

Lynn Beaton, 1946-2016

Scenes from the life of a passionate Shostakovich fan and a DSCH Journal correspondent

July 2013—The Brodsky Quartet in collaboration with students of the Australian National Academy of music in Melbourne perform all 15 Shostakovich string quartets in five concerts over one weekend. Lynn's passionate championing of these works (which she saw as the pinnacle of his output) had infected her chamber-music-loving friends. Lynn instigated two excellent projects in preparation for the event: first we devoured the book she recommended (Wendy Lesser's *Music for Silenced Voices*), then we devoured a special Russian dinner in honour of Shostakovich.

Lynn cooked a Russian fish pie and a hearty mushroom stew (a reference to *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*) for the dinner. She was at the centre of lively discussions about the political and personal background to the quartets we would shortly be hearing. The evening also included freely flowing vodka, readings from the *DSCH Journal* and stories of travels in the USSR.

Lynn's friend Ann remembers the Shostakovich quartet weekend: "Knowing Lynn was mad about Shostakovich, I looked forward to the joy of three days of listening, talking, and learning. Leading up to this extraordinary weekend, Lynn was appointed as the Australian correspondent for the *Journal*—this would be her first report. What a weekend it was—starting on Friday night with the First Quartet, finishing Saturday with the Twelfth, and then the finale on Sunday with the Eighth.

The programme had said, "To hear all fifteen is one of the great musical experiences, a little like climbing Everest or walking the Camino." For us it was Everest."

After each concert, Lynn discussed the quartets with formidable knowledge and passion, heightened by the thrill and honour she felt at doing her first interview for the *Journal* with members of the Brodsky Quartet.

As part of this Shostakovich quartet festival, ABC Radio National interviewed Lynn in a programme about Shostakovich's music. Lynn's friend Theresa remembers: "During the interview, Lynn cried. I was listening at home and smiled to myself. It was such an expression of "Lynn." Her intellect and passion were so intertwined. Lynn was embarrassed and told me she wished they had edited out her emotional outburst. I told her that it added to the interview. As a listener, I so felt the passion she had for Shostakovich's music. It came through. I'm sure it would have connected with many listeners."

April 2016—A concert in Melbourne by the ensemble *Selby and Friends*, featuring an excellent performance of *Shostakovich's Piano Trio in C minor; op. 8*. As Lynn's sister Johanne remembers, Lynn leapt up and bounced into the aisle at the end of the trio, cheering and clapping in the sort of exuberant response rarely seen in chamber music concerts. Pianist Kathryn Selby's smile of joy was a delight to see—here was an

audience member who truly appreciated that this performance had gone to the heart of Shostakovich's music.

Lynn was neither a professional musician nor a musicologist, but she was a deeply knowledgeable and perceptive listener. She studied piano as a child, and continued playing for pleasure throughout her life. Johanne remembers that their father introduced his daughters to classical music through buying them annual subscriptions to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra concert seasons. The girls loved attending these concerts. Lynn enjoyed being able to continue passing this musical thread through the generations, teaching piano to her grand-daughter Alice.

Lynn was also profoundly moved by music from other genres, such as the music and social activism of singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie. Lynn loved to get up and dance (wildly, freely) at gigs by her favourite bands. In 2016, she fulfilled a long-held ambition to attend WOMADelaide, where she revelled in the huge mix of musical styles from around the world.

In the 1990s, Lynn became increasingly drawn to chamber music, and she and Johanne shared this passion for many years, attending numerous chamber music subscription transposed from caring daughter to self-motivating party preparer. So IT1 pick this up again on Monday".

Lynn has asked her hairdresser to give her a special "do" for the party

night that will *not* be an “old persons look.” The hairdresser has done her proud, with a funky rock-star look that perfectly matches her typically stylish party outfit and bold jewellery. At the top of the board filled with photos of Lynn and her family and friends through the decades is a big photo of Shostakovich. As her justice); the poignant lyricism of the Romance from *The Gadfly* (Lynn the much-loved, deeply-loving mother and grandmother; the warm friend). Lynn, of course, knew and appreciated every theme.¹

June 2016—Lynns funeral How can one describe the shock and distress felt by all of those who loved Lynn, when we heard that the vibrant woman we had so recently celebrated with was gone? It was a given that Shostakovich’s music must be played at her funeral—the composer who meant so much to Lynn *must* be there with her at the end. A quartet of fine young musicians played the third movement of String Quartet no. 8 and the famous Waltz from Jazz Suite no. 2.

July 2016—Lynns memorial. Around 300 people filled Lynn’s local Town Hall to honour her extraordinary life and achievements, and to give her a big, strong, heartfelt send-off. The community choir that she had sung with for many years joined Lynn’s accordionist friend Dave, performing songs from different aspects of her life: “Women of the Working Class,”² written by Mai Finch for the wives of the striking coal miners in

Thatcher’s Britain (Lynn wrote an acclaimed book about this struggle, and formed series together. After a concert, however, Lynn would often complain to Johanne, saying, “well, that music was all very fine, but it’s



Lynn Beaton, 1946-2016

not as good as Shostakovich! Why don’t they programme more of his music here in Australia?”

June 2016—Lynns seventieth birthday party at a hip bar in the inner-city Melbourne suburb where she lived. Leading up to this celebration, Lynn has settled her mother into a nursing home. A couple of days before the party, she posts an exasperated outburst on Facebook regarding her unsuccessful attempts to get a telephone connected. Theresa, having recently been through similar telephone dramas

with her own mother, offers to call and provide some advice. Lynn’s response: “I’ve daughters Lucy and Chloe explained in their speeches, Dmitri played such an important role in Lynn’s life that he was considered part of the family— naturally he was placed in a position of honour in this display.

When I was asked to create a song to sing at this birthday party, it seemed essential to use only Shostakovich’s music. Four themes were found that suited different aspects of Lynn’s life: the probing, enigmatic DSCH theme found in a number of his works (Lynn the deep thinker); the boisterous Scherzo theme from his Piano Quintet (Lynn the lover of lively conversations, wild celebrations); the driving march from the first movement of Symphony no. 7 (Lynn the relentless fighter for social life-long bonds with these women); Theodorakis’ sublime choral work *Armissi*; and the rousing Chilean solidarity song “El Pueblo Unido.” The lyrics of a song by Si Kahn (sung with great gusto by Lynn at parties) were an eloquent reminder of Lynn’s approach to life:

It’s not what you’re born with
 It’s what you choose to bear
 It’s not how large your share is
 But it’s how much you can share
 And it’s not the fights you’ve
 dreamed of
 But those you really fought
 It’s not just what you’re given
 It’s what you do with what
 you’ve got

Few memorials held in Melbourne could boast such a ringing, full-throated roar of sound as the entire audience rose to raise fists and voices in *The Internationale*. And perhaps this was the first memorial ever to have ended with an exuberant performance of Shostakovich's Waltz from *Jazz Suite no. 2*—our accordionist leading the way around the hall as the choir sang, swirled, and waltzed, sweeping up audience members to join in a final spirited celebration of a life well-lived.

And what a productive and vigorous life it was. Lynn was widely known and respected for her work as a writer, researcher, feminist, and activist. During the tumultuous years of dissent and change in the 1960s, Lynn studied history and politics, and began her lifelong involvement in progressive politics and social movements. She was a tireless advocate for the rights of working women, and researched and wrote extensively in this field. Lynn also wrote major works on labour history, and at the time of her death, she was working on a history of the regional city of Ballarat's Trades and Labour Council. The flag flew at half-mast over Melbourne's mighty Trades Hall building when her death was announced, honouring this warrior for the working class.

Coda—“Real music is always revolutionary, for it cements the ranks of the people; it arouses them and leads them onward.” - Shostakovich (*The Power of Music*, 1964)

Lynn's deep knowledge of the ways of revolution engendered within her a profound empathy for the pain and conflict Shostakovich endured as an artist in Stalin's Russia. She seemed to be able to “get under the skin” of his music, to understand it, feel it, and



Lynn Beaton as a young woman

decades of observing it keenly “from the outside.”

For Lynn truly appreciated the work of musicians. I know from my own personal experience as a musician how valuable it was to talk to Lynn about my work. She was always interested, encouraging, and prepared to engage deeply in discussions about creative issues in new projects—another of her many aspects that will be sorely missed.

But Lynn will be remembered for much more than her work. As her eulogist Andy Blunden said, “For her many friends and family, Lynn was a tower of strength and love—an unflinching opponent of exploitation of any kind, while being the most sensitive, loving shoulder to rest upon that you will ever find; as good a listener as a speaker” Her friend Theresa wrote, “rarely a backseat driver; always driving, with your intellect, passion, laughter, politics, and integrity. You captured so much of the world, and we are all the better for having been part of your journey.” write about it with refreshing insight and appreciation. The *DSCH Journal* gave her the opportunity to bring together three of her great passions: writing, revolution, and chamber

music. She often talked about how privileged she felt to be able to do this work, opening up a whole new exciting chapter in her life. Being able to write about concerts featuring Shostakovich's music, and to interview leading artists about their approach to Shostakovich's music—this was a fascinating joy for Lynn. It meant a great deal to her to be able to enter more actively into this world, after

And yet, throughout her life, she gave so much of herself to so many people and to so many projects that her legacy lives on.

I like to think of Lynn waltzing into the distance with her friend Dmitri— both of them inspiring those who follow them to live life to the full, and to give it your all.

By Jeannie Marsh
(with Theresa Grima, Johanne Willoughby, and Ann Byrne)
Melbourne, November 2016

Notes

1. “Dmitri's Message to Lynn” can be heard at <https://youtu.be/qfIMgXHZz9A>. “Women of the Working Class” can be heard at <https://youtu.be/OjqTb1pNeuw>.