

In Memoriam

HOWARD MAYER BROWN

1930–1993

Howard Mayer Brown, the Ferdinand Schevill Distinguished Service Professor of Music at the University of Chicago and president of the Renaissance Society of America in 1990–91, died of a heart attack in Venice on 20 February 1993. With his death Renaissance scholarship lost one of its most vivacious, discerning minds and surely its most erudite musicologist. Brown's work combined penetrating musical analysis with a keen sense of cultural history and the most sophisticated techniques of paleography, textual criticism, and bibliography. Early on, his work concentrated on the French chanson and instrumental music, including his brilliant monograph *Music in the French Secular Theater, 1400–1550* of 1963 and his bibliography of sixteenth-century instrumental music, which followed shortly thereafter. Over the years his prodigious curiosity led him to gain expertise in organology, iconography, performance practices, seventeenth-century Italian opera and monody, sixteenth-century madrigal, Josquin studies, Florentine intermedi, commedia dell'arte, music theory, fourteenth-century music, women's music, liturgical practices, Italian oral traditions, and more.

Brown published over fourteen books and editions. Yet his favorite and most influential genre may have been the essay, which usually evolved as a paper for oral delivery. Howard (as everyone called him) thrived on spontaneous verbal dialogue, on the immediacy of speech. Each year he gave an extraordinary number of conference talks around the world, often as plenary speaker, including the Josephine Waters Bennett Lecture to the Renaissance Society in 1990. As early as 1964 he published the first in a stream of seminal articles, "The Genesis of a Style: The Parisian Chanson, 1500–1530," first delivered in 1961 at an Isham Memorial Library Conference and published in *Chanson & Madrigal* in 1964. At the time of his death he had just finished drafting a mammoth article "In Praise of Josquin and the Virgin Mary," a study of Josquin's Marian motets based on his 1991 Ethel Curry Lecture for the University of Michigan. The 96-page position paper he wrote for the Cambridge round table on late sixteenth-century French chanson, "*Ut musica poesis: Music and Poetry in France in the Late Sixteenth*

Century,” which took place in March after his death, will undoubtedly have the same effect once it is published.

Yet scholarship was only one form Howard’s work took. He turned his charismatic personality and his young training as a flutist and conductor to performing early music. His memorable concerts as conductor of the University of Chicago Collegium Musicum between 1960–72 and 1974–82 were interrupted only by a two-year stint as King Edward Professor of Music at King’s College, London, where he succeeded the legendary Thurston Dart. He was a consummate musician and one of a handful of people responsible for the growth of the early music movement in America, pioneered in England by scholar-performers like Dart. For many years Renaissance music aficionados and teachers depended on the ten records he made on the Pleiades label as part of Davison and Apel’s *Historical Anthology of Music*.

Howard’s vast imagination and his passion for books and instruments expressed themselves in the exceptional private collections he built up. His collections will now greatly enhance the holdings of the Newberry Library, the primary beneficiary of his estate. They include books of sixteenth-century French and Italian music and literature, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera librettos, rare liturgical service books, and old musical instruments, as well as superior non-rare holdings, of which the art books have particular value. The gift is especially fitting in light of his long association with the Newberry’s Center for Renaissance Studies. At the Center he directed a 1987 NEH summer institute, “Theory and Practice of Sixteenth-Century Music,” and also helped create an on-going program sponsored by the Center called “Music as a Cultural Institution in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.” The Newberry has established the Weiss-Brown Fund honoring the names of Howard and his life-long companion Roger Weiss.

New friends often wondered, as I did at first, how Howard could manage all of this and still regale his guests half the night with his delicious cooking and conversation. But Howard’s was a world without categories—high or low, new or old, local or global. Nothing separated work from life, and one quickly came to see that conversation—which he practiced as a great natural art—was a form of inquiry, testing, exploration, thinking, and teaching.

Howard was one of Chicago’s legendary teachers, both of students and colleagues. He taught by example how to think and write

adventurously and take joy in the unknown. In seminar after seminar he plopped himself down in the middle of new terrain and proceeded to go at it with rigor and relish; and his students would do the same. Howard seemed fearless, or what fears he had he determined to displace with his iron will. This was a strength that made him love resistance and contention. He made young people feel welcome to speak their minds, even—or especially—when they disagreed with him. He could be audacious and insouciant, but it was these qualities that allowed him to be unthreatened by new directions in the discipline, which by turns intrigued, irritated and stimulated him. Indeed before he died he had begun to explore those aspects he found of value—as always, without the slightest pretension—and had no hesitation in contesting whatever made him skeptical. It was this intrepid ability to be animated by what was new that prevented anything he said or wrote from getting tired and that had enabled him to deliver papers in five different languages on a seemingly endless array of topics on his annual conference tours; in the end he led scholars in all sorts of different fields to regard him as the leading specialist in theirs.

Howard defined his obligations to community in the broadest terms. At the University of Chicago he helped to install a large number of women faculty members in Music and most recently led an institution-wide group of faculty to help the University develop new policies extending equal benefits to same-sex domestic partners. He was an active supporter of Hillel House, the Center for Black Music Research, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. The community responded in kind. Not only was he recipient of scholarly honors like the Rotary Club of Pisa's Galileo Galilei prize for his contribution to the study of the Italian culture, a fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and much more, but before his death members of the American Musicological Society had established an endowment fund in his honor to offer graduate fellowships to minority students.

Howard's impatience with rigid categories dissolved the boundaries between public and private. With his genial personality, he showed untiring personal concern for his students, for other young scholars, and for scholars from distant and underprivileged parts of the world, who habitually sought him out for advice and hospitality. His great charm and rumpled elegance did not float above others but embraced them. The many advisees he left behind, working

on theses in areas as diverse as late-sixteenth-century French chanson, *stile antico* in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rome, modal theory, Italian theater around 1600, Spanish and Netherlandish sacred music, and German liturgical polyphony of the fifteenth century, testify to his enormous breadth as a scholar as well as his deeply nurturing qualities as a mentor and a human being. For one who was privileged to be his colleague in the last years, it's a special honor to acknowledge how important Howard was to these students and how important they were to him. He will be tenderly missed and remembered by them and by his many loving friends and colleagues the world round.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Martha Feldman