*Remarks at the dedication of the Sterling Beckwith Studio, York University, 19 March 2007*

This is really quite an unusual event.

- MONEY is what universities usually name rooms or buildings for.
- Or if not money, to show their indebtedness and subservience to POWER.
- Or in rare cases, out of respect and admiration for some poor departed soul, who probably wasn't treated all that well in life.

For whatever reason, it was decided to place my name on this spacious new classroom, even though:

- I gave NO money toward its construction;
- I do not represent or wield ANY kind of political or administrative power;
- I remain stubbornly alive and, despite the advancing years, still kicking.

(I did have something to do with acquiring the lovely tracker-action Baroque organ you just heard, and am grateful to its builder, Karl Wilhelm, for his devoted work in restoring it to playing condition in its new home, after so many years of neglect.)

There are a few other unusual things about this gathering. Although we are happy to welcome one of Canada's most distinguished composers (who happens to bear the same surname as mine), there are many people here who do NOT belong to the Music Department of this or any other institution. In our midst I can see: a famous Canadian sculptor, a pair of Anglican divines from Shakespeare's hometown, a historian or two, a Renaissance scholar, a filmmaker, a financial planner, a child psychologist, a sociologist from Owen Sound, several major painters and printmakers, and a variety of academics from other fields. Even a university president must feel honoured to appear at a York occasion that can attract such a diverse group of highly talented people.

I certainly do too; and it makes me realize how little this event has to do with me personally. It is not just to congratulate or reward one bemused elderly gent that so much energy, talent, and goodwill is assembled in this room today. Music, the art and the practice of music, is really what we have come together to honour and to celebrate. We are all here to affirm Music's necessary, if sometimes problematic, existence as a flourishing, fully accredited discipline within this large modern urban university; and also, to support and encourage its survival as a living, civilizing force, not just for a chosen few, but for the entire York community and beyond.

York now has at last some teaching and practice spaces built with Music students in mind, spaces they can call their own. True, a university music building without a music library is a rarity even in Canada, and not exactly the best match for the kind of integrated program our faculty had been developing here. But despite the lack of promised soundproofing in their offices, most agree it is an improvement over the various makeshift accommodations they put up with for so long.

It's too bad, though, about the stopgap performing and practice spaces Music built over the years in other buildings all across campus. In order to justify this new building, all of them had to be given up, and they are being expensively converted so as to destroy their usefulness for any but the most ordinary academic purposes. Losing them was a blow to those of us who hoped to see Music recognized not just as another separate academic specialty, but as a potential contributor to every York student's experience. We applaud President Naylor of UofT for insisting that student-animated musical activities, whether formal or informal, should be as important an ingredient of a healthy university life as athletics or computing or socializing, even for those who choose other fields of study and inhabit other zones of this far-flung and ever-expanding campus. Who knows—perhaps York's new President will eventually agree?

I'm only allowed a couple of minutes for these remarks; so I want to leave you with just one bit of avuncular advice: Creativity, WITHOUT Criticism, isn't worth much.

Every working artist in any medium knows the huge importance of continual self-criticism, at every stage of conceiving and producing a work of art. We all strive to become better artists, and that means learning all we can from others, from our contemporaries as well as from an ever-deepening acquaintance with the best achievements of the past. It also means having the courage to admit our shortcomings and mistakes, and being open to views and opinions with which we may disagree.

The people who run academic institutions these days don't always understand this. Often, they design elaborate administrative hierarchies and stage carefully scripted meetings so as to insulate themselves from ever having to hear a critical word about their own or their institution's performance. At the same time, they never miss a chance to proclaim the merit of the university as society's last bastion of untrammeled argument and the free exchange of views. The resulting general decline in critical thinking and writing should be no surprise. Have you noticed a growing tendency to enforce conformity with the instructor's views, even in so-called liberal arts courses? Do people now routinely give standing ovations at concerts, whether or not they are merited? And how often do we see world leaders nowadays move to suppress or punish those who dare dissent from their policies?

Creativity WITH Criticism would require artists who are not afraid to measure themselves and their teaching aginst the best, but who support their colleagues' work as well as their own, and who willingly help to improve and strengthen the community they work in. Is that asking too much?

For today's faculty members, faced with ever-increasing demands in the classroom and with skewed hiring and tenure priorities that do little to encourage the more demanding and transformative kinds of teaching, no doubt it's easier just to keep mum, stay out of trouble, and be grateful for small favours. Needless to say, that is NOT what I would recommend.

To be sure, when our cultivated awareness leads us to critique what is being done by those in authority, just because we are able to imagine how it could be done better, that can be a risky business, if not downright unpatriotic. Yet some would say such critical imagination is what artists ought to be particularly adept at applying, and is perhaps just what a serious Fine Arts Faculty should be expected to contribute to the rest of society.

Music is a collaborative art, deeply enmeshed in the wider cultural contexts to which it everywhere belongs. To understand it and become participants in its history, a wide range of knowledge and experience beyond the practical knowhow of musicmaking is essential. Nothing could be more misguided, it seems to me, than to separate those who are kept busy "creating" music from those who pursue critical or cultural studies, into two mutually exclusive streams or camps. It takes BOTH kinds of training— practical skill informed by critical awareness, and cultural knowledge enlightened by hands-on experience—to produce good artists AND good critics. And where better to combine them than within a university environment, where the needed intellectual and cultural resources are so abundant, so diverse, and so easily drawn upon?

Such schooling is not easy to find, even in North America, and is rarer still in Europe or Asia. Nor is it easy to manage, without a great deal of painstaking negotiation as you seek to find the right balance and the right mix for each level of each discipline. Still, one must hope that this studio, this building, this institution will continue to exploit to the fullest the advantages of its cosmopolitan location, and remain committed to welcoming the broadest, deepest, and most challenging kinds of teaching and learning in all the arts—with music, as always, leading the way.

Thank you all very much for coming.