth.”

I never saw him work with any group of students that wasn’t eating out of his hand within ten minutes. I’ve never met a former student of Bob’s who didn’t intuitively understand that he had high expectations for you – and that he loved you.

Surveying his accomplishments, it is immediately evident that Bob was a “big thinker.” Born in rural Nebraska, he graduated from Wayne State College in 1950, where he also met Beth Hart, who was to be his wife, companion and partner for the next sixty-two years; already by 1954 Bob had been named Nebraska Band Director of the Year for his work at Oakland High School, and perhaps the story could have ended there. After receiving his Masters degree from the University of Colorado, he moved to California to become the band director at Berkeley High School, and his work there is still remembered with admiration. He ended his teaching career in 1985, having served a number of years as director of the concert band and professor of music education at San Francisco State University. Perhaps the story could have ended there.

But if you know about Bob, you know about Cazadero Music Camp, which he started in 1957, and which had expanded to serve 600 young musicians every summer by the 1960’s – and which had inspired such devotion in so many, that a group of passionately dedicated alumni, led by Bob’s son Bill, banded together to restart the program in 1996. (The camp had always been a family affair for the Lutts, and Beth used to joke that Caz was Bob’s “mistress.”) If you know about Bob, you know about World Projects, the music production company he started, again with his son Bill, after his “retirement.” Perhaps your students have been to the Pacific Basin Music Festival, established by World Projects, or like my son, flown off to another continent with a youth orchestra, under the auspices of World Projects. Or perhaps you remember the opening ceremonies for the 2000 summer Olympic Games in Sydney, produced by World Projects?

We should certainly also recall here that Bob served on the Board of Directors of the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles; was Music Consultant to the 1988 World Exposition in Brisbane, Australia; and has been recognized for his work in numerous ways, including a CMEA Hall of Fame Award for Lifetime Achievement in Music Education and a Bay Area Jefferson Award for public service. The New Zealand Concert Bands Association gives an annual Robert Lutt Trophy for outstanding performance.

Truly, the number of lives touched by Bob Lutt is incalculable. All of us who are involved in music education should be able to take some measure of encouragement and inspiration from his example.

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