

## RICHARD GILL TRIBUTE – PART II: COMMENTARY

### What will I do when I grow up?

This is a question that Richard Gill has been asking himself all his life. His curiosity, devotion to music, and insistence on quality in all of his pursuits has—as we have seen—led to various musical occupations: school music teacher, Orff Schulwerk proponent, choral and orchestral conductor, vocal coach, Conservatorium dean and director, and opera music director.

Fundamental to all of his work, however, is his passion for teaching; it underscores the many roles that he has chosen in a life rich with accomplishment. Richard did not make life choices based on career advancement; he rather chose occupations that would engage him musically. Because of this view, he distinguished between active professional work and passive academic appointments. He obviously relished the former and renounced the latter.

Even as he worked with opera choristers, symphony players, and young conductors, he viewed the encounters as teaching opportunities. *I try, as far as I possibly can, to do as much as I can for the artists in the company (p.369)*. And, as good teachers always demonstrate, he wanted to be among people who could influence him musically. Reflecting on his years in Perth he said, *During these years, I grew enormously as a musician simply because I was surrounded by better musicians (p. 291)*. And again (p. 371) he writes, *I can say quite truthfully that almost all the students whom I have taught on a one-to-one basis, either as composers or conductors, have been essentially much more innately gifted than I am*. His enthusiasm never waned as he worked diligently to learn from his students.

As always, his great sense of humor provides perspective on the teacher/student relationship: *I know my work is nearing completion when I experience the first signs of resentment from a student at a suggestion I make; when a young conductor looks at me as if I dwell in some primeval swamp from which I have recently emerged, covered in slime (p. 372)*.

Richard has been a friend for many years, and I can tell you he's the most irreverent famous guy I've ever known. I met him first at the Portland AOSA conference in 1982 and was so taken with his first session I decided to attend the repeat. But it was anything but a repeat! He took us through material that addressed the same objectives, but in a totally different way. Both were the most musical Orff sessions I had ever attended.

We met again the following summer in Salzburg where we were members of the teaching faculty for the English summer course. I taught the opening session to people from around the world, with Richard in attendance. It was a real challenge, but one I felt I had met. Later he told me that he like my presentation—but where would it go next? I responded that I felt lucky to get as far as I did! As I thought about it later, I realized that what he was asking for was more involvement from the participants (improvisation, anyone?) and less direction from the teacher.

Richard lived and taught in the US beginning in 1983. He joined the music faculty at California State University in Chico at Jan Rapley's invitation, and taught workshops throughout the US during that year.

One of those workshops included a session for the Minnesota Orff chapter. A visit to my school was an additional bonus, in which he taught fifth grade and kindergarten classes, as well as a special session for the entire Lower School. After 40 minutes with the kindergarteners he dismissed them, calling each of the 20 students to the door by name! He told the older group that because they were fifth graders he had decided to teach them a piece in the meter of 5. "You can't do that," said a boy whose father was the conductor of a local college orchestra. "Oh yes I can," said Richard, "you just watch me." After putting the group through their metric paces, he asked at the end of class if they now realized that music could be organized in 5 meter. "I guess so, but I'll have to ask my dad," said the boy.

I engaged him to teach a Master Class at Hamline University the following summer and invited leading Orff teachers from throughout the country to join us. Because he brilliantly connected Orff Schulwerk to a wider musical repertoire, students were aware that they had been exposed to something musically unique in Orff pedagogy. During that summer, he also joined the teaching staff at the annual three-level summer course at Hamline. An unforgettable event took place as preparations were being made for the final sharing session of this course. Richard taught a fiendishly difficult canon to Level III in secret, announcing that all levels would be introduced to it the next day. He wanted to give Level III a chance to show off their superior skills. But unbeknownst to him, the Level III students taught it to Levels I and II and he was nonplussed that all levels were so skilled!

I very much hoped that Richard might find a suitable position in the USA, but we had to be satisfied with what he had given us during his brief, but spectacular, sojourns here.

Yet, we had one final opportunity learn from Richard. In July 2001, he addressed the University of St. Thomas Summer Seminar on the topic, "Time for a Renaissance: A Search for Things Lost in the Teaching of Music." During this presentation we had a preview of what Richard would later present to live audiences in TED talks in Australia. Such assertions as "we teach music because it is unique and good," and the notion of a hierarchy of musical activities that included "listening to music, performing music, improvising music, and writing it down" were the fundamentals of a comprehensive music program. In defiance of the trend toward arts integration in Australia, he stressed that music teachers presenting their subject in depth would have no time to attempt to integrate their programs with other areas of the curriculum.

Richard loves repartee. At one point during his US residence, he was being considered for a job as director of an Eastern US music conservatory. As one of his references, I had an hour-long conversation with the head of the search committee. I reported to Richard that the professor with whom I had spoken was so impressed with our conversation that he had decided to offer the job to me! Richard loved that. On another occasion when I was teaching at an Orff conference in Australia, the participants had gathered for a question-answer session. When somebody asked Richard about his book, Three Bags Full, he proceeded to describe the contents at length. Then it was my turn. I answered the question about Discovering Orff by saying that I had been asked to talk about my book, but I thought it was tacky to push your own material. "Americans are tacky," he teased me back. It was clear at this conference that Richard was revered by the Orff teachers. They obviously understood that they had a musical and pedagogical genius in their midst.

Because these memories are so fresh, it's been a genuine pleasure to share them here. Obviously Richard has been a singular influence in my life. If you haven't already done so, I suggest that you read his memoir, [Give Me Excess of It](#) (Pan Macmillan Australia, available from Amazon on Kindle). The page references in this article can be found in this book.

Richard did, after all, grow up. And what he accomplished on the way is an unforgettable musical legacy for his students of all ages. He writes that the principal idea that runs through his work is hope. *Hope is all we have* (p. 375). As the last sentence of his book states—and his life reflects: *If music be the food of love, play on, give me excess of it* (p. 376).

--Jane Frazee