

Words for my dear friend Ron MacKay.

Friday, April 18th, 2008

Last time I was up in front speaking about Ron, it was a citation for the NSMEA Music for Life Award in October. And about three seconds before I began to speak, he marched right down to the front of the auditorium and sat down in the third row in front of me... and... I started to blubber... and I blubbered my way through the entire speech... well here I am today and he's in front of me again. So Ron... how about coming up here and sit here on my shoulder and help me through this.

I was hoping for a beautiful sunny day today as I knew all of you would be here. And we'd have a packed house both inside and out. There are so many who this man Ron MacKay has influenced and in so many ways. Always in his conversations... there would be talk of music, or a story that started out like... "one time when..." and always a funny twist to the dialogue. I hope that I can try that tactic here today.

First of all, on behalf of the family and all of you... his friends, I thank you for your outpouring of love and affection during Ron's illness and to Ron throughout all the years. I thank you for the many phone calls and lovely messages through e-mail, letters, cards and flowers. Thank you all for coming to make this a special part of Ron's journey. A very special thanks to the Halifax Community Band and friends for helping with the reception, which is to follow this memorial.

I have had numerous calls and letters over the last weeks and days and yesterday Ron's dear friend and colleague Howard Cable called me on my drive up here yesterday to tell me that he performed one of Ron's favourite pieces of Howards this past Saturday in his honour... the Highlights of the Sound of Music. He sends his love to everyone. Ron sure climbed many mountains and had many triumphs.

I know that everyone knows all the fabulous things and wonderful music that Ron accomplished throughout these last 80 years because we have taken the time to pay tribute to him with the many honours and citations made to him while he was still with us... and there were so many. I just want to tell you that at the last three of the acknowledgements made to Ron he'd turn to me and say... this is the best day... or this is the best day of my life and then the last one... he just shook his head and was at a loss for words he was so happy. I want to say thanks to the band I conduct and the band that Ron help me get established, the Second Wind Community Band for helping us make these tributes happen.

I thought about what could I say that hasn't been said already in the papers and on CBC about our friend... and I decided that I would think of something balanced... seeing that was something he was always encouraging me to do in my music. Balance the sound. And as I am putting this together two of Ron's colleagues and really good friends, Jim Forde and Barb Stetter were grappling with what to do as the Cape Breton Band festival is going on and whether they should cancel today's sessions, so they could attend this special time for us all. Ron was a regular adjudicator at this festival and he was so proud of the bands and their teachers in our area. Jim gave this so much thought to this dilemma as we all did. The level that was being adjudicated today was B100, which for those of you who are not aware... is the beginning level of music for bands and young musicians... and it was something that Ron felt was so important... get the

music happening at the early stages and get the youngsters talking about music. Jim felt passionate about staying and delivering that message to these excited young students. Barb's band was the first band to be on Tuesday morning and knowing what had happened the day before and remembering Ron... she felt that Ron was sitting on her shoulder as they were playing and while she was conducting. I believe all of us here who knew Ron and worked with and along side of Ron... will feel that whenever we are up conducting or teaching he is on our shoulder. I thought what are the 3 things that come into my head as soon as I think of Ron MacKay or if I was asked to describe him and I came up with three words.

First of all... I'd say Dapper. Yes Ron would always look snappy and dressed up... topped off with his signature hat... even if it was a casual visit or a casual workshop or decked out in his tux. He always stood tall and gave you the sense he respected what he was about to do. I feel that in order to be dapper or to look good you have to look after details and you have to make sure that everything is in place. He used that same personal trait in his music too. He made sure that all the nuances were polished. He made sure that not just the notes were played but that the music was played too. He took care of the whole picture. Ron was so comfortable in his own skin. I know that he knew he had so much to offer in his head and heart and his ways worked. That gave him that "Dapperness" in his music.

My second word I'd say is devoted. Ron always felt that he had so much he had to do. There were workshops and festivals coming up that he was the guest, or he would be writing a piece of music to fit the next persons needs... or a commission or planning a shopping spree that he might take when Jane got home or when any of the kids would say let's go shopping. He loved to shop. Wanna know a secret... he told me that his favourite shop was Linen 'n Things and grocery shopping especially with Jane and his fart machine. That was the neat thing about Ron... amongst his busy schedule and his busy mind he was always having fun. His sense of humour was there right to the end. Just last week when I visited him Karen asked me if I'd like a beer. Of course I said yes. Well it was time for Ron to rest... so I said to Ron... that I was going to have a beer with Karen and he motioned to me to have one for him too. He was always wanting so much to be in the center of the action or at least hear that everyone around was enjoying themselves. When he was realizing the turn his life was taking in these last months, he kept saying to me how he would be back at his writing and his planning for the Beginner Festivals that he was so passionate about. He had such confidence in the hope he'd be better. And when I realized what was happening and how desperately he wanted to say more and felt he still had more to offer, I thought we need to get this written down or at least recorded. When I chatted with Ken Foote, who is so proud to say he was Ron's boss... he had the same thoughts as I did. So as Ron taught us... when there's a good thing to do... get it done. A great friend of Ron's and of course many of ours, Brenda Porter agreed to help us get the information written down. Many of you might not realize but we did get some interviewing done because he really wanted to do this. We decided to call this project for now... Tips from A Pro. He told me how cool it would have been if he had had a book that told you how to get the best music out of your musicians. He was always busy and devoted and he managed to get it done. And he was going strong and full-time and he was in his 80th year.

And lastly, the next word would be to LISTEN. This is a letter Ron shared with me from my daughter Jacki once she had learned of his illness. Ron shared this with me and I asked Jacki if she'd mind if I read it to you. Here goes...

Hi Ron,

Jacki Mercer here, Laura's daughter! I wanted to let you know I'm sorry about your news and I'm praying for you. Mom told me how amazing the concert was. I'm so sad I wasn't able to make it. Someone has it taped though, so I'll get to see it. She was so honored to be able to do that tribute for you because I know how much your friendship and mentorship means to her. I know she is blessed to have you as her friend! I also wanted to say that I respect you a lot too. I know this probably comes off as very random, but there are few people that I've met in your generation who believes so strongly in my generation. So many people say things about how we are and how awful we've become and that the worlds become, but I always tell people, not everyone thinks that. There's this man, Ron MacKay, and he really believes in us and thinks we're great! Haha..... But that is something that I have always admired and have always been thankful for. I wanted to make sure I got to say that too you and that you have made an impact on people that you didn't even know you did. People outside of the band circle too! I am blessed by you as a person and to have gotten to know you as you've been here with Mom. Just knowing the way that you love people (especially your family and the things you said about your wife) and the way that you believe in people, as a whole, seeing how much you love and cherish your friends, and also the way that you see things positively, it really impacts and influences us to be better people. Thank you for who you are and I will be praying for your COMPLETE healing! I believe it can happen. Bless you!!

Jacki Mercer

So Folk if we **listen** to what Jacki has said here you know that we have all felt the same way... just in context of your own experience. I treasure a little gift Ron gave to me a few years back that I am clutching onto right now in my hand. A token with a treble clef on one side and the word Listen on the other side. This is the biggest word I think about when I think of Ron MacKay... He LISTENED... and You had to listen carefully to hear what he was saying... you couldn't help but listen to his stories... and he said to listen to every aspect of your music and you'll be successful. What a great word to make sure is added to our lives.

These three words are the words that come to my mind when I first think of Ron personally and I believe that these three words also applied to his music. Strive for dapperness, be devoted to your life and LISTEN.

Thank You Ron for the gift you have given to me and to all around me.

And as Benoit Turcotte said to many of us in a letter this week... this is a big loss for all of us and the one thing he wanted to say was or could think of was... that we all have a new angel to look after us. We love you Ron... I love you.

Laura Mercer.
April 17, 2008

