

IN MEMORIAM: DR. LYNDA BRADLEY-VACCO

(March 31, 1965 – August 2, 2015)

by Korey Konkol

In 1992 I inherited my first doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. Lynda Marie Bradley had completed only one year of her degree program when her teacher and advisor, Dr. Roland Vamos, accepted a position at Oberlin College for the following year. Several Vamos students could not follow their beloved mentor to Ohio for various reasons. Some were too close to finishing their degrees in Minnesota to justify a transfer, and the more obvious rationale being that Oberlin was primarily an undergraduate institution making it implausible for graduate students to relocate.

Myself having just arrived in the Twin Cities from a short teaching stint at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, I could certainly understand the concerns of the Vamos students who remained at the U of MN, especially Lynda. After all, she was about to continue her studies with a relatively unknown teacher not much older than herself, not to mention someone whom she barely knew. Lynda's trust in me grew with each lesson, and I could not have been more proud of her many distinguished accomplishments over the years throughout her musical, personal and spiritual journeys.

Lynda paid me one of the highest compliments of my teaching career upon her graduation when she exclaimed that

Yizhak Schotten (University of Michigan) had developed her bow arm and Dr. Vamos had developed her left hand, but it was I who brought it all together for her! Lynda's five doctoral recitals clearly demonstrated her innate musical maturity and integrity as well as her effective programming choices. I was impressed by and admired Lynda's ability to "sell the music" no matter what style or difficulty of repertoire she was working on. Whether Lynda performed in a solo, chamber or orchestral venue, she continually "sold" her interpretations, heart and soul, to her audience. Mary Bradley, Lynda's incredibly supportive mother, offered sumptuous reception spreads that included my favorite treat—her spectacular seven-layer bars!

With her myriad personal and musical gifts, there was never a doubt in my mind of Lynda's future success. When the Bethel University upper strings and conducting position became available in 1995, I knew in

my heart that Lynda would be the perfect match. Rodney Loeffler, Assistant Director of the U of MN School of Music at the time, also promoted Lynda and couldn't think of a better candidate for the job. If ever there was a shoo-in for that position,

it was Lynda! Lynda started a grass-roots campaign to build the Bethel University Orchestra—tirelessly recruiting students and quickly demonstrating her teaching skills by bringing up the level of the students who were already there.

All the while, Lynda maintained a vital freelance career. Readers may not know that Lynda was chosen

as the singular violist in the original previews and world premier of *The Lion King* at the Orpheum Theatre, which went on to become a monumental global success. Lynda soon became one of the top viola freelancers in the Twin Cities musical scene, playing in the pit orchestras of many Broadway shows as well as on stage with numerous classical performing ensembles. Lynda's seemingly endless energy, enthusiasm and sense of humor were constant and evident in all facets of her illustrious career. I am eternally grateful that we remained great friends as our musical relationship transformed from teacher/student to respected colleagues in the profession.

In the midst of this burgeoning musical career, Lynda fell in love with and married her soul mate, Michael Vacco. The couple would soon have three beautiful and remarkable children, Bradley, Michaela and Benjamin. If anything, Lynda's family made her commitment to music and faith even stronger, and she became known as a kind of "wonder woman" for being able to juggle a plethora of personal and professional obligations with ease and grace.

Lynda touched so many people's lives, and that fact was never more evident than at her extraordinarily moving funeral ceremony that took place at the Church of the Epiphany in Coon Rapids on



Dr. Vacco was a teacher and conductor with unparalleled enthusiasm for her work. More than anything, she wanted her students to play and pursue music passionately, and she demonstrated that passion every day. In private lessons, she overflowed with practical wisdom; she brought energy and enthusiasm to all of her rehearsals.

When I think about my memories of Dr. Vacco, one of the themes that stands out to me most is the sense of victory she shared with her students after concerts, and particularly after concerts that went well. Music was a way for Dr. Vacco to express her joy and her hope, and even in the most painful days, she told her students that she felt no pain while conducting. I had the opportunity one year to play Hindemith's *Trauermusik* for viola and orchestra with her on tour, and

I think those concerts especially were victorious—a celebration of Dr. Vacco's artistry as a soloist and her dedication to building Bethel's orchestra.

Dr. Vacco greeted me with a bright smile every time I saw her. She let nothing stand in the way of her joy, her optimism, and her determination to share the beauty of music with others. No matter how difficult her days were or how many challenges were thrown at her, she continued to give all of herself to the people around her. She loved life, music, and her students, and I know that we will all continue to be inspired by our memories of her.

Rebekah Warren
Bethel University Orchestra,
concertmaster

August 6, 2015. From the sheer number of people who travelled from near and far to pay their respects, to the eloquent biblical readings and musical offerings of a full chorus and the Bethel University Orchestra, I know that Lynda would have been impressed and humbled at the scope and breadth of this extraordinary tribute. The plethora of pictures displayed highlighting her family travels and life events revealed Lynda's overwhelming joy of life, her beaming smile always present through all her trials and tribulations. I personally "lost it" when the strings of the Bethel Symphony Orchestra began a poignant interlude during the service. I saw and heard

in that very instance the tremendous work that Lynda had accomplished over the past 20 years—beautiful tones, exemplary hand positions, sensitive musicianship—all coming together through Lynda's careful and committed teaching.

One idiosyncrasy that Lynda and I shared, for better or worse, was the gift of gab! We could spend hours at lessons or on the telephone discussing repertoire, the best bowings and fingerings, teaching philosophies, etc., and then continue on to topics not related to music. When I mentioned this to Lynda's husband at the reception following the funeral, Michael conveyed to me a humorous anecdote that was so typically

Lynda. Lynda often taught private lessons out of their home, and Michael would generally busy himself or leave the house until the lesson was over. One particular time, Michael found himself asking Lynda when she thought the lesson might be over since she had been talking with the parent of the student for an hour and a half before the lesson even started! "That's our Lynda!" I said. While I expressed my deepest sympathies to Michael and his family, I explained that I didn't like to use clichés at moments like these, but there was one that definitely rang true for Lynda: that whoever is fortunate enough to take over Lynda's position at Bethel University will have some "mighty big shoes to fill"!

Dr. Vacco taught me how to play the viola. She helped me to play comfortably and to enjoy playing in an orchestra. She introduced me to so much music and shared so much of herself at the same time. But what I'll never forget is the lesson she taught me about the worth and potential of music. She believed that music had a definite place in everyday life: she believed it was worship to God and ministry to others.

It's impossible for me to describe Dr. Vacco without talking about her faith, probably because it played such a big part in her music-making. At a time when I couldn't get over how music was

of so little practical use—music can't cure cancer, I kept telling myself—she helped me to have faith that music was a wonderful and powerful gift of God. She taught me with her life that music is well worth the time it takes to master it, that even though invisible and intangible, it certainly accomplishes things.

She loved teaching so much, and she never doubted that through teaching about music, she could teach about all of life. For this lesson, and so many others, I can never thank her enough.

Jared Hedges

Bethel University Orchestra, manager

Rest in peace dearest Lynda – you will be forever loved and remembered as a devoted pedagogue, performer, mentor, wife, mother and friend!

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