

A Tribute to KERRY SNYDER

Jürgen Thym

My first encounter with Kerala Snyder dates back to Thanksgiving week 1977, when I was visiting Allen and Sharland Forte in New Haven, Connecticut, with John Rothgeb. A visit to Stoeckel Hall, home of Yale's Music Department was part of the itinerary and through a window in the door of the lecture hall I saw what must have been her trying to keep the attention of her students before Thanksgiving break. The next time (it may have been five or six years later), I *heard* about her from Russell Saunders. Consulting with his colleague David Craighead, he had given his professional life a slightly different direction in the mid-1970s and now emphasized, in addition to teaching, the scholarly side of organ studies. In turn he had considered it his duty to attend conferences and workshops that combined organ performances with musicological approaches. Russell met a small but distinguished group of performers and scholars who convened annually to advance the organ arts, and Kerala Snyder was one who impressed him. "We need to get her to Eastman," he summed up his assessment and added, with one of his occasional lapses into uncouth language: "That lady is hot!"

When Alfred Mann stepped down from full-time teaching at age 70, the musicology department searched for a Baroque specialist in 1987 and, as it turned out, Kerala Snyder was our choice as the best match for our needs. Now Kerry was no longer the distant figure I saw teaching through a window in a door or heard about through another individual: she became a colleague and friend. For eleven years, she was Professor of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music, but she might have held an appointment in the organ department as well, because her presence there was almost as strong. (When Eastman instituted the Affiliate Faculty Program in the mid-1990s, recognizing accomplishments and expertise across departmental boundaries, she became an immediate choice for "affiliation.")

The death of Russell Saunders in 1992 affected her deeply, and the grueling weekly commutes between Rochester and New Haven (and back) took their toll on her time and on her health. Thus, before the century's

end, she informed me that she planned to retire. I regretfully accepted her decision, knowing that the bridges she had built between musicology and organ had already shown results during her years at Eastman. And they would bear fruit, even more than I could have predicted, in the years ahead.

By the time Kerala Snyder began her Eastman years, she had just completed her magnum opus, *Dieterich Buxtehude: Organist in Lübeck*, a life-and-works monograph of the Danish-German composer (1637-1707). The book that soon would garner her the Buxtehude Prize of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck, has, by now, appeared in a second revised edition with University of Rochester Press as well as in a German translation with Bärenreiter. Her earlier work on Rosenmüller, a Baroque composer with significant ties to Italy, had suggested a Southern European trajectory for her scholarly career, but the preparatory work for Buxtehude clearly put her on a Northern path, making her an expert of the Baroque music of North Germany and Scandinavian countries. Kerry's husband, Dick Snyder, may have wished for sunnier research locales in Italy to join her in pursuit of Rosenmüller's musical legacy, but he went along with the less glamorous locations of Northern Germany and Sweden, even joined her in retracing part of Johann Sebastian Bach's journey, on foot, which that icon of Lutheran Baroque music committed himself to from Thuringia to Lübeck at the Baltic Sea to hear Buxtehude perform on the organ and listen to the *Abendmusiken* in the Marienkirche. (Decades later, in the summer of 2014, Kerry's hike was still remembered by the church volunteers selling postcards, booklets, and CDs to tourists visiting St. Mary's.)

Kerala Snyder's insistence on getting to know the sources (it was the era in American musicology when source studies were particularly fashionable) made her spend weeks, if not months, in libraries and archives of Northern Europe. The trail of several important Buxtehude compositions that came down to us as *unica* in the Düben Collection led her to Uppsala, Sweden. Way back in the eighteenth century, Gustav Düben, a court musician in Stockholm, had established the collection, and his descendants, also musicians, had added to it to turn it into what today must be considered one of the most important holdings of North European Baroque music. Erik Kjellberg was one of the first to recognize the significance of the Düben materials, but Kerala Snyder's enthusiasm and embrace of the latest technology led to a transatlantic collaboration of Eastman and Uppsala

students in cataloguing the holdings and making the emerging database available to scholars worldwide.

Kerala Snyder kicked off another synergistic project in the mid-1990s. One day she approached me (and it was not a casual conversation at the Eastman mail boxes but took on a more formal setting) with a report about a conference of organists, musicologists, and scientists she had been attending in Göteborg, Sweden. In great detail, she waxed enthusiastic about the metal components of organ pipes (and somehow a sunken ship off the coast of some Swedish rock islands also played a role), about casting organ pipes on sand and thereby getting a much better sound from the vibrating columns of air, and about how the whole enterprise would revolutionize the way historical instruments would be reconstructed. My head was spinning, but, mild-mannered as I am, I did not want to undercut the energy and enthusiasm she received from the encounter with the Göteborg Organ Art Center, or GOArt for short, spearheaded by a young organist-musicologist in Sweden by the name of Hans Davidsson. This initiative at the University of Gothenburg worked in close cooperation with Chalmers University of Technology, home of leading departments of metallurgy, acoustics, and fluid dynamics. It was wise not to roll logs in her way, as her lobbying efforts had extended to the organ department at Eastman, and soon a whole delegation of Eastman organists, headed by David Higgs and Michael Farris, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to learn more about North German historical organs and GOArt. Within a few years, Hans Davidsson was appointed to the Eastman Faculty. Beginning in 2000, he became the moving spirit behind the Eastman Rochester Organ Initiative (or EROI), resulting in international conferences devoted to aspects of the organ arts, new historical instruments available around the School, international students drawn to the shores of the Genesee River, and vigorous synergisms between performance and scholarship that crossed departmental boundaries.

By the time EROI became a household word at Eastman, Kerry was long retired, but she was present at many, if not all, of its conferences, weighed in with ideas from New Haven, Connecticut, pulled some strings once in a while to advance what she had wrought, and, I assume, must have been pleased by the results: a flourishing of the organ arts in Rochester, New York. The names of Harold Gleason, David Craighead, and Russell Saunders will forever be associated with organ studies at Eastman in

A Festschrift for Kerala J. Snyder

the twentieth century, but I would propose an addition to the triumvirate by including in the Hall of Fame the name of Kerala Snyder, who was instrumental in advancing those studies around the turn of the millennium in ways not so obvious to the outside observer.

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