

My name is Steve Bruns, and I'm honored to introduce tonight's special memorial concert for Richard Toensing. I worked closely with Dick for nearly twenty years in the department that he led until his retirement from CU in 2005. Like so many, I was stunned last spring to learn about the terrible illness that took him from us so prematurely early last July. Anyone who knew Richard Toensing remembers how deeply in touch he was with the spiritual and sacred throughout his life, and his music expresses his faith in profound ways. As I struggled with the sad news last June, I listened repeatedly to the recording of his sublime *Responsoria*, a work that Toensing described as a "vast, three-movement choral symphony." For me, it is among his most beautiful and moving compositions.

During his doctoral studies at the University of Michigan, Toensing studied with the legendary Ross Lee Finney, who established in 1950 one of the most distinguished composition programs in the country. Finney's former students include Pulitzer-Prize winners Leslie Bassett (who also taught Richard Toensing), Roger Reynolds, and George Crumb, and many other prominent composers. In the past year, I've been rereading Finney's memoirs and his brilliant writings about composing and teaching music. (I wish I had time to share with you extensive quotations; Finney's vividly compelling voice is just as apparent in his prose as in his music.) I've come to see striking parallels with Richard Toensing's leadership of CU Boulder's composition program. Like his own mentor, he was a fearless advocate for the uniquely valuable role that composers and other creative artists play in the modern university. Dick led our department through challenging times, and in his quietly effective way, he laid the foundations for the thriving program that we enjoy here at CU today.

Over the years, Dick Toensing was a wise and generous mentor to many. I learned a great deal from him, not only about music, but also about poetry, the delights and aggravations of University life, and so much else. I continue to reflect on the many conversations we enjoyed over the years, and I'll always remember his deeply informed reactions to music old and new. Many of my favorites were enlivened by his spot-on impression of Ross Lee Finney's incomparable speaking voice! As Dick faced his final weeks and days with characteristic grace and courage, it must have been deeply gratifying for him to hear from the many people whose lives were so profoundly effected by him.

Dick Toensing continued to compose right up to his final days, and it's fitting that tonight's celebration of his life and music culminates in the world premiere of his last completed work, *Serene and Heavenly Bells*, for antiphonal winds. Dick dedicated this composition to Allan McMurray, his lifelong friend and close colleague, who leads

tonight's performance. Other colleagues, friends, and many CU students are here to honor Dick's memory, as well. All of the compositions we will hear were composed especially for the musicians who perform them for us tonight.

It's not easy to summarize the impact of a long association with a respected and valued friend. To conclude, I'd like to read a passage from a short essay by the great American writer and former Poet Laureate, Donald Hall. When I shared these words with Dick in a letter last June, I told him that Hall expresses more eloquently than I ever could the most important lessons I learned from Dick himself:

Here is the closing passage from Donald Hall's advice to young poets:

10. Remember what matters

(Remember that you love *poems*, those old stars burning in the sky forever: "To Earthward," "The Garden of Love," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "The Return," "During Wind and Rain" . . . [here let the reader supply a list]. Remember that you work not for publication, not for NEA grants, not for listing in *Poets and Writers*, not for praise, not for notoriety, not for money, not for Guggenheims, not for Pulitzers, not for Greek Islands, not for *APR*, not for Yaddo, not for tenure. Remember that you work to make a star that will burn—outside you and even for a while after you—high in the sky.

(Remember that love is serious, and death is serious, friendship, justice, and aging are serious; remember that universities and magazines are not serious. Possibly you are serious, insofar as your poems are serious. . . .)¹

Richard Toensing indeed made a serious contribution, in his music and in his life. The stars he created for us all in his music *will* continue to burn brightly in the sky, and so we remain, forever enriched. Thank you.

Delivered March 31, 2015, at the CU College of Music memorial concert honoring the music of Richard Toensing.

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¹ Donald Hall, "Polonius's Advice to Young Poets," reprinted in *Breakfast Served Any Time All Day: Essays on Poetry New and Selected* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 174.