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Author(s): Claire Brook

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Tribute to Paul Henry Lang (1901-91)

CLAIRE BROOK (NEW YORK)*

Paul Henry Lang, distinguished author, scholar, teacher, editor, and critic, died peacefully in his sleep at his home in Lakeville, Connecticut on September 21, 1991. He was ninety years old. To some of you, he is remembered and loved as teacher, friend, and irrepressible raconteur; to many, he is known as the author of *Music in Western Civilization*, a fascinating book in the grand manner, innovative in its time, and perhaps now a bit musty and factually out-of-date, but still a beacon that illuminates cultural history; to the youngest of you, he may only be a name – one of the last surviving founders of the American Musicological Society, an *eminence grise* from another era.

Paul Henry Lang was born in Budapest in 1901. He attended the Budapest Academy of Music, where he became a competent bassoonist and conductor. Fascinated by music history, he went to Paris to study at the Sorbonne with André Pirro. In 1928, he was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship that brought him to the United States for further study. Always the gifted and impatient linguist, he perfected his command of English by regular afternoon attendance at Western movies.

Since no advanced degrees in musicology were available in the United States at that time, he earned his doctorate in French literature and philology at Cornell University in 1934, his subject, French opera. He taught at Vassar College, at Wells College, and, finally, at Columbia University, where he remained for thirty-six years, and trained several generations of scholars.

As editor of *The Musical Quarterly* (from 1945 to 1973), succeeding Gustave Reese, he enhanced that journal's international reputation by inviting contributions from scholars in other disciplines and opened its pages to discussions of contemporary music.

He succeeded Virgil Thomson as chief music critic of the New York Herald Tribune, a position he held from 1954 to 1973, bringing to that task a historical background and rigorous musical formation all too rare in American journalism.

From 1941, when *Music in Western Civilization* was published by W. W. Norton, until his death, he served as editorial advisor to that publishing house. He was the intellectual godfather of its music list: he persuaded Manfred Bukofzer to leave his customary bailiwicks and write about Baroque music; he introduced the name of Alfred Einstein to the Norton editorial board; he convinced Donald Grout to write a one-volume survey of Western music. He continued persuading, introducing, and convincing and helped make Norton one of the leading publishers of music books in the English language.

* Obituary read at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Palmer House, Chicago, Illinois: Nov. 9, 1991. I am very grateful for the permission to print this very personal statement. (R.F.).

In paying loving respect to his memory today, I would like to linger very briefly on one particular area of this multi-faceted man's accomplishments, the area that will guarantee his immortality: Paul Henry Lang, the teacher.

I mentioned that in his years as Professor of Musicology at Columbia University, he trained many generations of scholars. In the obituary printed in the New York Times, Richard Taruskin, Neal Zaslow, Rose Subotnik, Piero Weiss, James McKinnon, and Joel Sachs were mentioned. In adding the following names to that distinguished group, I am still only scratching the surface and risking offense by omitting many others: Merrill Knapp, Christopher Hatch, Isabelle Cazeaux, Edward Lippmann, Maria Rika Maniates, Edward Cone, William Holmes, Gordana Lazarevich, Ernest Sanders, Luise Eitel Peake, Alice Mitchell, Alfred Mann, Susan Sommer, Edmond Strainchamps, Alexander Ringer, Arbie Orenstein, David Josephson, Saul Novack, Boris Schwarz, Hermine Williams, Ruth Katz, Elias Dann, and - how could I forget - Barry Brook. Two observations come to mind when contemplating this partial list of Lang's students: they have all dealt, to one degree or another, with the meaning of music in its larger intellectual context. They were all influenced by man who said:

The greatest danger that threatens this burgeoning musicology is that its relationship to the humanities will become more and more tenuous if students eager to acquire scholarly status are taught nothing but specialized knowledge, independent of further connections; they will learn to master only the materials that make possible the acquisition of knowledge, not knowledge itself. The musicologist should always remember that the true function of the scholar is the illumination of the particular in terms of the universal.

The second observation is that this product of a middle-European nineteenth-century-oriented civilization, although obdurately gender-specific in his speech, who fondly called all his students his "boys", numbered many gifted women among those of whom he was so very proud; in fact, I believe that the very first doctorate he awarded was to Dika Newlin, class of 1945.

Why am I here before you? In a real sense, I was his very last student - and perhaps his most persevering, since I remained his student for over twenty years. As music editor of W. W. Norton, I frequently sought Paul's advice and guidance. I always found him incisive in his opinions, impatient with mediocrity, generous with his time, and incredibly wide-ranging in his knowledge and enthusiasm.

I will miss his stories, I will miss his wry sense of humor, I will miss his friendship, I will miss his wisdom.