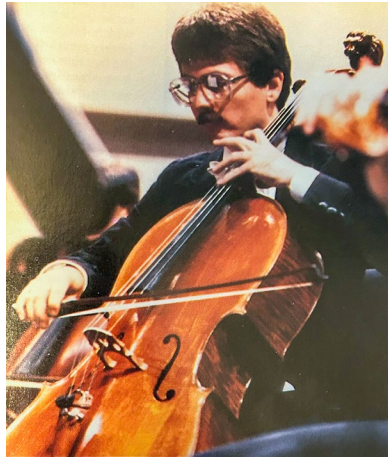


# LOVE AND COINCIDENCE

by John Madura

My brother, Bob, was also a cellist. He started cello because I was heading off to college and of course he needed to play the cello to fill out the family quartet. Our mother played violin, our middle brother also played violin, and our dad played viola. Obviously, music was very important to our family. I wanted to get my degree in cello performance, but my mother, in all of her wisdom, highly recommended that I get my music education degree! Dutiful son that I was, I did so.

For whatever reason, maybe sibling admiration, my brother became a very skilled cellist. While in high school, my brother and I collaborated on the Vivaldi *Double Cello Concerto* with the Austin, Minnesota Symphony (which our dad started). Bob auditioned as a freshman at Indiana University with Janos Starker, world class cellist, and



Robert (Bob) Madura

was accepted. Starker, though, convinced him to study at the North Carolina School of the Arts where he would get more attention. Indiana was a “cello factory” at the time. Bob studied with Denis Brott, a young teacher and former student of Starker. Bob met his future wife at NCSA and they moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan where he was hired to be Principal Cello of the Symphony. Meanwhile, I was teaching in a string program in the public school system in a St. Paul suburb.

The years moved ahead, each of us doing our thing. I developed a very successful string program, and my brother was playing and making friends with the likes of Emmanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma.

The Michigan Symphony, under the direction of Catherine Comet, decided to program the newly composed David Ott *Concerto for Two Cellos*. My brother and his stand partner were up for the challenge. Within weeks, however, Bob and his family received the dreaded news of cancer. There was a time of remission where he visited our parents’ home town to play in church (always his lovely Bach). I noticed his complexion a very sickly yellow. A quick move

to the Twin Cities for treatment, family, drugs and passing. Funeral was in North Carolina near Celso.

The Grand Rapids Symphony commissioned Ott to write a “fanfare” in Bob’s memory. What he produced was a symphony featuring the cello section. The Grand Rapids Symphony premiered it and it was recorded by Koss records. David Ott was in attendance and handed me the original score. For years as I listened, there were

tears and sometimes outright bawling! (A side note, the stagehands of the orchestra made a beautiful podium in his honor.)

Move ahead some more years. My mother, now alone, a traveler in her own right, became a part of her church group that did exchanges with other travelers from around the world. She hooked up with a lady from Russia who

came to the U.S. to spend time with my mom. Neither spoke each other’s language, but both had a little German. She brought her up to the Twin Cities and we went to a sports bar for some local color. As part of the exchange, Mom traveled to the middle of Siberia. The lady, being a good hostess, brought together several of her music friends. While making conversation, Mom mentioned that her two sons had performed the Vivaldi *Double Cello* together years ago, good old Mom bragging! Then she added that her youngest son was preparing the David Ott *Double Concerto*. One of the guests held up his hand and left the party. Forty-five minutes later he showed up at the party holding the Koss recording of the David Ott *Symphony No. 2* with my brother’s picture on it!

Add a few more years. A cellist friend of mine was principal cello of the St. Paul Civic Orchestra. Together we convinced the director of the orchestra to program David Ott, *Symphony No. 2*. I joined my friend in the performance using my brother’s cello!

Move ahead a few years. My retirement is in sight! I had determined long before if I ever had an orchestra in my high school that

was capable, I would attempt to perform the symphony written in honor of my brother. I called David Ott, who lives in Florida, to seek his permission. Of course, the piece was out of his hands by then and was in the publishers’ domain. But it so happened the publisher was located in Winona, MN. I called their rental department and found out that it was available. However, it was available for \$400/month. I would need at least need 7 months to prepare. I pleaded my case, the above narrative, and the agent said she would allow me to rent it for the year at that price. Butttt..., I said I would have to make copies of all the parts because it would be in the students’ hands for 7 months. She saw my point and relented.

Long term projects such as the one my high school orchestra was about to tackle took much planning and careful rehearsal. My group was a string ensemble and we had to “borrow” the woodwinds and brass from the band at best once a week. It just so happened that year I had a full complement of players who were willing to join the project and give it their all. That year also happened to be a tough time for the Minnesota Orchestra and they had to go on strike. In order for them to keep afloat they played several concerts and asked me if they could borrow our shells from time to time for their acoustic backdrop for their concerts. I agreed through the grace of my school administration. Bonus—they agreed to have many of their principal players do sectionals for my kids. (The principal cellist of the Minnesota Orchestra knew my brother from earlier in their careers.) Minnesota Orchestra members admitted that this was a tough song!

The slow movement of the Symphony is especially moving and I, of course had related its story to my students. They were very understanding when I would tear up during some rehearsals. We played the second movement at a contest and a colleague of mine who went to high school with my brother had a memory of my brother coming out of a practice room, which brought tears to his eyes. We were, as they say, putting it all together. A week ahead of the concert, the first trumpet player said he could not make the concert. What to do? Also, the tuba player was going to be a no show. I got a pro trumpet player, husband of a former student and the band

teacher/tuba player with whom there was a shaky relationship, offered to sit in!! The concert was a success and I was able to realize the dream of performing my brother's

final opus.

Present day. Bob's legacy lives on through his cello. My daughter, Stacy, uses his cello on long-time loan from my

brother's daughter Maya.

*Cellist John Madura taught at Mounds View High School 1969–2013. †*