

**CEREMONY**

**&**

**CELEBRATION**

for the life of

~

**LEONARD DAVIS**

~

**1915 - 2009**

~

Grove Park Cemetery

Thursday 30th July 2009

Ceremony conducted by

Billy Jenkins

BHA Humanist Officiant

Contact:

[billyjenkins@piemail.co.uk](mailto:billyjenkins@piemail.co.uk)

020 8691 8926

Funeral Directors: Nash Funerals T: 020 8294 0700

~

ENTRY MUSIC:

Mendelssohn

Octet in *Eb* for strings Op. 20

2nd Movement - 'Andante'

performed by

The Melos Ensemble



We meet this afternoon to accompany Leonard Davis - known to you all as Len or Leonard, to accompany him on his final journey through his long life - to honour him, to remember him and to say our farewells. And together, we offer each other comfort and support, for the death of someone we know is a very personal matter that resonates deep into us all.

It is my honour to be with you this afternoon. I stand here as a fellow member of the Musician's Union and someone whom I'm sure was taught viola for a short while at a school in Bromley by the man I knew as Mr Davis more than forty years ago (I'm pretty certain it was Leonard from looking at a contemporary photo of him and a lasting memory of a kindly, caring man who radiated a love of music). Even though he was aware that my interest in classical music was waning, having been seduced by the adolescent attraction of shallow popular musical tastes, it is Mr Davis I have to thank for his kindly encouragement and attention to intonation, vibrato and wrist technique that I applied to the self tuition on guitar that led me into a fulfilling lifetime of self unemployment as a committed musician.

I am also here on behalf the British Humanist Association, for, in keeping with Len's freethinking, this will not be a religious ceremony. However, we will be having a short period for reflection, where you might wish to say a silent prayer for Leonard borne from your own religion, philosophy or life support belief.

Those who choose to live their lives without religion might be considered to be what we call a Humanist. Someone who seeks to make the best of the one life they have by creating meaning and purpose for themselves. They take responsibility for their own actions and work with others, in an understated way, for the common good and for the love and health of family and friends – something that Len certainly did throughout his life.



I offer some thoughts now on life and death.

All living things are subject to death and we, being a part of nature, are no exception. When death arrives, it can be a rude reminder that life is only temporary and that whenever it is finished, the pattern stands in its completeness – with no negotiation, re-arrangement, re-recording or re-writing or re-scoring.



The final parting signified by death is bound to bring shock and sorrow whenever the ties of family, love and friendship are involved - for you have lost a father to Douglas, a step father and father-in-law to Michael and Janet, a grandfather to Rebecca, Danielle and Joshua, a cousin and a musical friend, associate and inspiration to many, many people.

Like every one of us here today, Len had a unique niche in the human community into which we are all born, and it is this uniqueness of each human life which is the basis of sorrow in bereavement.

Len was a one off, and you may search the four corners of our earth but you could never, ever find anyone else to fit that Len -shaped gap that he has left behind and it is these essential qualities that we are remembering now. Though no longer a visible part of your lives, Len will always remain part of you, through the influence he has had on you all and the special meaning that he brought to each and every one of you.

The world may be a different place for you without him, but it will always be a richer place because Len has been in it - so let there be happiness and celebration today too, as we remember Leonard and acknowledge together the unique life affirming energies and gifts that he brought into your lives and which will always stay with you.



Now last week I had the pleasure of visiting Leonard's stepson Michael and his wife Janet and it is from the stories and information they gave me during that fascinating meeting, together with personal memories written and read by Isla Cameron from the Liverpool String Orchestra that this Eulogy has been, perhaps we should say, composed - and the opening bars of the first movement begin with a Russian gentleman who arrived at immigration in the United Kingdom in 1898. A Customs Officer asked his name.

'Shlomele Lobachevsky', the gentleman replied.

The officer thumbed through a little booklet, glanced back up at this man who was a Yiddish speaking violinist, stamped his papers and said, 'Welcome to the United Kingdom. You are now officially known as Soloman Davis!'.

Settling into this newly adopted country, Soloman and his wife Cecilia were blessed first with their first child - a daughter Margaret and then in 1915, at 116 Firle Road, Eastbourne, a son, whom they simply named Leonard - who would become an elder brother for a third child, David. Leonard would always call his parents 'Ma' and 'Pa'.



Leonard's formative years were spent on the south coast before the family headed north in 1923 to Battersea and then, as a young teenager to Greenford and Ealing, where Len attended the County school before studying at the Guildhall School of Music - where he took lessons in conducting, violin and viola, orchestral and chamber music playing, harmony, form, history of music and where he was awarded several scholarships and prizes. He studied with well respected contemporary violinists like William Primrose, Bernard Shore and Fredrick Riddle and had conducting lessons from Sir Adrian Boult, Warwick Braithwaite, Lawrence Leonard and others. As a mature student he would later also study in Italy at the Conservatoire of Florence.

That concludes the First Movement of our 'Eulogy For Leonard Davis'.



The second movement (which I think, perhaps fact wise, should be expressed *allegro*) finds Len out in the big wide world, playing in bands in various hotels in central London and J.Lyons restaurants. But on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1936 at 10 Eaton Rise, near Ealing Broadway, life was to change forever for the twenty year old Len. For it was there he met his beloved Luise - who became Leonard's soul mate until her death forty two years later.

Len and Luise married at Ealing Registry Office on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1939 and for the next three years, as there was little or no work for musicians in the early years of World War Two, Leonard drove a bus for the Midland Red Bus Company around Birmingham.

When Leonard was called up, he served in the Royal Army Service Corps, driving ten ton lorries - transporting ammunition supplies, equipment and servicemen stationed in Algiers, North Africa and then in Naples, Italy. It was in Algiers, whilst driving ammunition to the front that he met a chap who needed food - which Len duly supplied in exchange for a violin.

It was this violin, along with his viola that, in later years, he donated to the Guildhall. Isla will disclose the value of these instruments later, but stepson Michael told me that, although Len was not known for swearing, when he found out their value he did say 'I wish I hadn't bloody given them away now!'.

Something Len probably never gave away was the 500 letters that Luise wrote to him when he was on active service.



Sadly, Len's younger brother David, serving in the RAF, went down off Gibraltar on the 26<sup>th</sup> December of 1942 and he was buried at sea.

After demobilisation and with Leonard working again as a musician, this time with the BBC Variety Orchestra, they adopted a three week old son, Douglas - who has since followed a hazardous journey through life - but Len never gave up hope for his son and that one day 'he might just turn that corner..?'.

When asked to write down some of his highlights of his long and distinguished musical life Len wrote:

“Playing with many of the world's most celebrated conductors and soloists - like Beecham, Boult, Sargeant, Stokowski, Heifitz, Jacqueline Du Pré, John Ogden, Hugh Bean and countless others. In Orchestras such as the RPO, LSO, LPO; all the BBC Orchestras and many others (including the Sadler's Wells Opera , Festival Ballet, Ballet Rambert and Royal Ballet Orchestras).

“My thirty years as conductor of Orpington Symphony Orchestra and nearly forty years as tutor at the annual summer schools of the Worker's Music Association at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield; founding and conducting Goldsmiths Youth Orchestra from 1965 - 1982 and coaching and conducting at my own residential summer schools at Rye and then Hassocks in Sussex for about twenty years”.

Some personal highlights of an amazing career from Len.

Luise died in 1978, but in the early 1980's, Leonard had the good fortune to meet Mrs Grace Stewart, a widower who had lost her husband Bill ten years earlier and they both had an appreciation of the nature of bereavement and a mutual respect for the love they shared for their departed spouses.

So in 1990, at the age of seventy five, Len married Grace and gained a step son and daughter-in-law in Michael and Janet. And in meeting Michael , there began an ongoing gentleman's debate as to why Michael, being left handed, could never, in Len's opinion, become a genius of an orchestral string player.....

Len once listed his hobbies and interests as 'playing chamber music, chess, Scrabble, reading and cycling' and, as he was a man who lived to a marvellous age was 'always on the go' (in fact he was



still driving a car to the end). Stepson Michael has no interest in any financial legacy from his stepfather. 'I've got what I want from him in the garage', he told me with a proud smile on his face - 'his walking boots and his bicycle...!'.

Grace died in October 2003 and his sister Margaret, to whom he remained very close to and shared his passion for music education, died a year later - thus closing this Second Movement on our 'Eulogy For Leonard Davis'.

Yet still Len continued his tireless devotion to his art - one that had always encompassed a love for teaching and enthusing students of all ages - especially the development of young musicians.

So, for our Third and Final movement we will now hear some personal memories from the person who chose the music for entry and departure from this room today - viola player Isla Cameron from the Liverpool String Orchestra, who reveals that Len has been an inspiration for her for much longer than she first realised. Together with her partner Phil Hargreaves, who skilfully transferred and reedited today's music they feel this third movement should be expressed as '*andante cantabile - finale*'. Medium pace, in a singing manner - the end.....



My first encounter with Len was at the WMA summer school of music in 1989 20 years ago. He opened a whole new world of string and chamber music which was thrilling for me.

Prior to this I had played only under duress or to become part of folk bands which had not been enough to stretch or inspire me to do the necessary groundwork to open the repertoire and my heart to it.

It transpires that in the sixties Len had been touring with the Festival Ballet and had visited Liverpool with Swan Lake. After hearing this at seven I announced that I needed and wanted to play the violin.

Wortley became a yearly must for me and my family, my kids came along as babies and now are both violinists. We had a fine time in that rich warm culture. I became familiar with works such as the Mendelssohn Octet we have just heard and Tchaikovsky we will listen to, Elgar's string serenade, Beethoven's Mozart and Hayden's string quartets all favourites of his and through Len's tutorage favourites of mine

~

Following this I was set to convert to viola playing when Liverpool String Orchestra opened its doors to me. I lead it now and we have a great time every Monday term time.

Our conductor Neill Jackson is also a violist and keeps us playing a lot of Len's pieces which we bought when he decided it was time to retire in 2007 at 92 years. We got a grant and Phil and I had a lovely day collecting the music from Len at Ivor Newton House.

This appeared to be a dream residence with regular in house professional concerts. Len donated his violin and viola worth £600,000 to the Guildhall and students came and played them for him and other elderly retired musicians. The best of everything was their beautiful gardens and lovely staff such as Terri and Coral.

He was a tireless campaigner against its closure in October last year. As predicted seven former residents have died since being forced to move, Len being the latest. The Musician's Benevolent Fund had been warned this would happen.

Len stayed with me in Liverpool on his past three conducting engagements with our string orchestra including in the week of his death. Considering an 80 year plus age gap he was easy to get along with and my children enjoyed his company especially the Scrabble contests and chess, he loved my pet cat and sadly she was killed the same day Len died. We had a lively correspondence as Len loved letters and expressed himself so well - preferring them to phone calls when he had some hearing loss.

He has three books published, his first dedicated to his wife Luise who was the love of his life and was a biography, his second with a forward by Yehudi Menuhin on conducting technique and a third, a bible for us amateur quartet players on tips for playing in small string groups

This last trip he was hale and hearty to take it all on and do a ferry trip on the Mersey on our hottest day, he learnt a new skill of extracting money from the wall with no difficulty, he sewed a button onto his shirt, watched Wimbledon avidly, coached four chamber groups and conducted a Handel Concerto with the string orchestra. We had planned to visit Anfield football museum and grounds the day he became ill but he appreciated the need for and availability of District Nurse care at midnight on both Saturday and Sunday the weekend before I took him into hospital with agonising abdominal pain.

He was stoical and stared death full on. He was accepting and not scared, he did not fully recover from his operation but deteriorated rapidly.



The visit from London by Terri and Coral his friends and staff from Ivor Newton House was so touching as he became conscious and smiled at them to say goodbye.

I was called by the Intensive care staff on the next day Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup> to say another deterioration had occurred . He died at 3.30pm holding my hand. It was peaceful and full of grace, I do not think that many people could expect to do a fraction of what he achieved in his last days. He was very special to me and many others whose lives he has touched, a great loss.



Beautiful and heartfelt memories bravely read by Isla.

Some say that when sight reading a piece of music, the hardest parts to play are the rests. And a spiritual element of music itself is the fact that, when it stops, there is nothing...nothing but silence. For music *per se* is invisible. Leonard has stopped to - and his physical presence is now invisible.

It is therefore fitting that we have a moment of silence to reflect on Isla's words and the times that you shared with Len. A chance also, if you so wish, to say a silent prayer for Len pertaining to your own religious faith or life support system.

Would you all please stand.



SILENCE FOR REFLECTION



Thoughts, memories and prayers for Len.

Please be seated.



Terri Masterson will now read her short poem entitled 'Len', which she wrote on the day he died, only hours after she received the sad news:

~

LEN

When you hear the bow crossing the strings,  
You will remember Len.

When you hear his name said  
You will remember the way in which you knew Len.

When you see the man in the street with his flat cap and stick  
You will remember Len.

When you see a piece of string  
You will remember Len.

When you look in the sky to-night and see the brightest star  
You will know it's Len.

~

Beautiful words bravely read by Terri

Len will now be taken from this chapel to be laid to rest but before we depart I would like to express Michael and Janet's thanks to you all for attending today - and you are all invited to join us at the graveside if you so wish and afterwards for refreshment and reminiscence and music performed by a quartet of Len's friends at the Bromley Court Hotel.

If you wish to make a donation in memory of Len - Michael and Janet thoughtfully suggest that you make it to a charity of your own choice.

For those of you who require transport to the grave, and indeed onwards to Bromley Court Hotel, there is a limousine with six seats available - and those with a spare seat please make yourself known.

Let us now accompany Len gently to his final resting place - where he will be reunited with his beloved first wife Luise....

At her funeral in 1978, the recorded music played at Eltham Spiritualist Church before she was brought to this cemetery to be laid to rest, was the 'Elegy' from Tchaikovsky's 'Serenade for Strings'. So it is indeed fitting that the music chosen to leave this room should be the 4th movement, the Finale, from that very same piece.

Thank you gentlemen.

~

~

MUSIC FOR EXIT FROM CHAPEL :  
Tchaikovsky 'Serenade for Strings'  
4th movement - 'Finale'  
Tema russo: Andante - Allegro con spirito  
Performed by  
The Berlin Philharmonic - conducted by Semyon Bychkov

~

## AT THE GRAVESIDE

Here, in this peaceful and beautiful graveyard that is listed by English Heritage as a landscape of special historic interest and as we gently place Len's body to be with his beloved Luise, we come to the final moment of parting. We have accompanied Len's body on its final journey and now, in this last act of sorrow but without fear, in love and appreciation, we must say farewell.

I now ask you to repeat what I say. Hold or hug the person next to you and say it loud and proud so the ground shakes!:

Dear Len

*Dear Len*

We rejoice that you lived

*We rejoice that you lived*

Thank for sharing your life with us

*Thank for sharing your life with us*

We cherish the memory of your words

*We cherish the memory of your words*

We cherish your music

*We cherish your music*

We cherish the memory of your presence



*We cherish the memory of your presence*  
We cherish your care and friendship  
*We cherish your care and friendship*  
And with our love, care and friendship  
*And with our love, care and friendship*  
We leave you in peace  
*We leave you in peace*

Thank you gentlemen - you may lower the coffin

Len has left this world  
As he entered here  
The same passage which he made from nothingness to life  
Without fuss and without fear  
He has made again  
From life to nothingness  
This is the natural order of things  
It belongs to the life of the world

And he is now free from all harm and suffering and he is reunited with his beloved Luise.



To close this ceremony , Terri will read her poem entitled 'In Memory of Len':

#### IN MEMORY OF LEN

He is in the bright blue sky  
He is on the clouds passing by  
He is the sun shining through  
He is the raindrops falling, and to-day and everyday he is with his friends.

And when you look in the sky to-night and see the brightest star  
You will know Len is smiling down on you.

~

~

With love and respect, we have been remembering and celebrating Len's life.  
His body is at rest, but he will live on forever in your memories, thoughts and dreams.

The best of all answers to death is the wholehearted and continuing affirmation of life for the greater fulfilment of humankind.

You can live your lives secure in the knowledge of all that Len contributed to your lives and you to his.

~