



Mark Paul Malkovich
1930 – 2010

A Life of
Fearlessness
Enterprise
Creativity
Music
People

With Russian pianist Andrei Gavrilov after his American debut recital at Spruance Hall, 1976



I don't think I have ever known anyone who enjoyed his work more than Mark did, and his enjoyment was contagious. Of course Mark experienced aggravations and setbacks. Newport hasn't been any more immune to the fluctuations of the economy than anywhere else, and its survival has sometimes hung by a thread. But Mark didn't let this get him down, at least for long – he knew that nearly every worthwhile artistic endeavor throughout history faced comparable obstacles. And with the help of his patrons and board, Mark always did overcome them.

A typical festival lasted three weeks and included more than 60 concerts, and I doubt he ever missed one of them. He was always there, shaking hands, fussing over donors, making charming opening speeches to welcome newcomers. Mark was like a cork bobbing on the bubbling surface of a large vat of champagne he had decanted himself; he couldn't wait until you filled your glass and drunk your fill.



A Tribute to Mark Malkovich By Richard Dyer

All the obituaries about Mark Malkovich that appeared in the sad days after Memorial Day week-end mentioned the deep love he felt for his four children. But most people realized that he actually had five offspring, and his devoted wife Joan knew all about it – in addition to Mark IV, Erik, Kent and Kara, there was the Newport Music Festival.

Mark was not the birth parent of the Festival. At the age of 45, after a distinguished and successful career in business, Mark adopted the Festival, and the Festival ran up to him and embraced him. At that point the Festival was 7 years old and no longer an infant. More of a problem child, actually.

Mark brought up the Festival with loving discipline until it became an event of international interest that accrued worldwide prestige. He accomplished this through taste, knowledge, imagination, and the promotional gifts of an old-time impresario. The instrument he knew and loved the best was the piano, but he rightly bridled at the suggestion that he was running a piano festival; he knew it was a *music* festival.



Early days as director in the Music Room at The Breakers. Mark was an accomplished pianist in his own right.

(Everyone was “sweetheart” or “darling” to him, except for those who stood in the way of his accomplishing the things he needed to do in the way they ought to be done. For such persons, he reserved a sailor’s vocabulary.)

The last email I had from Mark arrived a few weeks before he died. It was a summary of this season, which he was still putting the finishing touches on. He told me which concerts I could not afford to miss –and that amounted to just about all of them. I counted only seven exclamation points, but I knew Mark well enough to add them mentally to every sentence that didn’t have one.

Mark was born in Eveleth, Minnesota the home of the Hockey Hall of Fame, and he grew up there. In the late 1980s with the coming of *glasnost* to the Soviet Union, he took satisfaction in returning to his roots when he helped leading Russian hockey players find new careers in the NHL.

He went to college at the University of Minnesota, sidestepped into the National Guard during the Korean conflict, then finished his studies in chemistry and comparative literature at Columbia University, which he also attended as a graduate student. He was an avid student of the piano, and one of his teachers was the great Adele Marcus, a much-feared dragon-lady pedagogue at the Juilliard School.



With Italian pianist Andrea Lucchesini, Russian pianist Bella Davidovich and her son, violinist Dmitry Sitkovetsky, 1984



In 1959 Mark married Joan. They were happily complementary. She exerted a calming influence over a personality nature did not create calm. She is warm and organized; Mark was warm, inspirational and improvisational. Together they made quite a team, a team that did things right.

Mark’s first career was in the chemical business in America and in Belgium. In 1974, he moved his growing family back to this country and to Newport, where a festival was lying in wait for him. His new friends John and Anne Brown were serving on the board when a crisis developed, and he agreed to take over the management of the Festival. “Only for a year,” he said, but he never left. He had found his calling and his mission.

Many factors defined Mark Malkovich’s Newport Music Festival. One of them, of course, was Newport itself. The concerts take place in the historic 19th-century mansions overlooking the sea. These summer “cottages” redefine domestic scale, to put it mildly, but the concert spaces are small, and Mark knew how to take advantage of that. The programs featured music meant to be played and sung in intimate settings for small and discriminating audiences. Hearing familiar works at Newport was always illuminating because we realized that most performances of these pieces we hear represent a form of transcription; we usually experience them in auditoriums larger than most of the great composers of the past ever encountered or indeed ever imagined, and in artificially formal circumstances. Nowhere but Newport do concert audiences convene wearing an engaging mix of tuxedos, gowns, tennis whites, and swimwear. The ambience of Newport restores a direct and immediate contact between performers and audiences, the sharing of life experiences, of sorrows and joys, through close artistic communication. Something always feels not quite right when we hear these same pieces in other circumstances.



The repertoire that Mark chose for Newport was astounding in its extent, range, and variety. Over the years the Festival has presented the complete keyboard music and chamber music of every major composer from Bach through the mid-20th century, as well as an interesting sampling of music written since then. Mark placed familiar masterpieces alongside neglected works by the same composers; most programs were full of illuminating juxtapositions.

Mark's curiosity about music was insatiable. To the end of his days he was asking questions, seeking answers; he was always as eager to tell you something he had learned earlier in the day as he was to tell you all about some great artist he had heard decades ago. He also loved to lower his voice and gossip, especially if you had something juicy to tell *him*.



With old friend Victor Borge, 1999

With the help of an ally in the Library of Congress, Elmer Booze (who for three weeks every summer displays his talents as page-turner *extraordinaire*), Mark researched and rediscovered vast amounts of music long consigned to oblivion – worthwhile music that many of the great composers of the central repertoire knew very well. Sometimes the Festival was criticized for presenting trivial music. Mark didn't mind; he believed in the value of trivial music, although of course every season did present works of the greatest depth and seriousness. Mark's programs gave masterpieces a context. If the composers of those masterpieces could have visited Newport, they would probably gawked at the natural splendors and marble mansions like everyone else, but the minute the music began, they would have found themselves at home, in their own world.

To this research and scholarship Mark added the impresario's gift of matching work to performer, and of lining up works that complement and



Mark and Joan Malkovich with Greek pianist Dmitris Sgouros, 1982

illuminate each other. Mark created programs that entertained the ear, stimulated the mind, and lifted the spirit. He also knew just how to find a catchy title that would tie everything together, and lengthen the line at the box office. Just last season, for example, he used group names for birds and animals to organize his programs – a “Rookery of Russians,” “School of Scandinavians,” “Pod of Poles” and a “Flutter of French.” I wasn't present when he came up with all of this, but I remember talking with him on the phone about it, and how delighted he was with himself. I can well imagine him giggling and clapping his hands as he found and fashioned the next title.

The Newport Festival became celebrated for the prestige of its debut artists; the list of world-class musicians who made their American debuts at Newport is endless. Several of them return this summer – the great

With prima ballerina Marcia Haydée and Mark IV, 1986



Russian pianist Bella Davidovich arrived as a debut artist, and later returned to play with her son, the violinist Dmitry Sitkovetsky; now she is back not only with him, but with her granddaughter Julia Sitkovetsky, a soprano. Konstantin Lifschitz is back to play Bach's *Art of Fugue*. Gergely Bogányi returns with an astonishing feat – he will play the complete piano music of Chopin in 10 concerts.

Mark had a particular affection for great old masters whose appearances in this country were rare. The legendary Brazilian pianist Magda Tagliaferro was past 90 when she came to Newport, her hair still a blaze of bottled red; she closed her program with a nimble and brilliant performance of Chopin's *Andante spianato* and



With (left to right) Eric Vorontsov, cultural attache, Gosconcert; Russian pianist, Andrei Gavrilov; and his four children, Mark, Erik, Kara, and Kent; 1976

Addressing the audience, 1984



grande polonaise brillante. Her hands flew across the keyboard and afterwards she confided, with a mischievous grin, "It's all in the thumb!" Now Mme. Tagliaferro, Dame Moura Lympny, Sergio Fiorentino, Vlado Perlemuter and Halina Czerny-Stefanska are playing for Mark again, in circumstances even more resplendent than those in Newport.

He also reintroduced to this country many great artists still in mid-career, like the Italian pianist Maria Tipo. Dubravka Tomsic and Michael Endres returned repeatedly and became ambassadors of the Newport spirit wherever they went.

Naturally he was always interested in young talent and every season featured new and promising musicians. In Mark's first year, pianist Andrei Gavrilov made his American debut after winning the Tchaikovsky Competition at the age of 18; he went home with a cowboy hat and an attitude that got him into trouble with the authorities. This season brings the turn of young Claire Huangci.

Mark was also interested in unusual artists and events. The late Victor Borge was one of them, as was Portuguese fado singer Amália Rodrigues, prima ballerina Maria Tallchief, the Russian male choir Akafist and improviser John Bayless. This season brings the American debut of Aleksandr Hrustevich, a virtuoso on the Russian button accordion, the *bayan*. Hrustevich's YouTube appearances have made him an internet sensation, and the Newport audience will be the first in this country to see him live.

Finally over the years Mark has built a gifted, devoted and hard-working family of artists who return year after year, often learning long, difficult and obscure works knowing full well that they will probably only have one chance in their lifetimes to play them.

Mark filled his long and fruitful life to the brim and in his later years he was laden with honors, which he reveled in, but he was really more interested in further accomplishments. He organized other festivals and presented Newport artists in other venues; these concerts were wonderful but they lacked the magic ingredient supplied by Newport itself. He served on competition juries around the world, taking careful note of young talent he wanted to present back home. He taught, lectured, appeared on panels, and he was particularly delighted with his radio show – it was another way of sharing his love of music, and of building his audience.

He and Joan brought up their children to work behind the scenes in the Festival. In the last couple of years Mark retained his title of artistic director, but it must have come as a relief to him to relinquish the title and responsibilities of general manager to his son, Mark IV, who has spent his life in and around the festival. I know how proud Mark was to have fathered a trained and worthy successor.

As a civilization we honor the dead sometimes more than we did when they were alive. But there

On stage singing the Georgian National anthem at the 2007 Tbilisi International Piano Competition



At home with his grand piano, his music collection, and his many framed memories.



With two favorite pianists, Dame Moura Lympany and Dubravka Tomsic, 1995



With French pianists
Jean-Philippe Collard and
François-René Duchâble, 1987

(below) With "one of the greatest pianists I ever heard,"
Italian Sergio Fiorentino, 1998.
Fiorentino would be dead one month later.



have always been individuals that we honor with special feeling when we lose them, the ones who showed us a richer way to live.

Mark was one of those.

Richard Dyer wrote about music in The Boston Globe for 33 years, and remains active as a teacher, writer and lecturer. He followed the activities of the Newport Music Festival during Mark Malkovich's tenure with interest and admiration and loved both the Festival and the man.

In December, 2007 Mark needed a photo for a Christmas letter. He had just returned from Kazakstan where he had been invited to judge a national music competition and where he had been presented with this royal robe and hat. It isn't vanity or even exactly silliness that this photo captures; it is Mark's sheer joy of life and of the wondrous experiences and people he has been privileged to know.

This is my portrait of a beloved neighbor and role model, a giant of a man who could teach all of us how to make the most of life. I will miss him, but I will never stop trying to be more like him.

Phil Dickinson

