

## ANDREW DAWES

Mr. Dawes stands singular, even among the elite of Canada's musical gems in its fine cultural history. In the chamber music world, which is perhaps the purest of the pure classical music forms – "Andy" was, until his physical hand disability won out – about as great as it gets on a global scale.

Being the forever-unpretentious rural Albertan at his core, with a smile frequently leading to an ever-ready laugh, he prefers not being addressed as "Mr. Dawes" or even "Andrew," even by new acquaintances. He's simply "Andy." He evokes from others a casual normal-guy demeanor; until one hears him play that is – after which there no terms of respectful regard that are too high. This humble, honest demeanor is so refreshing and endearing – quintessentially and proudly Canadian.

What a stellar cultural ambassador he was. As first violin of the *non plus ultra* Orford String Quartet, the cognoscenti of the classical world witnessed often tear-inducing subtle refinement combined with jaw-dropping soaring power, unforgettably virtuosic interpretations of the greatest ever-written musical literature.

"They're *Canadians?*" critics stated in print worldwide upon first hearing them, with the equivalent implication of "*Who knew?*" Canadians are famed for many things, but a few decades back, chamber music was not among them – until Andy and his partners showed up. It so happens that I knew, as their manager during the ascent in the highly competitive and over-supplied European-American and other foreign markets. There was and remains, only room for a handful at the very top of the classical music niches; Andy/Orford put themselves and thereby Canada at the very top of this exclusive realm.

Purely by a self-created combination of technical virtuosity and profoundly intelligent artistry, with no trained stage presence or other audience-attracting techniques increasingly used in classical competition today – Andy led his three remarkable partners to win the hearts, minds and enthusiastic listening of those with the most sophisticated musical tastes. Just by playing it straight.

Reviews by the top discerning American, British, French, German, Asian, Latin and other major critics, were consistently glowing. Houses were sold out, prolonged standing ovations at every concert, literally.

Andy and The Orford performed some 80-120 concerts per annum, a stellar career in that realm. There is no major chamber music stage, audience or critic that one is aware they failed to conquer. Complete six-concert Beethoven cycles in Paris, London, Toronto and other centres – plus countless vinyl recordings and the first-ever complete Beethoven Cycle set on CD when the latter was still new technology – are still played and sold worldwide. Plus, many other recordings on CBC and private labels, often with star Canadian and international guest soloists, by composers both living and deceased. Andy stands high among the most-recorded Canadians.

Altogether, he has done some 3,000 on-stage performances and over 60 recordings, several prize-winning. His CDs of Beethoven's complete violin-piano sonatas with Jane Coop, remains among the finest in the catalog.

All this, while doing frequent cross-Canada tours, sometimes doing 20-30 smaller-town Canadian centres per annum, bringing the world's finest music to our church basements and high school gyms

where such quality is seldom available. In many towns Andy gladly offered master classes for aspiring locals, most often free of charge.

When the Orford members finally ended it, going their separate ways after decades of global success, Andy was asked by the great Tokyo String Quartet to become first violin, following the musical disability of also-Canadian Peter Oundjian. Again Andy distinguished himself as a world great among musical greats.

Along the way he was among the finest music teachers at UofT, McGill and UBC. He loved teaching, was reportedly excellent at it, helping produce a new generation of the finest – even coaching successful young professional ensembles.

Many new Canadian compositions were specifically commissioned, often at Andy's instigation, and were performed between the great classics before audiences from Brahms-Saal Vienna, to Kennedy Centre DC, to Baie-Comeau QC. Canadian music, both at the performance and creation levels, owes Andrew Dawes a long debt of appreciation.

In a career of managing some of the world's greats, Andy stands out in my own mind for his musical brilliance combined with understated elegance on-stage and off. Having worked closely with famed Canadians such as Jon Vickers, Maureen Forrester, Anton Kuerti, Moe Koffman, National Ballet, Stratford Festival, etc. – and non-Canadians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Colorado String Quartet, Rudolf Nureyev and others – Andy stands out singularly in this impresario's mind.

His 'specialness' on the world canvas was not just for sheer musical excellence, although that too; being top-tier globally was and remains a prerequisite. Andy stood out additionally as remarkably un-prima-donna in spite of his undisputed musical eminence. Still water runs deep: Quiet; understated; patient; understanding; wise; warm; absence of even a hint of superior attitude; a wonderful sense of humour, even in the tense moments. Reliable too, giving it 100% on stage and off, even when physically ill or otherwise distracted. Consistently a loving devoted father, husband and friend – and a very proud Canadian.

Andrew Dawes is indisputably, in the words of the Ottawa Citizen, among "the most distinguished violinists Canada has ever produced." He is also a remarkable human, a genuine honour and privilege to know.

- Peter Sever  
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