



János Sándor
Music Director

Yariv Aloni
Associate Music Director

Dear Friends,

With much sadness we announce that our beloved Music Director, János Sándor, died on Friday, May 14, 2010 at Victoria Hospice, with his family by his side. A memorial was held May 25 at the University Club.

Celebrating the Life of János Sándor



Budapest, Hungary - June 7, 1933

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Victoria, BC, Canada - May 14, 2010

Our hearts are with János's wife Mária, their son Zsolt and daughter Gabriella, and with Yariv Aloni, our Associate Music Director, who has supported János and all of us involved with the GVYO throughout this difficult time, and who will carry János' legacy forward.

We have lost a dear friend, companion and guide. He leaves us an inestimable gift of mentorship, as a musician and as a human being.

We are so grateful to have known him and shared in a life so well and fully lived, and we will do our best to honour him by following his example.

Goodbye Dear János

A memorial for our beloved music director János Sándor was held at the University Club on Tuesday, May 25. It was a full house. Tributes were paid by friends, colleagues, and students, all of whom remembered János for his love of music, his sense of humour, and his generosity of spirit. GVYO and UVic students played chamber music as attendees gathered. János's son Zsolt opened the service and welcomed each speaker to the podium. Tributes were paid by Diana MacDonald of GVYO; Lanny Pollet of the UVic School of Music; GVYO President John Sterk; personal friends Miklos Fischer and Peter Gary; UVic student and GVYO player Aubrey Kelly; and GVYO Associate Music Director Yariv Aloni. Sheila Redhead, Manager of GVYO, read the poem reprinted overleaf. Musicians Rebecca Hissen, clarinet; Ann Elliott-Goldschmid and Sharon Stanis, violins; Yariv Aloni, viola; and Pamela Highbaugh Aloni, cello, performed Mozart's *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings*. Barber's *Adagio for Strings* was played by UVic faculty and members of the UVic Orchestra and GVYO. A recording of Maestro Sándor conducting the UVic Orchestra's performance of Brahms' Symphony No. 3, *Third Movement (Poco Allegretto)*, was played in place of the customary moment of silence. A short film excerpt by Asterisk Productions was presented, showing János conducting his last rehearsal with the GVYO. A photo slide show provided images of János from early childhood onward. János' wife Mária, daughter Gabriella, and son Zsolt offered personal reminiscences, and asked all present to join hands and bid János a heartfelt "Farewell!"

While it is difficult indeed to bid farewell to such a dear friend, those present at his memorial were moved by the tributes made. For those who were unable to attend, or who wish to reflect again on the life of this wonderful man, we reproduce here the tributes paid to János Sándor by his GVYO friends.

From Aubrey Kelly, UVic student & GVYO player:

My name is Aubrey, and I feel incredibly lucky to have worked with János over the past four years as a student in the UVic orchestra, and the GVYO.

János's passion for music was infectious, and inspiring, as was his love for sharing this passion with young people. It was a great joy for him to share knowledge and tools with us, so that we could realize the amazing joys of music-making.

János had wonderful sense of humour, and always had fun in rehearsals. He made jokes, and loved to get into the roles of (often comical) characters – changing his voice, using big gestures, and dancing around. He was never afraid of looking silly to illustrate the character of a piece of music. As a result, the players of the orchestra always had fun. He made us laugh, and feel free, and young at heart.

János was also very compassionate and down to earth. He made an effort to connect with everyone in the orchestra on a friendly level. He would compliment you on your nice haircut, or joke around with you about something. I think that he made everyone feel really comfortable and welcome. And he took great pleasure in seeing camaraderie and fun being had among his players.

He was also very supportive of students. I saw him at almost every student recital at UVic that I

attended over the years. I know that at the recitals that I gave, he came and afterwards came backstage to congratulate me and offer some kind and encouraging words. I'm sure that he did this for most of the students here, and I think I can speak for all of us in saying that it meant so much, coming from this great man.

Between being the amazing musician that he was, being so inspiringly passionate, and just being such a likable person, I think that students felt compelled to push themselves, and realize their potential in orchestra, out of respect and love for him.

As a trombone player, I know that I'll never find another conductor who loves low brass as much as he did. Orchestral trombonists everywhere complain about getting "the hand" from conductors – a gesture which means "play much quieter!" In four years with János, we never got this gesture, but often the opposite! In rehearsals, playing Wagner or Sibelius, we'd be "givin'er", and he'd make eye contact, wiggle his eyebrows, have a huge grin on his face, and after cutting the orchestra off, he'd say, "trombones, it was good, but at the concert, it must be much more!"

János will be missed dearly, but I believe that he will live on in our music, and in our hearts.

From GVYO President John Sterk:

My tribute to János is a personal one as well as a representative one as President of the GVYO and as the volunteer manager and member of the University of Victoria Chorus. János was an inspiration to young and old alike; the orchestra and chorus members exceeded themselves because he believed in them, and if he believed they could play or sing a particular work, they did.

This last point is illustrated by a personal anecdote. In the fall of 1999, my friend Charles Dool suggested I join the University Chorus which was seeking added voices to perform Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* in 2000, a joint performance of the University Orchestra with GVYO. My response to Charles was that I had never sung before and could not read a musical score. He persuaded me to seek an audition with János in any event. I did so and showed up in his office on the bottom level of the School of Music. I told him up front of my inabilities. János, always the gentleman, smiled and proceeded to test the range of my voice, then handed me a score so I could sing along while he played the piano. I struggled mightily, somewhat frustrated. At the end of my feeble performance, János explained that the Mahler was rather a difficult work with more than one bass part, and inquired whether I was up to the challenge. With my affirmative answer, János sat back in his chair and said I should come to the first rehearsal in January. I did so, and 10 years later am still in the Chorus. János believed in a 59 year old -and I have seen that he did the same with young people.

The attributes of János which resonated with me were his manners; he was always civil and respectful. Who in the Chorus can ever forget his GOOD EVENING greeting at the beginning of a rehearsal? As well, he had good sense of humour; witness the dances on the podium at rehearsal when he demonstrated the czárdás or the tango! Or telling us, "that's ok, if you get it the first time I could be unemployed." On the rare occasion where a mild rebuke or caution was needed, it was always delivered more in sorrow than in anger.

János was truly a creator, a magician, who believed in the players. To quote Deryk Barker in his review of the final dance of the GVYO 2006 performance of de Falla's *The Three Cornered Hat*: "*The sight and sound of the evening was surely the raucous climax of the final dance...when Sándor stood triumphantly, arms*



akimbo, baton scarcely moving, confidently allowing his orchestra to play their hearts out" and "So impressive was the orchestra that I feel I can do nothing less than list all of their names below." Remember, both GVYO & the University Orchestra are student orchestras and have a turnover of between 25-40% annually, making the achievement even more laudable.

At the conclusion of his last concert on April 10th, János said the last 15 years were the most happy of his life, working with wonderful people, his colleagues, orchestra and chorus members. He did not consider it work but a great joy. He gained energy from the youthful musicians. János never progressed in his conducting career at the expense of others. He was always friendly and collaborative. I once asked János who his heroes were in life. I might have expected he would list a major composer or conductor; he answered without pause that it was his parents. What a wonderful tribute that was.

Shortly after János went into Hospice, I sent him a note not knowing if the family was able to read it to him. I wanted him to know how much he meant to me. I said in part "*You have had an amazing effect on my development as a human being and as a lover and student of music....I had a love of classical music for over half a century; yet it was not until I met you that I gained the inspiration to study music to learn more about it. Thank you for enriching my life, both musically and as a human being who very much admires you. Your contribution will never be forgotten.*"

János was small in stature but he was a giant among men. I have a vision of him conducting the orchestra of angels and telling them, "Look at me!"

Goodbye, dear János. You will be missed.

From Associate Music Director Yariv Aloni:

I have learned almost everything I know about conducting an orchestra from János. During the 14 years I knew him as a teacher and mentor we often talked about the idea that one should have an “arsenal of different solutions”, as he used to call it, for different problems. If there wasn’t a problem, you just conduct in a certain way that enables the players to give their best by giving them the room to do that; but sometimes you have to, in a split second, change the attitude and the conducting completely in order to solve a problem. I have watched János doing this for the last 14 years and was always amazed how well he knew what to do. This wasn’t only regarding conducting – it was a wholesome attitude towards life. I realized that most learning comes after a long while, after I got to see and be with him for such a long and wonderful time.

My best memory of one of those “solutions” did not, however, come in a musical context – it was after a concert in Haines Junction, Yukon, after the concert where we had shared the conducting. (I also got to ‘live’ his former life as a percussionist; we were short on percussion players and I ended up playing the bass drum alongside Mária, János’ wife, who he asked to play the castanets, and Diana MacDonald playing the triangle part.) We both wanted to have a nice long talk that was almost overdue because of the preparation for the Yukon trip, so after the concert János suggested we go and have a beer. So off we went, to the only bar in town to get our beer and have a nice talk.

As we entered the bar I had a feeling we were on a movie set. There were several people at tables, mostly guys playing cards, and as the two strangers entered they all stopped their conversation and just stared at us. We decided to make a bee-line to the bar and sit on the bar stools. Our bartender, a middle-aged lady with, I kid you not, three teeth, asked us what we will have and when we ordered beer she said she had to put it on a tab, for nobody is permitted to have only one beer! “What are your names?” she asked. We looked at each other, two strangers with foreign names and funny accents, and thought the same thought – which one of us is going to “hit her” first? We weren’t sure what the reaction would be to names like János or Yariv! That was the moment János’ problem-solving ingenuity appeared; he said (with great pride I must add), “I’m John!” and

seeing how it’s done I continued without any hesitation, “I’m Dave!” For the rest of the evening we periodically addressed each other in our new names. We actually had one of the most meaningful conversations that evening – and a LOT of beer too!

I loved János as a father; he was the most wonderful person one can imagine, wonderful in every sense of the word. He became my best friend, my family, my mentor and someone I could always consult when I needed good advice, no matter what was the subject. I still consult him even now. I lost my own father when I was only 12. Amazingly enough János passed away on the exact same day as my dad, May 14th, 35 years later. They are sharing the same day and I find an incredible comfort in that.

Pam, my wife, tells me that she could always tell when I was on the phone with János because she would hear my laughter. The laughter will come back, one day, when the time is right.

A Parable of Immortality

*I am standing upon the seashore.
A ship at my side spreads her white sails to
the morning breeze, and starts for the blue ocean.
She is an object of beauty and strength.
I stand and watch her, until at length
she hangs like a speck of white cloud,
just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.
Then someone at my side says: "There, she is gone!!"
"Gone where?"
Gone from my sight. That is all.
She is just as large in mast and hull and spar
as she was when she left my side,
and she is just as able to bear her load
of living freight to her destined port.
Her diminished size is in me, not in her.*

*And just at the moment when
someone at my side says: "There, she is gone!",
there are other eyes watching her coming,
and other voices ready to take up the glad shout:
"Here she comes!"*

Henry van Dyke

From Diana MacDonald, past manager and GVYO board member:

I am here, as you are, with a full heart: a heart filled with sadness at the loss of our dear friend, János; filled with compassion for Mária and Zsolt and Gabi; filled with gratitude for the privilege of friendship with this distinguished musician and deeply caring human being, and for the legacy he has given us.

János was a consummate teacher - he taught his students, with clarity, patience, irrepressible humour, and above all, kindness, how to live up to the demands of musicianship: to study and prepare and practise; to be aware of the parts played by others; and how all parts fit together to contribute to the whole: all the elements that combine to form a good ensemble. He taught his students to watch and listen - to pay attention.

For over 15 years I watched him guide our youth orchestra players - hundreds of them, from many different backgrounds – some university graduates, a few not yet in their teens. János taught that the contribution of each and every one of them, whatever their level of experience, was necessary to the whole performance. Under his teaching our players grew and flourished: in respect for each other, for their Maestro, and for the music. Under his precise baton great music was made.

As clear as his conducting was his example: he paid attention. He was attentive not only to his scores, which he knew in minute detail, but as well to his players, whom he knew with his acute sense of character. He knew when there was a need for help or advice, and he responded, always considering what was good for the player, and good for the orchestra.

And his example made it clear to his students that every lesson learned under his baton applies not

only to the art of music but equally to the art of living. It showed them – and reminds us - that every vocation invites commitment and every workplace benefits from teamwork; that a healthy community depends on the individual contribution of *each one* of us, and the consideration and respect we have for each other – that our well-being depends on our paying attention.

In János' hands nothing was more effective than a symphony to demonstrate that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Conducting in many lands and many circumstances, he knew that music is an international language communicated across cultural and ideological boundaries.

He also understood that, while he was master of his craft, he was servant of his art. We sensed this when he conducted *Nimrod* or the *Chorus Mysticus* in Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand*, standing motionless on the podium, letting the music itself speak.

Because he knew what humans have known from ancient time: that music takes us beyond ourselves – in mind, heart and spirit - to a new place, transcending our grief, our fear, our powerlessness in the face of loss. There, music works, in its mysterious eloquence, to give meaning to what seems meaningless, to give voice to the inexpressible, to point to a larger reality, helping us to see more clearly the gift of beauty in creation, and to recognize a wholeness we share with János that his death cannot destroy.

To our dear János, whose caring spirit has touched so many of us, we can pay no better tribute than to follow his example.

We are grateful to Asterisk Productions, who have made a short film excerpt of János conducting his last rehearsal with the GVYO. This excerpt, presented at the memorial service, can be viewed at our website: www.gvyo.org

Donations in memory of János Sándor may be made to:
Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra, 1611 Quadra St., Victoria, BC V8W 2L5

The 25th Anniversary Season of the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra
will be dedicated to the memory of János Sándor.

János Sándor: A Life in Music



János Sándor began his musical career as an orchestra musician. He was 18 years old when he was appointed principal timpanist, the youngest member of the Hungarian Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra. During his ten years tenure in the orchestra he studied conducting at the Franz Liszt Academy with Laszlo Somogyi and András Korodi, and at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena (Italy) with Sergiu Celibidache, one of the great conductors of the 20th century. He graduated with distinction. From 1961-75 he was Music Director of the Győr Philharmonic Orchestra and the Opera and Ballet Company in Pecs, both in Hungary. In 1975 he was appointed Conductor of the Hungarian State Opera and was active as opera conductor and as principal conductor of the State Opera Ballet Company. With the Hungarian State Opera he toured extensively, performing in the great Opera Houses of Europe, including Vienna Staatsoper, Covent Garden, Sadler's Wells and La Scala as well as in North America, South Korea and Mexico. János Sándor conducted Hungary's top symphony orchestras and appeared as guest conductor with numerous other orchestras in more than 20 countries, including the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Berlin Symphony, Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra, the Barcelona Symphony and the Italian Radio and Television Orchestra in Milan. From 1986-89 he was Head of the Music Department of the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest.

His interest in young people led to his involvement with many youth orchestras, including festivals in Lausanne, Switzerland, Aberdeen, Scotland and the Festival of Canadian Youth Orchestras in Banff, Canada, where he conducted the Gala concert of the Inaugural Festival in 1974 and was guest conductor for 15 years. A founding member of "Jeunesses Musicales" in Hungary, he regularly conducted the International Orchestra of the "Jeunesses" camp at Pecs.

His recordings include more than 30 records and CDs issued by Hungaroton, Echo, Laserlight, Delta, and Capriccio. His recording for Hungaroton of Bartok's Miraculous Mandarin, Dance Suite and Hungarian Peasant Songs, in the complete edition of Bartok's works, qualified as one of "the best five recordings of the year" in Hi-Fi News, and was awarded the Arthur Honegger Prize of the Grand Prix Nationale du Disque.

Since moving to Canada in 1991, he was guest conductor with the Victoria Symphony, the CBC Vancouver Orchestra, the Edmonton Symphony and the Sonor Ensemble of San Diego. He was featured in the Gala Concert celebrating the opening of CBC Victoria and conducted the CBC Radio Orchestra and combined choirs in a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Orpheum Theatre. He regularly returned to conduct in Europe, especially in Hungary.

In September 1995 Mr. Sándor joined the University of Victoria as Artist-in-Residence, Music Director and Conductor of the University of Victoria Orchestra and Chorus.

Mr. Sándor was appointed Music Director of the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra in September 1996. In his native Hungary he was awarded the "Franz Liszt" prize, the title "Merited Artist of the Hungarian Republic", and "Honorary Life Member" of the Győr Philharmonic Orchestra which he founded as a professional orchestra in 1968.

János Sándor died in Victoria Hospice May 14, 2010 after a battle with cancer fought with courage, dignity, and great humour. He is survived by his wife Mária, daughter Gabriella and son Zsolt.