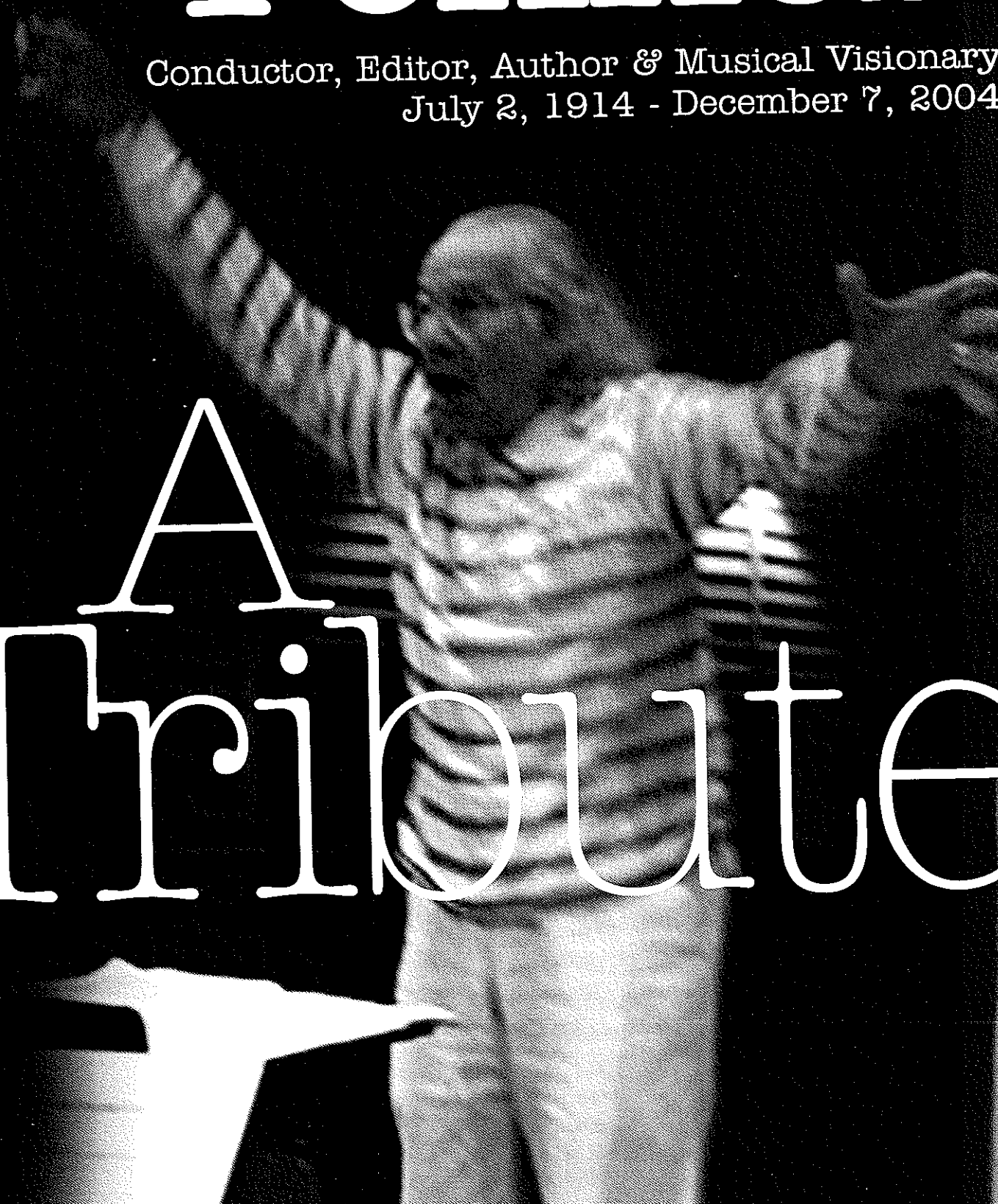


Frederick Fennell

Conductor, Editor, Author & Musical Visionary
July 2, 1914 - December 7, 2004



A
Tribute

Few conductors bring to the rostrum so much energy, elegance, enthusiasm and musicianship as did the late Frederick Fennell, who died peacefully at his home in Key West, Florida, on 7th December 2004. Standing at around five feet, he always signed himself 'ff', and fortissimo was how he lived and worked; it was his huge passion for music of all types that enthused audiences and players alike.

extraordinary ensemble Frederick Fennell had developed.'

RECORDING ARTIST

His most obvious legacy lies in recordings; in May 1953 he cut the first Eastman disc for Mercury with the Eastman Wind Ensemble and over twenty records followed, with a repertoire from Gabrieli and Mozart to Holst, Vaughan Williams, Hindemith, Stravinsky, Copland and the emerging school of American composers, cheek by jowl with marches, circus "screamers" and music of the American Civil War. Many of these have been re-issued on compact discs, and *Stereo Review* named the recording of Grainger's *Lincolnshire Posy* as one of the fifty best of the 'Century of the Phonograph, 1877-1977'.

ORCHESTRA INFLUENCES

As important was his extraordinary musicianship; he brought to the wind ensemble a finesse of phrasing, dynamics and balance normally only found in the orchestral world, and he claimed to have studied conducting with Toscanini, Klemperer, Stokowski, Beecham and others through assiduous attendance at their rehearsals and concerts. His own conducting was athletic, idiosyncratic and charismatic; he was a showman and entertainer, but primarily a musician.

Fennell's association with the Eastman Wind Ensemble ended in 1961 when he left to become Associate Conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony. What should have been an opportunity to continue his wind ensemble work at a professional level quickly turned sour politically, and Fennell returned to academe with the University of Miami. For the next four decades he conducted an enormous range of orchestral and wind ensemble music, making another eighty recordings. In 1984 he became principal conductor of the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra, an association which was to last twenty years up to their appearance at the Chicago Mid-West in 2002; in rehearsal, a youthful eighty-eight year old Fennell leapt onto the podium, greeted his old colleagues, lightly danced for no more than ten minutes through a few bars from the *Divertimento* of Persichetti before disappearing back to the Conference. The result was a scintillating concert performance of typical energy, charm and finesse, an object lesson to all of us on economy of effort and of rehearsal. He was principal guest conductor with Dallas Wind Symphony and in huge demand as conductor and teacher up to his death.

He was undoubtedly the finest wind band conductor since John Philip Sousa, with whom he shared a lust for life and passion for people. Inevitably first at a party and usually the last to leave, this intensity characterises his writings; *Time and the Winds* of 1954 remains one of the best short histories of the wind medium and his articles and letters were invariably witty, perceptive and hard-hitting.

EARLY MARCHING DAYS

His interest in music sprang from playing drum in his family fife and drum corps, and his first conducting experience at the University of Rochester was to form and direct a marching band in 1933 for the football team. The march was to be one of his greatest enthusiasms; he wrote several, edited many more, and conducted them in concert and on disc with a verve and energy which were to be his trademark. Some of his earliest musical experiences had been at the Interlochen Summer Camps and there he played under the legendary John Philip Sousa. These two great conducting personalities dominated the century, and they brought to the band a culture and elegance rare in military band circles. Both loved opera and orchestral music; Sousa's pilgrimages to Bayreuth found an echo in Fennell's brief studies during the thirties in Salzburg. He wrote that following his performance there of Dvořák's 9th Symphony in 1937, he was invited to become conductor of the Mozart Orchestra of Salzburg, a proposal wrecked by the impending Anschluss and his speedy repatriation by the State Department.

PIONEER WORK AT EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

It was his pioneer work at the Eastman School of Music that changed wind music dramatically. Mid-century American symphonic bands were huge, playing transcriptions from 19th and 20th century orchestral repertoire. Fennell's innovatory style of programming was based on the development of an ensemble of up to forty-five players, one to a part, with

flexible instrumentation to meet the varying demands of composers. In 1953 the Eastman Wind Ensemble made its debut. This revolutionary concept of Wind Ensemble, playing original repertoire, meant that for the first time composers could orchestrate their works for a quantifiable musical force, and this led directly to the explosion of fine original music for wind ensemble of the last half century. He himself saw his advocacy of the wind ensemble as a corollary to the work of the symphonic band, not as a threat. His colleagues viewed these innovations with suspicion, and when I first visited USA universities in 1982 on a Churchill Fellowship, to many of the traditional band conductors, Fennell and the Eastman Wind Ensemble were still anathema.

During the past decade he felt that in the USA there has been a move away from his chamber ensemble ideals of the fifties. He wrote to me:

'So much of the recent material is simply ferociously difficult to play and with all that colour and power in the large symphonic band, for which they write, there is an undeniable creative sonic attraction. It will be limited to the big schools, or the small colleges with big bands. The decision seems to be the old one, that bigger is better. Playing and recording *Four Seasons* one to a part was enough for me – and I hope, for Richard Rodney Bennett if ever he hears it.'

AS A TEACHER AND TRAINER

The key to the success of the Eastman Wind Ensemble was in the training and development of his players. The tuba player, Roger Bobo, who left Eastman to join the Concertgebouw, wrote recently:

'For the next 5 years I played in the Eastman Wind Ensemble. During this time we learned the art and techniques of ensemble playing and we learned them at a level that would prepare us for any kind of playing we would encounter in the working musical world. Even today, almost 50 years later, I can listen to the recordings we made during my 5 years of Eastman Wind Ensemble membership and hear what an

Continues over...

END OF AN ERA

His departure from Eastman marked the end of an era and of his greatest contribution to the musical world. With Dallas and Kosei, and in his various guest conducting engagements, he was no longer in total control of the ensemble and of programming, and in recent years he felt marginalized by developments elsewhere.

There is a sadness about some of his letters:

'I still have much to give back as a teacher, as a listener and as a rememberer, and at this point it looks like nobody is interested.'

He wrote to me in 1997 about the work of the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Ensemble:

'The stuff you are doing reminds me of the old Eastman days, the only way to make progress in the wind world. You, as I, see the whole picture, you have the group to try anything, you have the

schedule to control, you have a program in action. That's the old Eastman days... I have the crazy idea that I should come to the RNCM in Manchester just to be there - no conducting. I need to go back to the atmosphere of an academy just to sit there and listen maybe to take part in discussions, but mostly to talk with you about what I can still do

YOUTHFUL VITALITY

Of course, I never took him seriously, and over the last few years the growing demand for his services kept him on the road guest conducting. His energy was prodigious. I remember in Stockholm attending a rehearsal for his beloved *Lincolnshire Posy*. After a gruelling two hours, the concertmaster asked Fred if they could take a break. He gave them twenty minutes, but he sat there on the podium throughout, looking through his score, planning his

strategy, answering questions, anxious to continue.

At the symposium to celebrate fifty years of the Eastman Wind Ensemble, Fred spent a morning in hospital for checkups, missed a rehearsal and so could not conduct the *Gran Partita* of Mozart in the evening gala concert. Instead he sat bolt upright in the corner of the stage, in his tails, as impeccably dapper as ever. But the next morning he was back to full vigour with a huge alumni band in the Robert Russell Bennett *Suite of Old American Dances*.

Last October one of his final engagements was conducting all of the principal ensembles of the University of Minnesota; on the Saturday he directed the National Anthem at a football match in front of a crowd of 60,000. He must have relished the occasion and result, Minnesota 45 - Illinois 0.

Frederick Fennell

beautiful music

from the heart
of England

music for wind orchestra

Eseld Pierce

A Name Perpetual
Grade 4/5 10 minutes

Dominic Muldowney

Dance Suite
Grade 5.5 17 minutes

Guy Woolfenden

Gallimaufry
Grade 5 13 minutes

S.P.Q.R.
Grade 4/5 12 minutes

Illyrian Dances
Grade 4/5 10 minutes

Curtain Call
Grade 4/5 12 minutes

Birthday Treat
Grade 3 3 minutes

French Impressions
Grade 4/5 10 minutes

Rondo Variations
Grade 5 8 minutes

Celebration
Grade 4/5 15 minutes

Mockbeggar Variations
Grade 4/5 7 minutes

Firedance
Grade 4/5 10 minutes

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Maecenas Music

for bands & ensembles
Editor Timothy Reynish

New publications for wind orchestra

Geoffrey Poole

Unfinished Symphony

For Wind Orchestra

Rich tonal Harmony, long-breathed melodies and broad tempi dominate 'a work of two halves', the first one brilliant and ceremonial, the other more delicate and reflective. A gripping but approachable piece with a few challenges, but a gift for bands from good high-school upwards. 14 minutes

Gareth Wood

Spanish Picture

From Three Mexican Pictures

This thrilling finale from Three Mexican Pictures makes for a stunning, accessible piece of theatre. Wonderfully inventive, enormous fun, perfect for the beginning or end of a

STOP PRESS

Adam Gorb's Kosei Wind Orchestra commission,

Towards Nirvana

has won the 2004 British Academy Award for Wind or Brass Music
Send for a perusal score

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of its original publication,
Maecenas is proud to publish a newly engraved edition of

Paris Sketches

Martin Ellerby

Send for a perusal score

... and just published, the 2005 edition of the

Maecenas Wind Bands & Ensembles Catalogue

Send for your copy

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Brendon Le Page: -

I can still remember my first hearing of the Eastman Wind Ensemble on the Mercury Living Presence label. The very fact that Mercury chose to use its cutting edge technology on these recordings is itself eloquent testimony to the quality of performance. The only wind band recordings available to me until then were those of British and European service bands. What a revelation the Eastman group was - and students to boot.

But setting artistic standards of wind band performance is just one aspect of Fennell's legacy. Through his book *Time and the Winds* he plugged the wind band enthusiast into the mainstream of wind music through the history of western art music. Till then, the wind ensemble works of Mozart, Dvořák, Strauss and the rest were the preserve of orchestral musicians, while marches, selections, and just occasionally Holst and Vaughan Williams were the limits of the band musician's diet. This was, at any rate, my personal experience. Fennell's ideas of

programming, his bringing the highest artistic interpretation to the best band works and the best wind ensemble literature to the band musicians gave me a sense that the wind band could and should be capable of the highest level of musical expression.

In 1986 I chased him across the USA from Boston to Interlochen where he was working at the coal-face with a band of rather bemused teens on summer camp. I approached him with trepidation with a proposal to come to South Africa to conduct a band that I hadn't yet formed at a festival which didn't yet exist. To his credit and my everlasting gratitude, he gave me the benefit of the doubt, grasped instantly what I was trying to do, and agreed to the gig. Fred's was the only name that had sufficient international cachet to open the way to attracting the support and funding and media coverage which led to the formation of the first South African Youth Wind Ensemble and the first SA Wind Band Festival, held in Bloemfontein in 1988.

Aged 73, Fred worked those SAYWE kids into the ground every day for five days, and

then partied with the adults in the evenings. He prepared *Lincolnshire Posy* (using the brand new Fennell edition), *Suite of Old American Dances*, and a work which I commissioned from a local composer - Pastoral Suite *Mangaung*. Every hour of his rehearsal was attended by around 50 spectators soaking up the music through his description and explanation. The unbroken line between the Grainger's hearing folksinger's rendition, playing the wax discs and demonstrating the songs to Fennell, and Fennell re-presenting them to us in his inimitable way was very precious to me. The première performance by the SA Youth Wind Ensemble and Fred's address was one of the highlights of my life. Of course, I have many fond memories of the week he was my guest in Bloemfontein, including the occasional idiosyncrasies - when I gave him his fee (pretty substantial) in used US dollars at Johannesburg Airport, whilst being jostled by throngs of Moslems on their annual Hajj, he solemnly licked his fingers and counted every single bill - twice - before zipping the cash into his money belt. He'd earned it!

A TRIBUTE

Frank L. Battisti

My acquaintance with Fred Fennell began in 1953, the year I started teaching at Ithaca High School in Ithaca, New York. Fred had just started the Eastman Wind Ensemble (1952) and he and his ensemble became the models for the conductor I wanted to become and the kind of ensemble I wanted to develop and conduct.

Since Ithaca, NY is only 90 miles from Rochester, I took my high school band students to Eastman Wind Ensemble concerts. I continued to do this until I left Ithaca in 1967. All of Fennell's concerts took place in the huge Eastman Theatre. Most of the time, my students and I made up 95% of the audience. Often Fred would come out to the parking lot after concerts, hop on our bus, greet the students and thank them for coming.

During my years in Ithaca Fred was involved in numerous Ithaca High School Band activities. Every May, on the day before Memorial Day, he would drive down to Ithaca and spend the day rehearsing the band. The repertoire was always pieces that Fred had recorded with the Eastman Wind Ensemble and band members had heard performed at Eastman Wind Ensemble concerts. They were always well prepared and Fred came in and worked his "special magic" on the students. Fred's visits were much anticipated events, the highlight of the year for both the students and me. I can still recall the excitement generated by his visits.

The day of rehearsing always ended with a wonderful banquet, the highlight of which was the presentation of the students' gift to Fred. The gift had to be unique - one that would adequately convey their love and appreciation for Dr. Fennell. A deed to ten square feet of the Gettysburg Civil War Battlefield (purchased from the United States Department of the Interior) was their most unusual gift to Fred. The students were aware of Dr. Fennell's great interest in the Civil War (he had recorded an LP of Civil War music with the Eastman Wind Ensemble). They also knew that land speculators were buying up the great battlefield for commercial development. They decided that a gift that would help preserve the great battlefield would be the perfect gift for Dr. Fennell who cared so much about the American Civil War and this historical site. Fred was surprised, thrilled and pleased!

I sought Dr. Fennell's advice numerous times regarding composers I should commission to write pieces for the Ithaca High School Band. Among those that Fred recommended were Armand Russell (*Theme and Fantasia*) and Alex Wilder (*Entertainment III*). Fred invited composer Alex Wilder and his friend, photographer Louie Ouzer to visit the high school when he was rehearsing *Entertainment III*. It was the start of a wonderful relationship between these two men and the IHS Band. Wilder made annual visits to the high school and would sometimes set poems written by band students to music. I have a number of songs

with music written by Alex Wilder and words by one of my band students. Louie Ouzer, the brilliant photo artist whose photographs are often seen in *The Instrumentalist*, took hundreds of photos, most beautiful close-up photo portraits of band students in rehearsals and performances.

Fred guest conducted the Ithaca High School Band twice. The first time was in Chicago at the 1965 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic where he conducted the première performance of Alex Wilder's *Entertainment III*. Two years later, in May 1967, he conducted Percy Grainger's *Lincolnshire Posy* on my final concert with the Ithaca High School Band. He also conducted my two other ensembles - the Baldwin Wallace College Symphonic Wind Ensemble and the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble.

Fred profoundly affected the development of wind groups and wind literature. He saw a coming repertory for the wind bands/ensembles and was hopeful that band directors would find his wind ensemble concept appealing, interesting and exciting. He sparked the birth of a new type of wind band/ensemble conductor, not modelled after John Philip Sousa, but after Arturo Toscanini and Serge Koussevitzky.

Frederick Fennell was a person of great energy, enthusiasm and generosity. His contributions to wind bands/ensembles and the musical world are immense. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.