

# The Harvard Crimson

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## Woody

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NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED July 22, 1969



Oh may I join the coir invisible

Of those immortal dead who live again

In minds made better by their presence...

So to live is even:

To make undying music in the world. **George Eliot**

AT ANY GIVEN time Harvard as plenty of learned scholars, but precious few transcendent teachers. It is the latter who give Harvard its special character and who enable the College to make its truly indelible impact on students over the years. The do so not only through what and how they teach but also through what and how they teach but through what they are--towering personalities.

The departed among that select company--which includes such noble figures as Bliss Perry, Theodore Spencer, Zechariah Chafee, Perry Miller, and Raphael Demos--was increased by one with the death last Friday of Professor G. Wallace Woodworth. He was--and preferred to be--known, however, simply as "Woody," just as another Harvard giant, Charles T. Copeland, had been universally known to earlier generations as "Copey."

Harvard as ad music in its official curriculum for a little more than a hundred years. In all that time the Music Department as had no other teacher so great as Woody. Yet his undergraduate training was not in music but in history. Perhaps it was this shift from one field to another tat accounted in part for his deepest concern: the musical education of the amateur, the non-specialist. Just as Talleyrand proclaimed that war is much too serious a thing to be left to military men, Woody was convicted that music is much is too important a thing to be left to its professionals. So the bulk of his four decades of teaching was directed at non-concentrators--through the introductory survey Music 1, which attracted hundreds every year, or his more topical and specialized courses. This concern for the layman led him to tape a course on the history of the symphony for nationally syndicated educational television, and to broadcast a weekly illustrated discussion in preparation for the Boston Symphony concerts, which won an award as the best radio program in the humanities.

Woody believed, too, in more than the importance of teaching people how to listen. He knew tat amateurs could be taught to *make* music--and make music well--through singing. As conductor of the Harvard Glee Club and Radcliffe Choral Society for more than tree decades, e elicited a level of performance that made these institutions world-renowned--and he did this without any condescension to singers of concessions to difficulty. Despite the fact that he had, as a Harvard undergraduate, been turned down by the Glee Club for having a poor voice, he became the greatest choral conductor in the country--a fact signalized four year ago wen he was chosen director of the First International University Choral Festival.

**HIS MOST** striking quality was an absolutely irresistible enthusiasm, apparent from the podium, over the airwaves and in the classroom, and possessed to a degree unsurpassed by anyone else. He might be hearing or conducting a piece for the thousandth

time, but he had the gift of making us feel tat he was encountering it for the first time and that it was worth encountering.

In 1945 Woody asked his friend the late great Lucien Price to address the Glee Club's annual banquet, Mentioning some powerful music, Price added, in that war year, "Although this world may be no great shakes, the future problematical, and no telling what may become of us, one thing is certain--so long as there is such music in the world, there is always that the world can do to us." Woody's career. right through our war-riven 1960's , was testimony to that view of music's potency.

Unshakeable was his faith in music. Unshake-able was his faith in youth. His students and singers, Woody wrote, "have strengthened my faith and given me my best moments." Reciprocally, we must add, woody gave untold thousands of us some of *our* best moments.

We wish Woody might have finished his labors,. But then it is impossible to picture so energetic and zestful a person as Woody basking in retirement. He probably would have chosen to be still in full harness at the end. And he would have reminded us mourners of the title of that cantata by his earthly god Bach, which he loved, performed , wrote about, and recorded: "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit."

We join many other college generations in giving thanks for this supreme teacher, supreme conductor, supreme human being--G. Wallace Woodworth, James Edward Ditson Professor of Music, B.A., M.A., Mus. Doc., Litt. D. He was all of this--triumphantly. But most important, was Woody. His favorite novelist, Joseph Conrad, once wrote that "a man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reasons of respect or natural love." In Woody's case, it was both.

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