

When I first came to Bowdoin for my on-campus interview, the driver who was sent to pick me up asked what job I was interviewing for. When I told him, he said, “oh – that’s Elliott’s position - those are some might big shoes to fill – both literally and figuratively!” And then he laughed at his own joke for quite a while longer than I, already nervous about my upcoming on-campus visit, needed to hear. But what he said was absolutely true, and I’d like to spend a few moments talking about those big shoes – not so much the literal size 13s, but the figurative large footprints that Elliott left when he passed away early last December.

The distinctive musical style that Schwartz gradually formed reflected a major aesthetic conflict of the postwar era: a revolt against the proponents of absolute artistic control, represented by such serialists as Pierre Boulez and Milton Babbitt. In reaction to this, Elliott and composers like him rejected the concept of the “perfect masterpiece” and instead sought to write music that reflected the unpredictability of the multi-layered everyday world we live in. As an example, in 1966, four years after his arrival at Bowdoin, Elliott Schwartz composed his *Elevator Music* for “any instruments, and a minimum of 12 players situated on 12 different landings of a 16+ story building.” The form of the piece worked like this: The audience for the piece would be enter into an elevator, which the “conductor” would direct to go to different floors, all of which opened to musicians playing different musical gestures and ideas. Thus, no two performances of the piece would ever be remotely identical. This early composition brought Elliott--and Bowdoin’s Coles Tower--to the international music stage, and it set a life-long tone of wild creativity and humor in his music. The entire world served as Elliott’s musical instrument, and scarcely a day went by when he did not hear a sound that he thought had musical potential, in spite of the fact that anyone else might call it noise. Inspiration could also originate in current events, history, and the people in his life; a simple number, such as the year of

Bowdoin's founding, or the letters of a friend's name, were translated into pitches that provided the basis of an entire composition. Even science inspired him, as in his recent works based on Darwin's theories, which he composed jointly with his late wife, the artist Dorothy Schwartz, (DeeDee) who provided visual art to accompany his scores.

DeeDee, who passed away in 2014, was not only Elliott's high-school sweetheart, but also the long time director of the Maine Humanities Council. Together the two of them formed Maine's premiere arts power couple

In addition to his compositions, Elliott was also a consummate musician--an excellent pianist who knew the musical canon like the back of his hand. Any listener without a similar knowledge simply could not grasp everything that was occurring in his music, which often quoted pre-existing music and through artful, collage-like juxtapositions of these quotes imparted an added layer of meaning. By the time he was named the first Robert K. Beckwith Professor of Music at Bowdoin in 1995, his compositions had earned him an entry in the venerable Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, which notes that "he developed a distinctly eclectic style, employing an idiosyncratic blend of traditional and aleatory notations. References to music of the past emerge from, recede into, or starkly juxtapose radically dissonant and rhythmically fluid textures."

His vast knowledge of the canon, and his broad musical tastes, made him an excellent teacher of classical music literature, and the perfect candidate to author a book on music appreciation, which was adopted in classrooms across the country. In addition, his leading roles in national academic and composers' organizations gave him the opportunity to befriend and work with a large number of American composers, thus providing the foundation for his book on American music of the 20th century. Musical styles during that time were more diverse than they

had ever been, and included everything from tightly organized serial music, to highly improvisatory music and even neo-romantic music, yet Elliott was at home with all of them, and taught them with enthusiasm. His most enduring legacy to Bowdoin may be that his many composition students over the years learned to accept and understand a huge array of creative musical impulses without bias.

Although Elliott had visiting positions at many other institutions during his time at Bowdoin, including the University of California at Santa Barbara, Ohio State University, and Cambridge University, he continued to come back to teach in the liberal arts atmosphere that he enjoyed so much. He entrusted his music not just to professional musicians, but also to amateur students of the liberal arts, with the expectation that their broad creativity would reveal new and valuable perspectives of his music. On the one hand, he sought beauty in his compositions, as witnessed by his hours of work on the voicing of a single major chord at the end of a piece for the Portland Symphony; on the other hand, he wanted his music to stimulate the intellectual curiosity that we hold in such high regard in the liberal arts. Along with Elliott's openness, optimism and good humor, this celebration of music and the mind is what we will miss most in his passing.

Elliott loved the liberal arts atmosphere, and entrusted his music not just to professional musicians, but also to amateur students, with the expectation that their broad creativity would reveal new and valuable perspectives of his music (something that we celebrate today).