



a recital in music, meter, and prose
February 13, 2009

8:00 pm
T. Earl Hinton Music Hall
Wright Music Building

School of Music
Middle Tennessee State University



serenade for Lucy Strickland

program

Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978):
Trio for Violin, Clarinet and Piano (1932),
Andante con dolore, molt' espressivo

Todd Waldecker, clarinet
Andrea Dawson, violin
Lynn Rice-See, piano

Wendell Berry (1934-)
"The Peace of Wild Things"

Amy Stegall Swartz, reader

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 55, No. 2

Lynn Rice-See, piano

Mary Oliver (1935-)
"Song"

Russell Zeidner, reader

"In Lucy's Words"

Rachel Strickland, speaker

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1663-1764)
Gavotte and Six Doubles

William Yelverton, guitar

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955):
"Sunday Morning"

Charles Dean, reader

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
Allerseelen, Op. 10, No. 8
Morgen! Op. 27, No. 4
Zueignung, Op. 10, No. 1

Stephen Smith, tenor
Lynn Rice-See, piano

"Speaking of Lucy"

Ted LaRoche, speaker

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Cello Suite No. 3 in C

Prelude
Sarabande

Xiao-Fan Zhang, cello

E.B. White (1899-1985):
"Natural History"

Charles Dean, reader

Carl Reinecke (1824-1910)
Trio for Piano, Oboe and Horn, Allegro moderato

Laura Ann Ross, oboe
Angela DeBoer, horn
David See, piano

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

by Wendell Berry (1934-)

Song

There is so much communication and understanding beneath and apart from the substantiations of language spoken out or written down that language is almost no more than a compression, or elaboration—an exactitude, declared emphasis, emotion-in-syntax—not at all essential to the message. And therefore, as an elegance, as something almost superfluous, it is likely (because it is *free* to be so used) to be carefully shaped, to take risks, to begin and even prolong adventures that may turn out poorly after all—and all in the cause of the crisp flight and the buzzing bliss of the words, as well as their directive—to make, of the body-bright commitment to life, and its passions, including (of course!) the passion of meditation, an exact celebration, or inquiry, employing grammar, mirth, and wit in a precise and intelligent way. Language is, in other words, not necessary, but voluntary. If it were necessary, it would have stayed simple; it would not agitate our hearts with ever-present loveliness and ever-creeping ambiguity; it would not dream, on its long white bones, of turning into song.

by Mary Oliver (1935-)

Sunday Morning (excerpt)

She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
Before they fly, test the reality
Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"

...

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find. . .

...

We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

by Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Natural History

The spider, dropping down from twig,
Unfolds a plan of her devising,
A thin premeditated rig
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,
In cool descent and loyal hearted,
She spins a ladder to the place
From where she started.

Thus I, gone forth as spiders do
In spider's web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken thread to you
For my returning.

by E.B. White (1899-1985)

In Lucy's Words

Rachel Strickland . 13 February 2009

When we were children, our parents intended that we should be seen and not heard. At times that I was not rehearsing stealth disappearance—teaching myself how to tiptoe without letting floor boards creak or to read by flashlight without rustling the bed sheets—there were opportunities to listen in speechless rapture as our mother and her friends constructed, populated, furnished, and reapportioned entire worlds through breathtaking feats of extemporaneous conversation.

For anyone drilled as Rocky and I were in the rhetoric of reticence, Lucy's is a hard act to follow.

Furthermore, every woman has discovered for herself that the formation of personal identity originates in an ordeal of differentiating herself from her mother. At the time growing up when I floundered in this daughterly identity crisis, I confess that I resolutely resisted numerous maternal advisories—especially those that regarded posture, or her peculiar hypothesis that foundation garments would forestall effects of gravity and age on the female anatomy, not to mention the astonishing proposition that I ought to hold myself accountable for expectations of my behavior that occurred to random strangers. In time I accumulated appreciation for such gifts of insight that Lucy had sought to bestow. Years after fleeing the nest, I once thanked her for having troubled to expose me to the virtues of genteel southern manners. I expressed this, or so I thought, as a compliment. My mother rolled her eyes. “You are a resourceful person and you do have some accomplishments to your credit. But one thing you *never* learned was good manners.”

My own allergy to telephones was not acquired genetically. Indeed Lucy was happy to hold up both sides of the conversation once she resigned herself to the sorry fact that her daughter had no disposition for the art of idle chatter. In the weeks after Lucy's death my brother confided that he especially missed their evening phone ritual. “She was thrilled whenever I thought to call, yet I never needed to say very much because I could count on her to monopolize the talking,” he explained.

As the pace of her gait slowed, Lucy grew increasingly loquacious. “My ears are getting tired,” was her polite way to cut off someone who chattered for too long. She also reported to us that “print is getting smaller” and “my hearing is getting slower.” Sudoku are not mathematical puzzles, she corrected my partner Russell. “They are eye puzzles.” As for faulty recollection of events and people's names, such as develops with longevity, “Well every now and then they wash up on the shore,” Lucy remarked with an air of fresh discovery. Her intelligence and humor, as she fended off the perils of old age, were startling.¹

¹ This sentence lifted from John Updike's essay “Mother” in the collection *Odd Jobs* (Knopf, 1991).

In my own trials and errors, language has consistently posed a series of trapdoors and trick mirrors, or, in other words, it's the treacherous oil slick on that surface where consciousness keeps stumbling across reality. For Lucy—to the contrary—language was the key that secured a rational ordering for affairs of the cosmos, imparting sense as well as consequence, while it also unlocked mysteries of the human psyche. She employed language with skill, precision, and enormous self-assurance. It was the thread that she spun for finding her way through the puzzle of experience and for connecting the dots in her map of understanding.

The stroke was cruel to rob Lucy's gift of speech. At first I harbored a delusion that we could transcend functional limitations of the vocal apparatus, and figure naturally an alternate way of communicating. "My goodness," she replied with only her lips. She made mighty efforts to vocalize, struggling to form words and link syllables into phrases that we might understand. We played 20 Questions and counting with fingers. "Keep trying," she whispered when we expressed frustration and regret for failing to comprehend.

Lucy had been a prodigious correspondent. For years she faithfully dispatched two letters a week, and that only counts the ones she wrote to me. During phases of my life when the itinerary was uncertain or my whereabouts were in flux, it was understood that maintaining a post office box took precedence over securing and affording housing.

When speech failed Lucy in the final weeks, I went about unearthing several small caches of letters that I had squirreled away, and I proceeded to peruse them for any clues that might help dispel the silence.

Here are some things that Lucy wrote:

...

In September 1968 I departed for college. A couple of weeks later my mother mailed this note:

I'm sorry not to hear from you for all those people who ask—"What do you hear from Rachel?" The second most common comment I have lately is, "My, Lucy, how good you look." That's nothing to do with your being away, though. I miss you.

When I was disappointed in kindergarten I said, "I want to learn some hard knowledge." Do you feel you're getting to it at last?

Much love, Mother

That same autumn, 1968, a young professor in the history department, Jim Leonard, was killed in a tragic car accident, leaving a dependent wife and two small daughters on their own. Lucy wrote on November 16:

. . . You may wonder how I can be so matter-of-fact about all of these heart-rending things, and I do too. But somehow the only thing you can be is matter-of-fact.

. . . I am here to report that at twice your age and more the intensities of life are still teaching me a lot. . . One thing I have observed in all my heart-rending encounters this fall is that the people who try hardest to express themselves, who stay nearest the surface, are the healthiest ones emotionally. I would make the observation further that those who practice this most often then have more to offer others. If you find an exception to this near at hand and want to say I'm wrong, stop to think whether the one you mean is just talking or *really* trying to clear away the debris and see the truth.

May 12, 1969

If you were serious in your beatification of "Mother Love" (so kindly for Mommy day) you must realize that what you have ever seen of this in me (or in other mothers perhaps) is simply the eternal, pure, unselfish Love peering out. Most of the time my loves are very human—blaming and claiming, both. When the state of waiving blame and claim is reached not by natural instinct (as in a Mother) but by self-abnegating effort on anyone's part—then we are close to what God intended. The beauty of this is that there are so many signposts and pushes toward this that it *is* sometimes possible.

October 21, 1969

The description of your feelings after the Moratorium day was interesting and what I would have expected. It was very impressive that so many people, young and old, expressed themselves so quietly but firmly, with intelligence as well as emotion. Nixon may have said he paid no attention . . . but I think the weight of opinion even at the top echelon is shifting very clearly and I think Nixon's policies will be affected.

Much of your problem expressed goes back to the thing that has been concerning me most in a philosophical way in recent months—that is the dichotomy between 1) actions and interactions between individuals and 2) social or group activity. It's always necessary to start at "love thy neighbor as thyself" and to broaden the word neighbor as far as it will extend—that is to say, to all mankind. But it's obvious that the expression of that love must be different in the one-to-one, I-thou, situation than in those that involve others in groups or even in the abstract.

. . . The individual, the human, is most himself by himself, yet somehow not fully human alone. This is part of the paradox I'm trying to see into.

March 1, 1992

I have been thinking recently, without developing the thought well, that my thinking processes are frequently subconscious, that they are circular—or, better, not linear—and that it is very hard to develop a set of thoughts linearly in my head—something a lawyer needs to be able to do easily. I do find that prior thought and concern over some time equip me to speak extemporaneously on a specific subject, in a way that has a logical pattern, ideas and connections welling up when they are needed. I never have used verbal dictation for letters or memos — and that might have been good practice. But in reading an essay by John Updike yesterday, I find my thought and condition echoed by E.B. White, subject of an essay in Updike's *Odd Jobs*: "I always write a thing first and think about it afterwards . . . because the easiest way to have consecutive thoughts is to start putting them down." Now, is this true of Updike, E.B. and me or of everyone or what?

I am enjoying this collection for several aspects of it. Here's an Updike quote: "Few things are harder. . . than to get to know one's mother as a person—to forgive her, in effect, for being one's mother."

I have mentioned that I was not the only beneficiary of Lucy's correspondence. My brother and my niece and countless cousins and friends occupied their own privileged positions in her mailing list. This letter dated March 10, 2000 was posted to the Daily News Journal:

To the Editor:

What a glorious picture of spring by Intintoli you published yesterday! Thank you. I'm sending the clipping to my most distant daughter (in California) with pride.

Unfortunately the caption was not on a par with the photo—for two reasons. It illustrates the frequent errors in fact or spelling or grammar that plague the print media—including your newspaper. And, really worse, it refers to the beautiful magnolia soulangeana (or Japanese or tulip magnolia or other more technically correct term) by a wrong name that may well increase our epidemic of Bradford pears about town. The Bradford pear in itself is a rather handsome, formal tree that, in my opinion, has its place in limited settings in singles or pairs and coupled with other trees or shrubs. But it lacks the grace and artistry of plantings of other early cherries and pears, and the rows of them all around town show a singular lack of imagination on the part of those who plant them in multitudes.

and an email dispatch to me on December 22, 2001:

Thanks again for your call. On such occasions I talk too much—or maybe I should say I don't listen enough. You were telling me that sunrises get later for a while after the shortest day, and I said that Wade Gilbert explained that to me. But I didn't get the explanation from you, which I have forgotten. It isn't as simple as sunsets getting later either, is it? I hope your supply of candles is adequate to keep you going through this dark night. . .

Speaking of Lucy

Richard F. (Ted) LaRoche, Jr. 13 February 2009

First, I would like to thank Rachel and Rocky Strickland for inviting me to say a few words about an extremely close, personal and family friend—their mother, Lucy Strickland. Of course, the LaRoche family and the Strickland family have had intertwined lives since our parents moved to Murfreesboro in late 1949. I have also had the opportunity to speak during this week with family members and friends and, of course, benefited from the wonderful obituary which Rachel finished at 2:00 am the morning it went to the paper. Finally, the five hours of MTSU's Gore Center interviews with Lucy—three hours conducted in 2005 and two hours in 2007—were invaluable.

I have known Lucy and Roscoe Strickland since I could first talk, and they always spoke to me and with me as if I were an adult. When, in 1959, I started Central High School several MTSU students came to start a debate club. My good friend Sidney Garrison and I attended that session along with a number of other people, all of whom are still friends. The soon-to-be debate coaches told us that we should prepare for our first session by thinking about what I now know to be the old debate chestnut “Was Jesus a man of action or a man of thought?” After that meeting I immediately went to the Strickland home to ask Lucy's advice and I distinctly remember her demanding of me, “All right, which position do you want to defend?” I am taking that dichotomy for the framework of my remarks today and would like to first defend the theme that Lucy was a woman of thought.

Lucy initially took Latin, then added French in prep school, continuing both through high school and college. She majored in math and graduated with that degree from Randolph-Macon and was working on her master's at the University of North Carolina when she met her husband-to-be. Lucy recalls, “I knew that if I simply spent a summer in France I could be fluent in French but then I met Roscoe and that was the end of that.”

After marrying Roscoe, starting a family and moving to Murfreesboro, by 1957 her mind needed additional challenges and when asked by Dean Kirksey whether she could perhaps teach some MTSU math courses, she recalls, “I liked that idea very much, although I started at the lowest of the low. . . . After a year, I approached the new president of MTSU, Quill Cope, and asked, ‘If I attended Vanderbilt and finished my master's degree, could I have a full time professor's position?’ . . . Dr. Cope told me quite directly that he was looking for more Indians rather than chiefs and wasn't interested at all in my increasing my qualifications.” Needless to say, Lucy turned her energies elsewhere.

One of her new directions involved researching and drafting the new Murfreesboro League of Women Voters' booklet describing inner workings of the Murfreesboro/Rutherford County

government. This took much reading plus attendance at many meetings, and she ended up single-handedly writing the entire book. She says in her Gore Center interview that she notices in yearly editions of the Voters' Guide that most of her language remains unchanged. She also recalls that while putting it together in those pre-computer days it became so messy that Roscoe banned it from the house—she ended up carrying it in the trunk of her car everywhere.

As her children matured, Lucy continued to read, listen to music, and she worked at understanding poetry. She additionally became a self-taught botanist focused on Middle Tennessee plants and an accomplished amateur astronomer. In 1972 she and Roscoe moved to Buena Vista, Virginia, where Roscoe became the President of Southern Seminary. While there, her restless mind learned that Washington & Lee Law School was but eight miles away and that it had admitted its first woman in 1972. Thereupon she resolved to go to law school and was admitted to the second coed class, where she was one of five women. She said it was difficult at first, remembering that the bulletin board was too high for her to read with her bifocals and she had to ask the young students to translate for her. Ultimately, however, she became “one of the boys”—a situation that lasted until she was practicing in Hillsboro, North Carolina. As she recalls, it was a judge in Durham who called everyone in the court room “Mister” except when he referred to her and he always called her Lucy. Needless to say, she avoided that judge where possible.

My second thesis is that Lucy was a woman of action. When MTSU Professor Charlotte Allen was contacted by the Nashville Chapter of the League of Women Voters and mentioned that organization to Lucy, Lucy immediately became the co-founder and first president. I've already mentioned how she wrote their first publication. Lucy recalls, “Some ladies in the Murfreesboro DAR thought we were ‘pink’—that meant trouble back in those days. Some of these women actually joined the League so they could make sure we weren't teaching communist doctrines.” While working on the Voters' Guide, she and the other women learned of many inequities in local government. She points out that there were at that time 54 “Squires,” or Justices of the Peace, who ran the county. She and the other League women referred to these men as “squares.” Although there were 54 representatives, only eight were from the city which had almost half the county's voting population. They learned the Rutherford County School Board was even worse—there were thirteen men and only (she recalls) one and a half from the City of Murfreesboro.

As they started attending the School Board meetings, the board members became very uncomfortable with their presence and soon these League women would appear at a room for a scheduled meeting only to learn that it had been rescheduled or was being held at a different location. Lucy also recalls that the “men wouldn't stand up or relinquish chairs” and the women would have to stand around the walls. Another time while attending a Zoning Board meeting where they were requesting the city to impose stronger building codes, one of the members, who was a big rental property owner in town, stood up and left the room to deny a quorum. As he left, he said, “If you are going to take the position that my tenants have to have better housing, why I'll just go to the Mardi Gras.”

Lucy and Roscoe soon realized that the inequities needed to be challenged and agreed to serve as lead plaintiffs in a seminal lawsuit which was brought under the name “Strickland versus Burns,” Burns being the name of the Chairman of the Rutherford County School Board. Of course, they needed a lawyer so Lucy and other women in the League started raising money. She says she was told on several occasions by educated Murfreesboro men that they didn’t even think women should vote. She also recalls (and I haven’t verified this) that when they first moved to Murfreesboro, husbands and wives were allowed to enter the voting booth jointly. Lucy says she would never go there with Roscoe. After the Trial Court ruled that the constitution was violated by Rutherford County’s improper representation, Lucy took it upon herself to draw and define the boundaries for the new school districts. Of course, I am sure that that didn’t have anything to do with the fact that her good and close friend, Eska Garrison, ran for and was elected to one of the newly designated city seats.

So we see that Lucy was both a woman of thought and a woman of action, but what do we call such a person? Eska Garrison told me that she believed Lucy to be a “Renaissance Woman”—accomplished in all that she did. But I would suggest that this Lucy that we all love is even more than a Renaissance Woman for she, above all else, was a friend of all she met, always giving more of herself in the friendship than was expected. Again, Eska Garrison had a great line—“Lucy had a talent for friendship.” As Lucy mentioned in her interviews, “The people you know while raising your children have a bond with you—they become like family.” But I think the most telling story about Lucy’s value of friendship is found in her self-written paragraph in her 50th Randolph-Macon reunion book. “I do not define myself as a wife or as a mother or as a lawyer or as a volunteer or a committee person, or whatever. If something could best describe me, I hope it would be my friendships, some going back more than these 50 years. Many of these friends are far distant or dead but it does not change to me the sustaining power of these relationships.”

Lucy, we hear you.