

Donald Jay Grout

September 28, 1902 — March 9, 1987

From 1945 to 1970 Donald Grout guided Cornell's music and musicology. He still inspires our combinations of performing, composing, investigating history and theory, relating music to other arts and sciences, and teaching all these activities together. His excellence in each of them was as extraordinary as his energy and versatility. His books keep bringing Cornell recognition from readers around the globe, and they remind many scholars and teachers of distinctive ways of combining musical practice and theory. For example, although Professor Grout had retired from teaching before our graduate program in historical performance of eighteenth-century instrumental music began, he had provided the necessary nourishing environment with his farsighted strong support of the library, of the modest collection of musical instruments, and especially of young faculty members and their diverse interrelated interests. The best students in the program find in Grout's writings characteristic helpful hints toward the dynamic equilibrium they seek.

When Donald was born, his family was living in Rock Rapids, Iowa, but in 1906 they moved back to Skaneateles, New York, where they originated. About that time his mother began to teach the four-year-old boy to play the piano. By the age of twelve he was a good musician: for the next four years he was organist of the Skaneateles Methodist Church. In 1919 he entered Syracuse University. He became the organist of the First Universalist Church of Syracuse and occasionally in the next years also played at the Strand Theater, accompanying silent films. After he graduated in 1923, as valedictorian of his class and with philosophy as his major subject, he went to Boston for further study at the Boston University School of Theology. In about six months he dropped that program to concentrate on music.

Through the 1920s Grout taught piano and played organs at various churches in Boston, carrying his study of performance to the point of a second prize in the Naumburg Competition in 1932. Meanwhile he began graduate work in music at Harvard, which led to a master's degree in 1932 and the Paine Travelling Fellowship for 1933-35.

Grout's scholarship was thus founded on his thorough musicianship together with a philosophical training. He liked to define *musicologist* as "a musician with an education."

On his first trip abroad he pursued studies in the history of opera at Strasbourg, Paris, and Vienna, particularly with Théodore Gérold, J. G. Prod'homme, and Robert Haas. But he always gave greater credit to Archibald T.

Davison, the Harvard choral conductor, and Otto Kinkeldey, the first American professor of musicology (at Cornell 1930-44) as his models of teaching and scholarship in music.

He traveled westward in 1936 to be visiting lecturer at Mills College in Oakland, California. Then he returned to teach at Harvard and Radcliffe (and occasionally to play the organ at the Memorial Church). With his dissertation, “The Origins of the Opéra Comique” (1939), he won the doctorate, and for three more years he was instructor, tutor, and director of graduate studies in music. By 1942, when he left Harvard for a brief tenure at the University of Texas at Austin, he had begun writing *A Short History of Opera*.

This major work on opera, published in 1947 by Columbia University Press, he revised and enlarged for a second edition in 1965, and he left a third edition under way. Though concise, it needed at least two volumes to coordinate its dauntingly comprehensive critical array of specialized research. Not only is this Short History continually cited by scholars of opera, it stands as a model, unique in America up to its time, for handbooks of other genres—sonata, oratorio, and perhaps eventually symphony, concerto, quartet, and even jazz.

In 1944, again in 1949-50, and many times thereafter through 1976, Grout served on the Executive Board of the American Musicological Society (AMS). From 1948 to 1951 he was editor in chief of the society’s Journal. His devoted skill and energy enabled the society to bring out volumes two through four with speed, tact, and elegance.

On his second European sojourn, in 1951-52 with Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowships, Grout collected films of all extant Renaissance sacred music in choirbooks, planning a systematic study of text underlay. Though he never brought this study to publication, it contributed to his teaching and to his perspectives as historiographer, consultant, and impresario of international collaborations.

During his first term as president of the AMS (1952-54) Grout began planning to bring to America the Congress of the International Musicological Society—a bold plan fulfilled during his second term (1960-62). The International Musicological Society elected Grout president in 1962-64, then vice president in 1965-67, permanent member of its directorium, and honorary president of the Répertoire Internationale des Sources Musicales. His concerns extended to the music of continents around the globe: he was an active trustee of the Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation in Berlin. Almost as a matter of course he joined the national musicological societies of France, Holland, and Italy and became a member and honorary fellow of the Central Institute for Mozart Research in Salzburg, a corresponding fellow of the British Academy, and a member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. These memberships indicate the extent to which he represented American musicology abroad.

In 1960, almost as a by-product of Grout's teaching and editing and organizational work, he completed his *History of Western Music*, the monument that makes him probably the most well known of all historians of music writing in any language. Published by W. W. Norton, the book has renewed its use in a second edition in 1973 and a third in 1980. Readers of any chapter of this book are grateful for Grout's skillful organization of vast ranges of learning, here even more vast than in the opera volumes. At the same time, readers sense the depth and warmth of his love for a great deal of music, old and new—songs he sang, all kinds of instrumental music he played at the piano or organ, and choruses he conducted.

His last book was another by-product, this time of an enterprise of scholarly teamwork that he organized to edit from manuscripts all the extant operas of Alessandro Scarlatti. These operas, almost unknown since the early eighteenth century, are often referred to as essential links in the development of techniques and styles between Monteverdi and Mozart, and a closer knowledge of them will illumine understanding of the whole development. From 1970 to 1986 the Harvard University Press published two of these operas edited by Grout himself and seven more edited under his supervision by scholars, including William C. Holmes, a Cornell colleague of the years 1962-68. The slim book with the modest title *Alessandro Scarlatti: An Introduction to His Operas* records the lectures Grout gave in 1976 as the Ernest Bloch Professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Grout's writings include more than twenty essays, lectures, articles, and reviews. Although the musicological topics are mostly too specialized for a wide audience, an exceptionally alluring one is *Mozart in the History of Opera*, the Louis Charles Elson Memorial Lecture at the Library of Congress, 1971, published as a booklet at the library in Washington. Grout's wit and wisdom shine in this lecture on a topic central to all his work, radiating to all the world.

At Cornell Grout directed the Sage Chapel Choir from the time he came in 1945 until 1952, and after that he often conducted choral performances and open readings, in some of which an orchestra joined. On such occasions he amazed everyone with the efficiency of his rehearsals and the excitement of the performances. The most elaborate production, for the Bach bicentennial year 1950, was the *Passion according to Matthew*, with its double choir and orchestra, soloists, and children's chorus.

He served as chairman of the Department of Music in 1947-51, 1953-58, and 1961-62. As a matter of course he represented the Field of Music in the Graduate School and presided over the Special Committees of nearly all doctoral candidates. When the professional programs in composition, leading to the Master of Fine Arts and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees, were established, he was ordinarily an important member of those Special

Committees, representing musicology as a minor subject for composers like Richard Monaco and Paul Chihara. From 1962 on he was the Given Foundation Professor of Musicology.

He gladly taught at every level. He welcomed students with no previous study of music into courses he invented for them. He contributed to the progress of every undergraduate for whom music was a major subject. He inaugurated the Collegium Musicum. He provided graduate students with strenuous introductions to bibliography and paleography, as well as advanced seminars. In one term he taught four courses, and in many terms three, while presiding, conducting, editing, and writing his *History*. Later, as the faculty grew and matured, he enjoyed teaching interdisciplinary courses such as one on the operas of Wagner with Professor Eric Blackall. In 1970 he appeared as guest pianist and lecturer on Chopin in another course. His expectations could be scary, but he made allowances for the weaknesses of any student who worked steadily with honest effort. He helped several learn to write about music with clarity and grace. He inspired many to surpass all they had supposed they could do before they encountered him. In the first years after retiring he often joined small groups of students at lunch for informal but serious discussions of many kinds of music in contexts of general history and literature. Even in the last decade of his life, when illness slowed him down, he welcomed students and colleagues who came to visit him at Cloudbank, his home overlooking Skaneateles Lake. On some of these visits he played piano duets or accompanied a singer: his precision and style kept partners doing their best.

Donald died peacefully at Cloudbank, where his wife, Margaret; their daughter, Martha; and her husband and children were all close by. At the funeral service on March 12 the family and the Skaneateles congregation were joined by many devoted friends from Cornell and further away. The greetings of Professor Thomas A. Sokol, current chairman of the Department of Music, were read. Then, on April 26, a service of homage at Sage Chapel brought the family and Cornell together again. Here Professor H. Peter Kahn's ink drawing "Recollections of the Grout home on Dodge Farm Road," printed on the program cover, reminded us of many similar collaborations. Professor Donald R. M. Paterson, the university organist, offered a prelude and postlude by Bach. The Cornell Chorale, conducted by Tom Sokol, sang the kyrie from Ralph Vaughan Williams's Mass in G Minor. Readings from the Bible by the Reverend Richard Strauss were followed by remarks by William Austin, Harold E. Samuel, Susan Davenny Wyner, and Don Randel. Dr. Samuel, returning from Yale, where he is the music librarian, recalled the generosity of Donald and Margaret in the years of his graduate studies. Susan Davenny Wyner, now a professor here, recalled Donald's part in her undergraduate program with a double major in English and music. Among others joining this homage were Robert Palmer, professor emeritus, and Sir Keith Falkner, a professor at Cornell

for a decade before he returned to London as director of the Royal College of Music, where he often brought Grout, Hsu, Sokol, and other Cornell musicians to help him propagate the kinds of practical scholarship and scholarly performance that Grout cultivated at Cornell.

At the time of his retirement Donald and Margaret Grout gave the Cornell Music Library over two thousand books, scores, and films. These have been kept, with a few other rare items, in the “Grout Room” of the Library, where Grout himself used to hold seminars.

A new gift by Margaret Grout in 1987 established the Donald Jay Grout Memorial Scholarship Fund for graduate students in musicology. With the collaboration of other donors this fund will speed many students’ scholarly travels as well as their reading and writing, singing and playing, and teaching and endless learning—a most appropriate tribute to Donald’s enormous influence.

John Hsu, Don M. Randel, William W. Austin