

Musical Treasure Chest #36

2020 has been a difficult year, one dominated by COVID and its tidal wave of tragic effects. I found a few bright spots with special virtual projects and wonderful musical programs and in many ways Musicians of Ma'alwyck hobbled through the year with some very rewarding creative activity. But it has been shadowed by some very great losses that truly have altered the ensemble. The loss of our cellist Petia Kassarova back in July is surely one of the most devastating, affecting our very core of players and our musical identity. But other losses not as obvious to the public have hit us, such as the loss of Mary Jane Dike and Mary Ellen Fenner, patrons that were close dear friends and devoted to the group, and Eric Wiener, who was a long time board member, friend and so important to the development of the ensemble. 2020 is closing out for us with the passing of another person deeply important to me and a true friend of Musicians of Ma'alwyck.

On Christmas Eve morning **Merle Winn** died of glioblastoma. Merle has been part of my life for more than thirty years. A gifted singer and a passionate music lover, Merle sang in Albany Pro Musica for more than three decades. He was also an APM board member and sponsor of concerts. Coming from a musical family (his mother Nancy Winn was a long-time member of the Albany Symphony cello section), Merle could be counted on to support musical activities. He housed ASO musicians for years, donated to the orchestra at high level and generally did everything associated with being a fabulous music patron. Even after he became sick, Merle continued to support both Albany Pro Musica and the ASO. I have included a link to his obituary so that you can read about the scope of his activities and patronage.

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/timesunion-albany/name/merle-winn-obituary?pid=197368581>

But the Merle I want to share with you is the great friend that I was honored to have. Merle could always be counted on to support Musicians of Ma'alwyck. He was an avid attendee of our concerts and fundraisers and a generous donor, year after year. He always gave thoughtful advice on his reaction to the programs and

was willing to share ideas for improvement and development of the group. But over and beyond any professional affiliation, Merle could be relied upon for his loyalty as a friend. He was one of those rare people that you could call in an emergency and know that he would be there. He and his wife Aggie attended Glimmerglass Opera each summer and would often stay with us. How we enjoyed drinking wine on the porch after performances, while discussing the opera productions.

Merle loved music, it was part of his very soul. He relished singing, attending concerts, and learning about music. As concertmaster of the Albany Pro Musica, I often shared the stage with him. How heartening it was to look over at the chorus and catch his eye and experience the music together. As you will see in his obituary, he had a passion for a capella singing and glee club. I had a chance to travel out to his summer retreat on Conesus Lake in the Finger Lakes. What fun to hear all of the guys singing and to watch the fun they were having.

One of Merle's joys was singing in the Washington Choral Arts Society back in the early 1980s and one of the performances he was particularly proud of was one of the **Rachmaninov Vespers**. He played the tape of it for me many years ago. I cannot find that recording to share with you from YouTube, but here are some excerpts of the Rachmaninov with the Washington Choral Arts Society from 2015 (you will have to keep forwarding through the links). It seems to me the perfect work to remember him by.

Merle, you will be so profoundly missed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukxAy0MWnQ0>