

2001: Dear Vernon

I was pleased that you asked me to join you at the Beryl Buck Award dinner. It was, as always, my honor to be in your inner circle. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you how I feel about you, my dear friend.

I believe each of us is like an orchestra although not everyone is as disciplined as you in obeying his inner conductor. I think you conduct the myriad voices you have within you with precision and harmony. Your voices are clear and pure. Few of your melodies are so soft as not to be heard. You have attained a pleasing sound. You have used your life to compose and perform a symphony.

I admire that section of your orchestra that has had such strength in community affairs. As you have said, you are a “catalyst” in the community. But that’s only one section of your orchestra. By acting with such conviction in the world, you set a standard for the other voices within you, a standard that I’ve had the opportunity to hear and appreciate.

There must be voices within you that have never had a chance to play, or have played little, or badly. No piece is complete or perfect. There are few Beethovens that come into this world, yet I believe each of us has the opportunity to compose equally great music within ourselves. Beethoven became outwardly deaf. So, each of us, I think, becomes inwardly hard of hearing, not ready or willing to strike up a tune to every dance. Yet, you have shown me your ability to listen profoundly, to hear truth and to speak justly. For that, I’m grateful.

You’ve been a model to me of an artist, one who has learned to tune his instrument on the meager lessons of life. Ultimately, I believe, we must each of us learn on our own. I haven’t met great teachers, but have met a few exceptional students like yourself.

Perhaps being self-taught makes one’s achievements all the more important. We ultimately learn to conduct and play our instrument for ourself. This happens within. This happens alone.

Still, you’ve been an example to me of what is possible. I’ve cherished your musicality, your dedication to your own sweet tune.

Thank you, dear friend, for giving me the pleasure of your song, your gift, your love.

Barry
December 8, 2000