

A Tribute to Robert Glasgow, Hill Auditorium, The University of Michigan, May 29, 2009

Marcia Van Oyen

For over half a century, Robert Glasgow (1925–2008) imparted his mastery of the pipe organ to generations of eager students, holding teaching positions at the University of Michigan (1962–2006) and MacMurray College (1951–1962). He was a combination of pedagogue, preacher, conductor, and touchstone for musical excellence, and always a wry commentator. Efforts to perfect technique were all channeled towards creating a performance that was infused with emotion, well proportioned and prepared, and as a result free to spin effortlessly into a polished, engaging performance.

He was no less a teacher when performing himself. During his peak performances, the music would float palpably in the air, waves of sound undulating through the auditorium as if they were alive. His performances were neither earth-bound nor encumbered with fussy articulations or gyrations at the console. His disciplined, quiet technique and painstaking orchestration of the organ's voices rendered many memorable concerts.

On May 29, students, colleagues, and friends gathered at the Hill Auditorium on the University of Michigan campus for a tribute concert to honor Professor Glasgow's legacy. Organized by Jeremy David Tarrant, the program included stunning performances by six former Glasgow students: Susan De Kam, Steven Egler, Peter Stoltzfus Berton, Charles Kennedy, Martin Jean, and Jeremy David Tarrant, as well as personal remembrances given by six speakers from various eras of Glasgow's career: David Palmer, Marilyn Mason, Louis Nagel, William Aylesworth, Martin Jean, and Orpha Ochse.

David Palmer kicked off the evening with some introductory remarks: "As a teacher and mentor, here was one who tapped into the depths of music in an uncompromising and exhaustive way, whether teaching or performing. Who of us who were his students can forget lines such as 'Why can't organists join the musical human race?' as he decried dull or faddish playing. 'Don't aim to just please organists in your playing.' Or 'Why, there's nobody at home,' as he tried stop after stop, searching for just the right sound. 'Think of pinwheels,' he said to me in Messaien's *Transports de Joie*. 'Think of a French sauce, as you play this, not just meat and potatoes,' attempting to get us beyond the notes. Food was often a ready source of imagery for him. As I got closer to my own undergrad recital, and in his frustration in trying to get me out of my reserved personality, he blurted out, 'Just play the hell out of it!' Performers he idolized were not organists. He urged us to hear the likes of Artur Schnabel, Pierre Fournier, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, and so on. And of course we heard them all, here in Hill Auditorium.

"Words of praise came only when truly deserved. The effective culmination after months of work, that is, knowing that one had achieved something close to his standard was life-affirming, and clearly relative to an objective personal standard. Easy approval was not Bob's way, not only with his students, but especially with himself. Would that the reservations he had about his own playing had not prevented the world from having only one published recording of Franck, from All Saints in Worcester. Much of his hesitation probably came from the fact that he knew that no recording fully captures a live performance. And what performances he gave. I've said this before, but when Bob played, the audience reaction was akin to the frenzy that Horowitz used to generate. Bob reached any audience. One didn't have to be an organist to be swept away. His first unveiling of the Liszt *Ad Nos*, in 1965 if I'm correct, remains one of the great concerts



Robert Glasgow 1964



Robert Glasgow 1986



Steven Egler, Peter Stoltzfus Berton, Jeremy David Tarrant, Susan De Kam, Charles Kennedy, and Martin Jean

I've ever heard in my life. Franck, Tourneure, Viëne, Widor, Schumann, Sowerby, Bach—whatever music he played was revelatory."

Susan De Kam followed Palmer's remarks with an elegantly energetic rendering of the *Prelude et Fugue sur le nom d'ALAIN* by Duruflé. Throughout the evening, elements of Glasgow's style were evident in the performances, but not slavishly so. He never sought to produce clones of himself, but rather sought to elicit the best from the musical personality and talent of each individual student. The variety of repertoire on the program demonstrates Glasgow's versatility as a teacher, and his penchant for selecting repertoire matched to a student's interests and abilities.

Marilyn Mason took the podium next. "I was responsible for hiring [Robert Glasgow]. When I had played in Pennsylvania, at a regional convention of the AGO, several of us had breakfast the next morning. I can remember it very clearly: Harold Gleason, Catharine Crozier, plus a few others who had joined us. We spoke of several things: of our views of organ playing, organbuilding, and specifically of Michigan. At that moment during that breakfast, I shared with Dr. Gleason that we were in the market for a third teacher. Both Bob Noehren and I were teaching here at Michigan. Without hesitation, Dr. Gleason spoke: 'We have a recent graduate who is a splendid organist and I'm sure a good teacher. Just now he is teaching at MacMurray College in Illinois. He is a fine person and an excellent organist, and I know he will make his mark in the organ world.' Indeed, of course he did. I came home and I talked to my Dean, Earl V. Moore, and his assistant, Jim Wallace. They were actually the search committee. Those were

the days when you had two or three or one—no résumés needed, mostly a high recommendation from Harold Gleason. They were in favor. The next thing was the audition for Bob Glasgow, and the rest of it is history. Indeed he did make his mark, and fulfilled all of the Harold Gleason prophecy.

"When I saw in 2007 that the complete works of Viëne would be published in a new edition, I went to my good friend Charles Reynolds, who runs the music library and said, 'We must get this. I want to order it and I want to give it to the University of Michigan in honor of Bob Glasgow.' Bob knew about this. The publication wasn't ready, but he saw the outline of what was in each volume. This is a beautiful edition. There are thirteen volumes, all the organ works of Viëne, edited by David Sanger.

"So we bought this for the University of Michigan in April 2008 and the bookplate on the inscription of each volume reads, 'Given by Marilyn Mason in honor of her distinguished colleague, Professor Emeritus Robert Glasgow, University of Michigan, 1962–2005.'

"He was a treasured colleague of mine, and that sense of humor which he had always came to the fore. All of us have a sense of humor, but his was unique, very special. We should make a book of all those wonderful sayings."

Steven Egler preceded his polished performance of *A Triptych of Fugues* by Gerald Near with brief explanatory remarks. "Lest the music of Gerald Near stick out like a sore thumb amidst all of this other great literature that Bob played and loved, I need to explain a couple of connections. This *Triptych* was Gerald Near's third organ composition, composed for Bob in 1965, and premiered by him in Hill Auditorium January 30, 1966. Gerald Near was a student of both Mari-

Each of the performers shared recollections, which were printed in the program book; some excerpts follow. The complete program booklet, beautifully prepared by Ron Krebs, is available online at http://www.reuterorgan.com/assets/news&events_page/3Glasgow%20Program.pdf.

"The simple fact is, no single person has influenced me more musically and artistically, and if I can look back on my career having helped half as many budding musicians as he, I will consider my work a success."—Martin Jean

"His oft-repeated maxim of 'needing to know the rules before learning how to break them' applied to fingering, phrasing, registration, agogic accents, beverages, and a wealth of life lessons, as he continuously gave attention to those things beyond music which make for good music-making."—Peter Stoltzfus Berton

"There is not a day of a lesson that passes during which I do not hear Robert Glasgow's voice coming out in mine: 'play on through,' 'play the line,' and who cannot forget his expressive conducting. He knew how to get the best out of each one of his students, and he demanded only the very best—musically and artistically. He was a one-of-a-kind teacher and an artist without reproach."—Steven Egler

"The lessons that Robert Glasgow gave me were memorable and influential. I feel honored to have known him, to have studied with him, and to be able to pass down his knowledge and musical approach to future generations."—Susan De Kam

"I was absolutely mesmerized by his performance, and remained to listen as he prepared for a lecture to follow, hearing him play Franck's *Cantabile* and *Pastorale*, as well as two pieces from Brahms's Opus 122. That experience was a revelation I have never forgotten. It not only instilled in me the desire to play those works, but also provided me a point of view of how nineteenth-century organ repertoire ought to sound."—Charles Kennedy

"In October of 1993, Robert Glasgow played a concert in Hill Auditorium that is irrevocably etched in my memory. The program consisted of the *Symphonie Romane* of Widor and Viëne's *Symphonie No. 5*. The broad, sweeping gestures, the lyricism, the color, the touch, the registration, and the rhythm that was solid and playful at the same time—elements that one reviewer described as 'Glasgow's trademark magic'—held me captive. An indescribable energy pervaded this great hall that night, which led the audience to erupt in loud cheers at the program's conclusion. As I stood there in tears, I knew I had witnessed something extraordinary."—Jeremy David Tarrant

lyn and of Bob, while he was a master's student in composition and conducting."

Louis Nagel, professor of piano at the University of Michigan, offered these thoughts: "Grandeur and majesty are words that come to mind when I recall the performances I heard from Bob Glasgow. He and the organ were one and the same when he played, and his ability to tame this gargantuan instrument, to console the console if I may say it that way, was inspirational. I remember a particular performance in Hill Auditorium one summer. The temperature outside



Jeremy David Tarrant and Marilyn Mason

had risen that day to a hundred degrees, perhaps beyond. Inside Hill—this was before air-conditioning was installed—the temperature was considerably above that. Needless to say, the program included some demanding nineteenth-century works. I arrived in a short-sleeved shirt and casual pants. I even sat by a fan placed in front of an open door. Professor Glasgow walked out on the stage in full concert attire, sat himself at the keyboard, and proceeded to perform for over an hour with the greatest command and ease. After the concert, I went backstage and greeted him. He had hardly worked up a sweat, it seemed to me, despite the athleticism of his performance. (We pianists don't have to use pedals that way. We have to watch [organists] to realize how comfortably we really have it.) 'Aren't you hot?' I asked him incredulously. 'No,' he rather laconically replied. I must have looked disbelieving still, so he told me he grew up in Okalahoma where it routinely got that hot in the summertime in the shade, and this did not faze him at all. I congratulated him and retreated, chastened, but eternally admiring of his honesty and endurance.

"Bob was a very special colleague. I believe that he was as apolitical as he could be; at least he seemed that way as I knew him. Rarely did I have occasion to discuss school issues with him, or serve on any committee other than an occasional doctoral dissertation. I visited, at his invitation, a couple of organ juries, and he was deeply involved in the performances of the students taking their juries, not just his students, but all the students. He was a devoted and compassionate teacher, and I think his attitude made a major impression upon me. His fusion of teaching and performing as two sides of the same coin certainly influenced my own thinking on that subject.

"In preparing these comments, I listened twice to the CD we have in our library of Bob playing the works of César Franck. Franck, as we all know, worshipped at the altar of modulation. I am amused, in fact, when the title of the piece says *Choral in E major* or *Cantabile in B major*. For one phrase it is in E or B, and then goes on through 29 more tonalities. I was struck by the fact that Bob also modulated in his life, originally planning to be an architect. Had he changed keys fractionally as much as Franck, we'd probably not be gathered here today to recall his life as an organist. Fortunately, he did not modulate after arriving in the tonality of music, but remained firmly rooted in the parallel tonics of teaching and performing. And thus his long and honorable career here at the University of Michigan serves as a remarkable example to all of us of true dedication, collegiality, grandeur and majesty." **Peter Stoltzfus Berton** then gave a focused, fervent performance of Franck's *Prière*.

William Aylesworth, who had studied organ with Professor Glasgow at MacMurray College, shared a number of humorous anecdotes from his student days, beginning with his encounter with RG at registration, seated at an old-fashioned student desk: "I walked in to find a rather slender young man with reddish hair, who was nervously shuffling a stack of papers. He had several pens and pencils in one hand, which he kept dropping on the terrazzo floor. He would leap up to retrieve them, just spider-like, and just get going on something, then something else would fall, and it would happen all over again. Not



Jeremy David Tarrant with Glasgow cousins Lauranne Brunner, Bill Brunner, and Richard Bard

that Bob was ever nervous, or anything like that." He also recalled being presented with the fourth edition of the Gleason organ method at his first lesson, much of which at that time was hand-typed and hand-scripted. "This book far surpassed the significance of the Holy Scriptures in Bob's estimation."

"For us organ students [required attendance at Chapel services] was no hardship. Bob would begin by playing an opening voluntary. Can you imagine him doing a *Psalm Prelude* by Herbert Howells or the Frank Bridge *Adagio in E*, or I think he even used to play the Barber *Adagio for Strings*. To hear him, with his incomparable rhythmic sense giving out a hymn. No fancy harmonies behind it, mind you, but totally as is, as perfectly as anyone could imagine. And believe me, when he got through giving out that hymn, everybody was standing on their feet ready to sing. It was really something. Then there were his magnificent choir accompaniments—often a 17th- or 18th-century piece in Latin or perhaps an early 20th-century work. Some of the Latin titles were mercilessly parodied, which led to endless giggles, from Bob, too. [One of the pieces we performed] was Bach Cantata 140. Of course, being out in the sticks like we were, Bob was the orchestra. I remember the *Messiah*, Bach *Magnificat*, Brahms and Fauré *Requiems*, always accompanied by Bob at the wonderful Aeolian-Skinner. Now he took all of this very seriously, and his accompaniments were rhythmically vibrant, and were color-wise and style-wise as fine as anyone could ever imagine. He would work for hours on these to get them just right. He would say, 'fiendishly difficult,' but they were done to perfection. Just imagine having all this to listen to as a student. And I think it helped him broaden his sense of musicianship as well.

"The most wonderful thing about my four years at MacMurray was the example Bob set for all of us. His mind was never still. He knew literature, art, architecture, drama, movies, and led all of us to a deeper appreciation of all that. But it was the musical example he gave us to measure up to, if we could, which was his greatest gift. Several times in the years since, I was able to tell him that he has always been my musical wellspring. It will always be true."

Aylesworth's light-hearted anecdotes were contrasted by **Charles Kennedy's** intricately colorful and nuanced performance of the Howells *Fugue, Chorale and Epilogue*.

Martin Jean recalled his early days as a Glasgow student: "It was clear to me from my first lesson with Professor Glasgow that on some level we 'clicked.' I played the Liszt 'BACH' for him before my first semester of study, a piece that I had a hard time liking, and emerged from his studio that day with a new love of the music. This happened over and over again. But on many other levels, at least at the start, we were strangers to one another. I was a midwestern Lutheran, he was a Scot Presbyterian from Oklahoma. I was thoroughly Germanicized in my aesthetic; he was a Francophile. But one of the things that sticks in my head as different were the ways we

kept time. I come from a family of morning people, and, as we all know, no one with any sense would have a lesson with RG before 10:30 in the morning, mostly because he was up half the night before watching old movies in the back room of his apartment. He was as puzzled with me as I was with him. 'How can you get up so early?' he would ask. 'Well,' I would answer, 'I like being up when no one else is around. How can you stay up so late?' He replied, 'Same reason.' It never made sense to me. Being a nocturnal animal was just not in my nature and it still isn't. It seemed a lonely life to me, and as I came to know Bob better, I worried more and more that he lived a lonely life.

"I know for a fact that many of us caught our love for old films from Bob. Ironically, my first glimpse of the Yale campus came through the window of the Taft Hotel in the last scene of 'All About Eve.' It was indicative of Bob in general: that which he loved, he loved to share. And we, his students, were all the beneficiaries. He was an open book to us. From music to art to poetry to old movies to great food to Catherine's killer punch to the joy of staying up late and enjoying the moonlight. It turns out that that nocturnal animal, deriving strength from moonlight instead of sunlight, was not so different from me. He simply liked to stay up later. The moonlight that nurtured him would for me, too, become alluring. Instead of the fierce brightness of the morning, there would be the dazzling gentleness of the evening light, stunning in its own way, a kind of sentinel that looked after him during his night-time vigil. I offer this piece in honor of that memory and so much more." Jean then read the poem, "Clair de Lune" by Paul Verlaine, followed by a poignant rendition of Vierne's fantasy piece of the same title.

Orpha Ochse was the final speaker for the evening. She and Bob Glasgow met at the Eastman School of Music, found they had much in common, and became fast friends. I recall Professor Glasgow always speaking of her with the utmost respect. Ochse began, "From the very first, I was awed by Bob's music making, his understanding of the organ's tone colors, his sense of style. Even then, he instinctively knew where he was going musically and he was not to be distracted. A quarter of a century later, he still maintained both his stylistic preferences and his artistic integrity through those years of the early music frenzy, a time when organ recitals were often more performance practice than music. And in his later years, he remained on track with his artistic convictions.

"Bob's students were his family. He worried about them as much as any parent, and he was as proud of their accomplishments as any grandparent. I'm surprised he didn't carry their pictures around in his billfold. Through the years, many of those students became my friends. I earned a place in that family circle by listening untold times to Bob's musings about how talented and how wonderful his students were. I may have stifled a yawn, but he did speak truly. His great legacy depends on the generations of students who absorbed the lessons of musicianship that he exemplified. And



Orpha Ochse and Jeremy David Tarrant

this evening, we've been privileged to hear them create a fitting monument in his honor.

"I recall one time when Bob and I visited Harold Gleason toward the end of Gleason's life. Harold loved to carry an idea to the ridiculous extreme. He said on this occasion, 'You know, nothing in nature is ever lost. It may change form, but it continues to exist. If we send vibrations out into space, if we just keep going forever. Maybe if we knew the spot in outer space to pinpoint, we could hear Mr. Bach playing.' Well, Harold was just fantasizing to amuse us, but on this special occasion, we really do hear the Glasgow legacy, and are reassured that it will be perpetuated in new generations of grand-pupils and great-grand-pupils. Those of us who have been privileged to attend great universities and learn from great teachers assume a lifelong responsibility. Somehow we ought to repay the efforts that were made in our behalf, and justify those awesome opportunities.

"I'm drawn to the imagery presented in the letter to the Hebrews. In this familiar passage, the Greek people who are no longer with us watch to see if we will carry forward their work. 'Since we are encompassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us thrust aside every impediment and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.'" **Jeremy David Tarrant** closed the concert with a thrilling performance of the Choral and Final from Widor's seventh symphony.

On the evening of May 29, Hill Auditorium was alive with the legacy of Robert Glasgow, an atmosphere created by the cumulative effect of electrifying performances, affectionate spoken tributes, and the collective remembrances and esteem of all who had gathered to celebrate all that made Robert Glasgow unforgettable.

As I listened to the concert, I mused on my own student days. In particular, I recalled my nervous approach to the mammoth organ console at Hill to play the Franck B-minor *Choral* for my master's recital, and several occasions when I laughed heartily at one of Professor Glasgow's signature comments during a lesson ("It's like putting lipstick on a pig. It's still a pig."). When he would assume the bench to demonstrate a point, I watched, fascinated with the way he used the weight of his hands and arms to move effortlessly over the keyboards. I enjoyed and endured studio classes on Tuesday nights, sometimes lasting until 11:00 pm. I will never forget the day he both complimented and humbled me by saying, "You have enough musical instinct for three people; you just need to calm down." I treasure his hand-written directions in my Franck scores, and I can still hear his voice in my mind, coaching me through the long phrases.

At the reception after the tribute concert, **Huw Lewis** mentioned that he had cut short a visit with his family in Wales to attend the tribute concert. I said, "But Huw, this is your family, too." He replied, "You're right. They are." And what a heritage we all share, thanks to the inspiration, encouragement, discipline, excellence, mastery, romanticism, musicality and uniqueness of Robert Glasgow. ■

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