

PAUL TOBIAS OBITUARY AND MEMORIAL SERVICE

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF
PAUL TOBIAS
(MARCH 29, 1946—MAY 6, 2014)



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2014
7:30 PM
MANNES COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Cellist Paul Tobias, truly one of the giants of the instrument, passed away earlier this year.

His death comes as an immeasurable loss to the musical world, and especially to his many colleagues and students, who will always consider themselves grateful for his good humor, dedication to teaching, and unswerving musicianship. We invite all who knew Paul to join us for a celebration of his singular artistry, and to remember a life filled with warm devotion to his students, friends, and family.

The event will be held on Sunday, October 12, 2014 at 7:30 pm in the Concert Hall of the Mannes College of Music, where Paul taught for 39 years. It will feature performances intermingled with reflections from family and friends. If you are interested in attending or participating, please RSVP to Robert Burkhart at robertburkhart@mac.com or Nathan Pell at npell1990@gmail.com. Please spread the word to anyone who knew Paul and might want to attend.

Obituary for PAUL TOBIAS, Cellist

Paul Tobias died on May 6, 2014 of injuries sustained in a fall. He had a long and distinguished career as a cellist and teacher, and will be remembered for his sharp wit and gentle spirit.

Mr. Tobias performed with conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Zubin Mehta, Leonard Bernstein, and Michael Tilson Thomas and with orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. He appeared as a soloist in Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, the Kennedy Center and many other major concert halls. He toured widely as a recitalist and chamber musician across the country and internationally throughout South America and Europe. He was the featured soloist on a "Live from Lincoln Center Broadcast" with the NY Philharmonic and Pierre Boulez, as well as a performer at President Jimmy Carter's inaugural festivities.

His career was particularly noteworthy due to his championing of difficult and interesting cello works that he believed should be more widely heard. He was recognized as a pre-eminent interpreter of Samuel Barber's cello concerto and Tchaikovsky's original version of *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, which he edited for its first publication by Edwin F. Kalmus.

Paul Tobias was also Artistic Director of New Heritage Music, a non-profit organization that has commissioned new works in honor of people, events and themes central to American history. Praised by the American Symphony Orchestra League as "a success story in creating new audiences *with new music*," New Heritage has fostered new works by American composers such as Chen Yi, Michael Daugherty, David Ott, Behzad Ranjbaran, David Sampson, Peter Schickele and Dan Welcher. Ranjbaran's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra* was premiered by Paul Tobias and JoAnn Falletta with The Virginia Symphony Orchestra and was recorded together with Chen Yi's *Eleanor's Gift* and Barber's cello concerto on Mr. Tobias's recording, *The American Cello*.

Mr. Tobias authored numerous articles for *American String Teacher*, *The Juilliard Journal*, *The Journal of the Conductors Guild*, *Strings*, and *The Strad*, including essays on Samuel Barber's cello concerto, which contributed to the present resurgence of this long under-appreciated work.

A former Lecturer in Music at Harvard University and for the New York Philharmonic, he served on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Rutgers University, and the University of California at Berkeley. Until recently, he was on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music/New School University, where he was a recipient of the Distinguished University Teacher of the Year Award in 1995.

Paul Tobias lived in New York City. He is survived by his three children, Andrew, Margaret, and Matthew, by his sister, Mary Carter, and by his former wife, Elizabeth. Services will be private.

Remarks by Elizabeth Tobias prepared for Paul's Memorial

First of all, I'd like to thank Nathan Pell and Robert Burkhart for their initiative and hard work organizing and planning this Memorial Concert. Truly, it would not have happened without their efforts. Thank you so much, Nathan and Robert.

We are here to celebrate the life of a wonderful cellist and marvelous human being, Paul Tobias, and also to mourn our collective loss. While nobody here will forget that Paul succumbed to mental illness, fell apart and eventually died tragically, to me it seems healthier for us to concentrate on the best of Paul, especially tonight, and there was plenty that was marvelous.

We were all truly blessed to know Paul. What a brilliant, gifted, funny, delightful guy he could be! For myself, I want to remember the joy of our personal relationship. I never laughed as much with any other human being as I laughed with Paul! Paul had the best sense of humor and made endless terrible puns, occasionally quite successfully in languages he didn't know. Our 3 beautiful children were such a deep source of joy to both of us, and with them Paul had fun doing things most of you might never imagine he'd do.

Don't ask me why amphibians were such a big deal in our house, but Paul and the kids collected them by the bucketful. No snake, salamander, or frog was safe anywhere near our Pennsylvania weekend house, and most were caught and released over and over I suspect. Our property is in fact officially designated as a National Wildlife Habitat. We had to do all sorts of things to get that certification, and Paul and the kids devoted themselves to it over several summers. We had to plant appropriate wildlife protecting shrubs, as well as plants that attracted butterflies and bees, and we had bird feeders everywhere. Sometimes we chased the immature Barred Owls all night long through the forest, from tree to tree. Their cry is really weird and the first time we heard it we just had to know what sort of creature was making it. Knowing Paul, is anybody here surprised that he and the kids learned to call down the owls - yes, literally have conversations with them - a kind of owl chamber music? And then there was the night that the kids discovered that a lake near our house had been drained for dredging and the muddy bottom was now home to zillions of frogs. Their adventures in

this muck chasing frogs went on for hours and you don't want to know what they looked like when they eventually came home.

I have chosen to tell you all this, so that you would understand why we chose to scatter Paul's ashes where we did. Last summer when we were looking for a meaningful location, we spotted a beautiful lake, and just sensed it was the right place. When we got to the water's edge, we saw that it was a frog pond, with dozens of enormous bullfrog tadpoles. We knew Paul would have loved it there, and had he been alive it would have been difficult to get him to leave. We knew it was exactly the right place for him to go on chasing frogs forever.

As many of you know, Paul got involved in commissioning new cello concerti and was very proud of this venture. As any parent of kids knows, you spend a lot of time in the car driving them around. On these car rides Paul would play the music of prospective composers. The children's reactions were strongly considered, as I think that Paul figured if the music of a composer could keep children interested, and not melting down, it would do the same for grownups! There are so many stories I could tell about great family adventures. Our lives were immeasurably rich in uncountable ways before his illness took over and he was gone.

Paul the cellist – wow! – what a wonder, a marvel almost beyond description, technically and musically stunning, in touch with the finest musical instincts any human being could possibly possess, someone with unimaginable mastery.

He never forgot a piece of music, ever, a rare gift many of us wish we possessed, and could play anything that he'd ever played, at any time, without practice. Once, the conductor Christopher von Dohnanyi, for whom Paul was auditioning in Cleveland, asked him if he'd ever played his grandfather's cello concerto. Paul said he loved the piece and launched into a passionate performance on the spot, playing confidently, though he hadn't touched the piece in at least a dozen years. How many of us can do that?

He could learn music faster and with less effort than anyone I ever knew. We gave our first concert together when we were both students in Aspen. I had just played the Kodaly Cello and Piano Sonata with another cellist at the Festival and Paul agreed to learn the Sonata for

this performance. In the hall trying the piano a couple of hours before the concert, Paul still did not know the piece. At the time I was really upset, though I later learned not to be upset at anything Paul did in rehearsal, because in performance he'd always come through magnificently. When we began the Kodaly, I was stunned. Paul had not only somehow managed to learn his part in a couple of hours, without looking at the music or practicing, he'd also somehow manage to memorize it, and he played like the great artist he was, as though he'd known the Sonata life-long.

Margaret Rowell, his beloved childhood teacher, whom Paul regarded as his personal and musical grandmother, and for whom our daughter is named, once told me he was the only student she ever had that could incorporate any major new change, a fingering or bowing, anything that she might suggest even minutes before a performance, and it wouldn't throw Paul off in the least. Margaret called him "one in a million".

In music, Paul was the perfect Zen master of effortlessly staying in the moment. Looking back over the years, the most dramatic example of this I could think of took place about 30 years ago. He was chosen to be the soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra on their first international tour, to South America, and in Brasilia, Brazil they were playing in an unusually large concert hall, seating thousands. Just as Paul was about to begin his cadenza, all power failed in the city and the huge hall was plunged into darkness. Paul kept playing, starting his cadenza in total blackness. As the cadenza neared the end, he figured that if he stopped playing people would panic, and in such a large space, folks might get hurt trying to get out. So very artfully he began a Bach suite, one chosen to segue harmonically nicely from the cadenza. After a long time, 20-30 minutes, with Paul playing the whole time in total darkness, the lights came back on. Even then, Paul kept on playing and gracefully transitioned back into the end of the cadenza and the rest of the concerto. This created an absolute sensation and earned him a spot of the cover of the South American equivalent of Time Magazine.

He had a similar adventure one afternoon playing two concerti with the New Jersey Philharmonic. He always asked to play two concerti when hired for a concerto, by the way. Most of us are happy just playing one, but he insisted on playing two. The first concerto required a smaller orchestra and it was played uneventfully, but the second required more

players. The extra wind players had become stuck in a terrible traffic jam coming out of NY and had not shown up by the time the second concerto was to be played. They had an intermission while waiting, and it went on far longer than usual. As the concert was on Super Bowl Sunday most people were anxious to get home to see the game and the audience was starting to get restless and resentful. Paul volunteered to walk out on the stage and start playing. So he did. He played Bach, he played some unaccompanied modern music. And with his ever-ready sense of humor, he turned this into a comedy act, and would look offstage here and there obviously enquiring about whether the players had arrived yet, shaking his head sadly or shrugging his shoulders to great effect. The audience was enthralled and giggling, and it was almost a disappointment when the missing players arrived and they could finally get on with completing the concert.

All the cellists here could compare crazy tales about traveling with cellos. While Paul was playing the great Piatti Stradivarius cello, on loan to him from Marlboro Music Festival to which it had been bequeathed, it was rather like lugging around the Mona Lisa. It was a scary responsibility as the cello was worth several million dollars and the terms of the loan stated it could never be out of Paul's sight or immediate possession. I thought to mention this cello loan tonight because if we are here to remember what sort of human being Paul Tobias was, consider that when Marlboro was pondering loaning this magnificent cello to someone, Rudolf Serkin called Gregor Piatigorsky for a personal recommendation. Piatigorsky told Serkin the only cellist on earth he'd personally trust with such a cello was Paul Tobias, due to his integrity as a human being, his exquisite cello artistry, and also due to the meticulous care he took of his own cello.

Wouldn't you know, October is National Depression Awareness Month. Statistics show that 1 in 4 adults, and 1 in 10 children, are impacted by mental illness in some way. Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Mahler, Beethoven, Bruckner, Donizetti, Rossini, Berlioz, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Arensky, Scriabin, Elgar, Glinka, Holst, Ives, Moussorgsky, and even Mozart – analyses of their writings have concluded that all had mood disorders and most also suffered from what would now be called personality disorders. Rachmaninoff even dedicated his beloved 2nd Piano Concerto to his psychiatrist, a doctor who was developing an experimental hypnosis therapy that obviously worked, enabling

Rachmaninoff to resume composing after a deep suicidal depression. Of course, this illness also affects many others and we could also add to the list world leaders like Lincoln and Churchill, artists like Van Gogh, writers like Hemingway, popular musicians like Curt Cobain and Amy Winehouse, and many actors, Robin Williams, but the latest.

Some of you have spoken to me about how you think you should have done more for Paul and how you feel guilty about it. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking, oh, if only I'd done such and such, the outcome would have been different. I can say, for sure, because I tried it all, and then some, that it doesn't appear that there was anything that anyone could have done to influence the outcome. Let's just be glad Paul was sane long enough for us to have had a pre-illness Paul in our lives, as well as some phenomenal playing to remember.

I'd like to quote Kay Redfield Jamison, whose excellent book *Touched by Fire* is well worth your time. She speaks of how mental illness and great artistry often appear together. "There are so many studies now that are finding the same thing: an exceedingly elevated rate of manic-depressive and depressive illnesses among artists, writers and composers. It is my perspective that the illness itself, in the context of a creative mind, can at certain times create a very definite advantage for the artist."

I do not mean to imply that all of us who are creative are doomed. Far from it! We can learn by observing what happened to Paul, and we can honor his memory by taking care of ourselves, even if we have an issue, and by striving to maintain balance in our lives, even while we let our creativity flow.

It would help a lot if everyone were more open about mental illness. It is NOT a moral failing and is nothing to be ashamed of. No one would hesitate to say they have arthritis or a broken bone, but mental illness carries shame. This is ridiculous and the more people talk about it, the better it will be for everyone. But knowing our sensitivities as artists and creative people, and knowing that we are prone to mood imbalances, there are a few things we can do to take care of ourselves.

Let's get over the culture of perfectionism. Let's not place perfectionism on a high pedestal, even if the flawless editing of recordings surrounds us with so-called "perfect playing". Paul used to delight in telling a story

attributed to George Szell. Once, listening to the final version of a highly edited concerto recording he was making with a well-known pianist, the pianist remarked that it sounded absolutely magnificent, to which George Szell was reported to have said "Yes, it does. Don't you wish you could play like that?!"

It's also impossible to have hope without faith in something bigger than us. We all need something wondrous we can connect with, whatever that might be. This is essential for keeping us sane.

We can also actively work at maintaining our own personal balance and mental health. There are many ways to do this, through ancient techniques or modern ones. Finding better mental health balance is available to all of us, but we do have to believe it is important and go after it.

I would humbly suggest that if you want to do something to honor the great musician, wise friend, inspiring teacher, and sweet human being that was Paul Tobias, take good care of yourselves, and honor yourselves, and then go and play a whole lot of music!

Paul loved you all. He was such a proud papa not only to his children, but also to his students. He admired his colleagues enormously, and would have been overjoyed to see you all here tonight. He would absolutely have loved this Memorial Concert. Thank you all for coming, and best wishes to you all.