

Remembering David Diamond . . .

To many, he was just a name passed over quickly in a music history book. To most, even the learned musician, he was a name that they had heard but knew nothing of his music. However, David Diamond was one of the most gifted and prolific American composers of the 20th century, and, quite possibly, the greatest American symphonist. He was a generous individual who changed my musical life.

My association with David Diamond began where most people's ended. As a composition student of Robert Washburn the summer of 1974, my studies included listening assignments of 20th century American composers. It was that summer that I discovered the music of Peter Mennin and his terrific band work, *Canzona*. Upon listening to other Mennin works, I discovered on the "flip side" of the record album the *Fourth Symphony* of David Diamond. In my mind, it even eclipsed the wonderful music of Mennin. On trying to acquire more recordings of Diamond's music, I found my search to be futile. However, I never forgot the impression his music made on me and would revisit it a decade later.

A perusal of *Who's Who in Music* late in 1985 turned up Mr. Diamond's address in Rochester, NY. I wrote to him, expressing my fondness for his music and my concern that, as he approached his 70th birthday, his music still remained neglected. He wrote back, thanking me for my letter and telling me about the resurgence in his music, including an upcoming concert of chamber music to be performed at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. I traveled to Washington for the concert, my score to the *Fourth Symphony* in tow! As I stood in line for the "first come, first serve" seating, I noticed an art exhibition in one of the hallways connecting these large government buildings. A small man with thick rimless glasses was carefully studying one of the three-dimensional figures. I quickly left the line as my pulse rate escalated. I introduced myself, and he remembered me from my letter. I asked if he would sign my score that now reads:

"for Mr. Stamp whose gracious interest in this work may help keep its spirit alive- David Diamond, 10th May, 1986, Washington, D.C."

Following the performance, I went to congratulate him and he invited me up on to the stage to meet the performers. Thus began a nearly twenty year association with this most generous and gifted musician.

As a doctoral student in conducting at Michigan State University a year later, I had the great fortune to be required to take all six courses of the music history sequence at the graduate level. My final course was in 20th century music and I decided to do my final paper on David Diamond and his music. I wrote him and asked if we could do a recorded phone interview. He agreed and some interesting revelations surfaced during that Sunday morning chat. When I had asked him why he hadn't written a band work, he responded, "No one has ever asked me!" I was stunned by the response. He said that he had known Frederick Fennell since their "student days" at Eastman, and "Freddy" had asked him to write something for the Eastman Wind Ensemble but could never come up with commission funds to make it happen. With the cornerstone of our American repertoire being written in the 1950's by Schuman, Gould, Mennin, Piston, and

Persichetti, I inquired why he hadn't been asked to write a work during that time. He reminded me that he had fled McCarthyism and moved to Italy in the early fifties, and "no one is going to call Italy, to contact an American composer to write a band piece!" (In an *Instrumentalist* article last year, Joan Tower affectionately referred to me as a "composer stalker, a banner which I proudly wear! Up to this point in my career, I had been a "junior stalker", having made contact with Robert Washburn, Fisher Tull, and Vincent Persichetti. I was about to become a full-fledged stalker.)

At this juncture, I asked Mr. Diamond if he would be interested in writing a band work. He said he would! I learned earlier in my career that it is easier to beg forgiveness than asking permission. So, I commissioned him with absolutely no idea of how I was going to pay for it! I was a graduate student on leave from an institution that neither had the financial or musical resources to successfully mount such a project. I was able to form a consortium of eleven schools to fund the project. Many major institutions were a part of the consortium, including The University of Michigan, University of Colorado, Northwestern University, and the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. Mr. Diamond agreed to write the work for seven thousand dollars. The remaining funding would pay for the copyist and the duplication of parts. I remember that we constantly corresponded during the composition process. I have saved every note that he sent me during that time. One dated September 21, 1987 states:

"I work only on Tantivy now. The structure becomes clearer everyday."

Another correspondence gave insight into the work, its title and thematic material:

"I have already sketches for the rousing Tantivy!, Tantivy!, Tantivy! opening. But there is a musical surprise involved at the end. Can't tell."

After realizing that "tantivy" means hunt, and that the thematic material would be based upon the traditional horn call, I became concerned. As a child of the sixties, I could only remember hearing that motif at the end of "The Three Stooges" episodes! I shared my concerns with Alan McMurray from the University of Colorado. Alan calmed my fears by saying, "He's a great composer with skill and craft. What do you think people would have thought if Copland had said 'I am basing *Emblems* on the hymn tune *Amazing Grace*?'"

I can remember the December, 1987 phone call from Mr. Diamond that announced the completion of *Tantivy*. "I'll never write another band work," he stated. "Why?" I responded. "All those damn transpositions. The score is murder. Now I know how Schoenberg felt composing *Guerrelieder*!" Mark Rogers, now of Southern Music, graciously agreed to take on the massive project of copying the parts for this new work. Unfortunately for most of the consortium, the parts, completed in April, were too late for a spring performance. However, CCM was on the quarter system, and their final concert was in June. They agreed to mount the premiere. A note from Mr. Diamond just prior to the premiere is one of my most cherished. It states:

"I look forward to your reactions to Tantivy. And please: keep me informed of very first reading: I want to be there at birth. You will be the Mid-man."

Mr. Diamond was pleased with the premiere and a week later, Eugene Corporon embarked on the first recording of the now renowned Klavier Wind Recording Project, with *Tantivy* as a part of that first recorded repertoire. Following the weekend session we called Mr. Diamond to report the success of the recording sessions. “I’ve felt your energy this weekend,” he stated. “Therefore, I’ve written another work for band.” The resulting work was called *Heart’s Music* and bears the following quote:

Tune thy music to thy heart; Sing thy joy with thanks. – Anonymous

The work is dedicated to Eugene Corporon, in thanks for his premiere of *Tantivy*. It was premiered in the Fall of 1989 by the CCM Wind Symphony.

My relationship with Mr. Diamond continued after the premieres of *Tantivy* and *Heart’s Music*. In 1985, Gerard Schwarz, the Seattle Symphony and Delos Records embarked on a recording project featuring most of Mr. Diamond’s symphonic works. I had the opportunity to fly to Seattle for pre-recording concerts, attend premieres of chamber works in New York and Washington, DC, and attend the Waterloo Festival run by Schwarz in the summers where he featured much of David’s music. This entire time I had not told Mr. Diamond that I, myself, was a composer. I feared a negative reaction after I had done much to build his trust and friendship. When I got up enough nerve to tell him and share some of my compositions with him, I asked if I could have some composition lessons. He agreed, and thus began several lessons, not just in composition, but also in 20th Century American Classical Music. He shared stories of the great composers and conductors that he knew. With anguish, he shared his last meeting with Aaron Copland. He went to have lunch with Copland, who was suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease. While eating, Copland looked up from his lunch at David and said, “I’m supposed to know you, aren’t I?” Diamond reflected, “I could never go back and see him after that. It was too painful.” I have two favorite stories from lessons to share, one is about a piece I was working on with him, and the other is about his music. One of my first assignments was to harmonize a Bach chorale using modal harmony, but no accidentals. As we went through the piece, Diamond made suggestions for change. Always taught to do manuscript in pencil, I went to erase my error and correct it. Diamond stopped me and gave me a blue pencil. “Never erase your changes. You must learn from them.” At one point, while playing through the harmonization, he stopped, looked up from the piano and said, “Boulangier would have liked that!” Oh, where was my tape recorder!! Another time, he had just received “first edits” of the Seattle Symphony’s recording of his ballet *Tom*. He sat me down in front of his stereo and put on a movement from the ballet. The opening majestic fanfare broke into a barn dance reminiscent of the music of Aaron Copland. After listening, David asked, “Who does that sound like to you?” Afraid to say Copland, I said it sounded like “Americana.” David prodded me more and I admitted that it sounded like Copland. A twinkle came in his eye with his smile, and he said, “I wrote this in 1936, two years before *Billy the Kid*. Jack, Aaron didn’t have the market on cowboy music!” He never charged me for a lesson, and always took me out to dinner afterwards. Over my 19-year friendship, I had the opportunity to both share my music with him and record some of his. Each time he would make helpful suggestions. My *Variations on a Bach Chorale* was the result of my study with him.

From the early forties, living in New York, David was fascinated with hippopotami. He said he would visit them regularly at the Central Park Zoo. During our nearly two decades of friendship, I must have given him nearly 25 different hippo statues. Over the past five years, his health and mobility declined and I only had the opportunity to visit him once, though we talked frequently on the phone. My last conversation with him was right before Memorial Day weekend in May of 2005. He had just come back from Seattle and performances of his symphonies. His voice sounded strong and he was quite alert and vibrant. I asked if I could come for a visit this summer. Most recently, he would decline me for health reasons. This time he said, "I don't see why not! Call me a few days before you come." I suggested the last week in July, which he agreed to. I am writing this remembrance the last week in July.

For me David Diamond opened a world of music I had never seen, that was the professional world of music, not the educational or academic. Each visit with him was a lesson in American music history. He was a renaissance man; spoke at least seven languages, was a voracious reader, loved the movies, and made you believe he knew every classical piece of music ever written. And yet his academic credentials would prevent him from being hired at my institution and many like it. He was an "old school" musician who believed musicians had to master their craft and then earn their way through the professional world. And yet, he was one of the kindest, most generous individuals I have ever met.

Though the majority of the readers of this remembrance did not have the good fortune of meeting Mr. Diamond, we do still have his music! Thanks to Gerard Schwarz and the Naxos label, many of his large symphonic works have been re-released. The Potomac String Quartet has embarked on a project of recording all of Mr. Diamond's string quartets. The Citadel label will be releasing a disc of his wind works coupled with 18 of his songs. I would invite all of you to listen to his incredible craft and experience his deeply moving and uplifting music.