

Gale's rich tales of classical composers resonate through tribute site



Gale

john rennison, the hamilton spectator

Richard Gale, left, and Wayne Irwin chew the fat about the website Irwin has made as a tribute to Gale's long-running classical radio show.

By Jeff Mahoney

You can take the voice out the heavens, but you can't take the heaven out of the voice.

So as Richard Gale speaks to me from a sofa cushion's length away, I find myself whipsawed between the present and the 1980s, when I listened to him on the radio.

Back then, the broadcaster's words were ricocheting off the stratosphere (or is it the ionosphere? I failed radio in journalism school), not the living room ceiling. But it always *seemed* he was sitting on the sofa with you.

Did I say "speaks?" No, he resonates. This voluminous, diaphragmatic sound comes from him as though from deep vaults. It's a voice by turns pipe-organ strong and antler-skin soft but always bound inseparably to certain qualities of character — warmth, intimacy, dynamism (especially around story-telling) — that endeared him to generations.

"I was just born with it, I guess," says Richard, humbly, of his famous voice, best-known to Hamiltonians from his decades on CKDS (CHML's FM station at the time) hosting *An Evening with Richard Gale*, the popular, engagingly grassroots late-night classical music program. It ran from 1967 to 1991.

Do you miss Richard Gale? I know many of you are nodding yes. Not just the voice and the personality but the lively stories he'd relate from the lives of the great composers. Yes, we miss him.

Then let me bring you the good news. You can hear Richard again, right now, thanks to a new high-tech genuflection to the man by his friend and admirer, Rev. Wayne Irwin. Wayne, with the technical help of his grandson Stephen Litt Belch, started up a website: aneveningwithrichardgale.com.

Back in the day, programs were recorded onto wide-loop reel-to-reel tapes. Those tapes were not saved but repeatedly recorded over, so few of Richard Gale's shows survive. In his home he shows me a silver canister the size of a hubcap. It contains a recording of his final Evening with Richard Gale show. It's all he has.

Rev. Wayne, the retired minister of Hamilton's historic Centenary United Church, loved Richard's show from the time he was a science student at McMaster University.

"I built an Eiko radio tuner kit and the first program that came in happened to be Richard's first night (on CKDS). I liked it instantly. It was like he was talking right to you," says Wayne.

He changed tracks and studied to become a minister. He kept the dial on CKDS.

One day in the 1990s, Richard happened to visit Centenary, and there met Wayne, who showed him around. Turned out Richard had married his wife, Alma, in that church.

Wayne and Richard formed a fast friendship which deepened over the years. When Alma died in 2007, Wayne performed the service. Not long after, Wayne began the process of mining Richard's stories and memories in several interview sessions, during which hours of conversation were taped.

Then it occurred to Wayne: a Richard Gale website. This was right up Wayne's alley. After retiring from the ministry, he started building websites for churches, just to keep busy. (Wayne is a very accomplished man on many levels, including musically.)

"My reaction was 'Who's alive to remember? Who cares?'" Richard says with a self-deprecating laugh.

Who? Well, almost as soon as the site went up — with all the interview material uploaded — the feedback started. A man from Switzerland posted his memories from when he studied in Hamilton and listened to Richard.

One Toronto visitor had cassette tapes of many of Richard's shows (he did 6,000 altogether) from the early '80s. That material is now on the site, along with so much else: the original introduction music (a passage from Liszt's Concert Étude 3), the final broadcast, testimonials, photographs.

It's a growing concern.

Pay the site a visit. And happy listening.

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