



## **In Memoriam: F. John Adams**

Posted on May 26, 2011



### **F. John Adams – Conductor of the Holden Choruses 1970-78**

The Harvard Glee Club family mourns with the family of F. John Adams even as we celebrate the life of this remarkable man and accomplished musician. He is pictured here on Mount Washington in the Presidential Range in New Hampshire with the Lakes of the Clouds in the background. Thanks to Adam Finkel '79 for this photo which he took circa 1982.

F. John was Conductor of the Holden Choruses at Harvard University from 1970 to 1978, during which time he prepared choruses for Leonard Bernstein, Michael Tilson Thomas, Erich Leinsdorf, Mstislav Rostropovich, and William Steinberg. He co-founded and served as music director of the Boston Classical Orchestra from 1980 to 1983, and was assistant conductor of Boston Lyric Opera's Ring Cycle in 1983. In 1983, he joined the faculty of the New England Conservatory where he taught until 2007. He was assistant conductor of the Rhode Island Philharmonic from 1994 to 1996, and was also artistic director of its youth orchestra program. Adams was Leonard Bernstein's assistant conductor and performed as a guest pianist, harpsichordist, and organist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa and Michael Tilson Thomas. He also served as music director of the New Bedford Symphony for 18 years and conducted the Concord Chorus for 20 years.

Awards include a Tanglewood Fellowship, a medal from Pope Paul VI, an honorary membership in the Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard University, and the Harvard Glee Club Medal. In addition, Adams edited motets of Josquin des Prez and Antoine Brumel for G. Schirmer and directed five recordings for the Musical Heritage Society.

F. John received his A.B., A.M., and Ph.D. from Harvard University and studied conducting with Frederik Prausnitz and Nadia Boulanger.

A Memorial Service (<http://hgcfoundation.org/?p=885>) was held in Cambridge on September 25, 2011 at The Memorial Church. We welcome your expressions of sympathy and remembrances of F. John which will be shared with his family.

Read John's obituary by Gil Bliss as published by the Boston Globe on June 16, 2011 here ([http://hgcfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/f\\_john-obituary.pdf](http://hgcfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/f_john-obituary.pdf)).

## 43 thoughts on “In Memoriam: F. John Adams”



David Potts says:

April 3, 2012 at 11:28 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/#comment-62>)

I'm late to the game on this one, having just today run across this news. I can't tell you how saddened I am to learn this. During my first term as President of MasterSingers of Worcester, we experienced the death of Alfred Nash Patterson, and I was tasked, as folks often are, with facilitating the search for a new Music Director. After auditioning many wonderful folks, we settled on F. John, who became not only a treasured colleague and director, but a good friend. There were many evenings, post-rehearsal, when he would bed down in my spare room rather than drive back from Worcester to Wellesley, and his influence and friendship will long live in me. I clearly remember one of the most stunning displays of his musicianship – MSW sang one of the first performances in Worcester of Berlioz' Requiem in many, many years, back in the early 80's, and I was amazed that F. John conducted the entire concert WITHOUT a score. His grasp of all things musical, from voice to instrumental, was wonderful. He is (and will continue to be) truly missed.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/?replytocom=62#respond>)



Matthew Beach says:

December 23, 2011 at 12:33 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/#comment-61>)

Master Singers of Worcester had prepared Mozart's "Vespers for a Solemn Confessor" was set to perform in Faneui Hall, Boston, together with The Boston Classical Orchestra. I had memorized the bass part, rehearsed hours with recording and score at home, and arrived with a very sore throat. I treated the malady with several doses of hot rum punch; then under F. John' direction, experienced the rare transforming perfect union of instruments and voices in service of deeply inspired music. Afterward I told John how humbled I felt, and how very thankful, to be present with him and the others.

I told him I gave extra attention to every entrance and cutoff, freed from having to look at the notes. He said he was glad I'd chosen to sing. "If you you're right with every entrance and cutoff, it's a wonderful feeling."

In his great generosity, John conducted a little choir at the baptism of my son Andrew. "Gracious" best describes this dear friend.

We had said farewell after John had gone down the path of Alzheimers more than a little ways.

I look forward to singing with him in Paradise.

Thanks, John.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/?replytocom=61#respond>)



Matthew Beach says:

December 23, 2011 at 12:19 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/#comment-60>)

John conducted Master Singers of Worcester, which I joined thanks to encouragement from Henry Rose. One day I said to John, "I'd like to begin study with a voice coach and become a bass soloist." John replied, "I'm not sure if your voice would justify the money, and even more: the time. But I know someone who could make a wise decision. I'll see if he will audition you."

Thanks to John's kindness I met my master teacher, John's New England Conservatory colleague Mark Pearson.

Both men enriched my life wonderfully.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriam-f-john-adams/?replytocom=60#respond>)



Mark Holland, H'71 says:

November 20, 2011 at 11:23 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-54>)

Sadness, loss, grief, passing of an era. Musician, conductor, teacher, friend, These words pretty much say it all. But they don't entirely. Not by a long shot.....

We were the first batch of Glee Clubbers that sang with F. John, a fresh new choral conductor, with an exquisite sense of vocal sound, color, blending, intonation, texture, fabric, tempos, and style. Exquisite also were his hands, something that virtually everybody remarked on at the time, men and women alike. He infused us with an ennobling sense of high art, high purpose, mixed with good humor, glee, laughter, that were present everywhere and at every turn, whether rehearsal, performance, tour, or a simple thing such as eating together. He had that infectious smile and resounding sunburst laughter — we could always count on that one-of-a-kind laugh whenever we said something funny enough to be worthy of eliciting it. And we could always count also on those fabled blue shirts when- and where- ever we encountered him, in and out of Sever Hall.

We were also the first intrepid few who wished to sing mixed-voice “a capella” sacred & secular music from all periods on a regular basis, and thereby established, founded and pioneered the then brand-new Collegium Musicum. F. John was imaginative, open to envisioning the possibilities. I even stayed around Harvard for one extra year after graduation ('71-'72) in order to continue singing with our fledgling new group, which I grew to love more and more as the years have passed. People today tend to forget that Collegium was not a “given” by any means, that it actually met with some resistance at the beginning, with a kind of benign neglect from a music department that didn't care at the time, even perhaps from an uncaring administration of the university itself. The history of the various battles waged are pretty well known amongst us collectively by now, and illustrate that particular point, so here is no point in dredging them up again. It's enough to say simply that, as a result, it actually took a lot of determination, resolve, and will power on F. John's part to see it through, stabilize it, and foster it initially. And he succeeded admirably in this. Even brilliantly. The present day Collegium is now one of the university's shining jewels, and this is part of F. John's legacy.

As to F. John the teacher, it is sufficient to observe that when he took over the introductory music course (ah, age... I can't even recall the course number right now), enrollment in the course more than doubled, nearly tripling during the years he taught it. He was beloved as teacher. His vigorous new energy, excitement, and youthful enthusiasm were contagious to students in the classroom as well as in the rehearsal hall. I owe a special debt of gratitude to him, as F. John sponsored me in an Independent Study in composition. F. John was resident faculty member in Leverett House, and as such, he became my music tutor — all the more remarkable, as my actual concentration was theoretical math. He related, as he had himself also done a whole lot of theoretical math as an undergrad. He also heard me practicing piano and composing in the House Common Room my junior year. He said, “you have a good ear and can hear counterpoint, voice-leading, uncommonly well, and I like what you're doing. Would you like for me to sponsor you in an independent study for credit?” Those words coalesced my career and my future. This had been a low period in my life, and when he said that, I leaped with excitement, at the opportunity to be sure, but especially at the critical issue of encouragement, which he did wonderfully. He was not like a bull in a China shop — tearing away at my every bar of writing and shredding my pieces as well as my morale the way other teachers might have; but rather a gentle beneficent force and soul who guided and encouraged. Always encouraged... And in that way it paid off in my life, as I am a grown-up composer and professional musician. F. John started the ball rolling for me at a critical time in my life. At the recent memorial service, I heard Prof. Robert Levin say so eloquently how F. had gotten him started initially in realizing and completing so beautifully unfinished and incomplete compositions by Mozart. And other people have remarked similarly how a simple comment or calm word of advice from F. changed their lives. Uh-huh! I can relate.

People also may not realize that F. John, working alongside El Forbes, was an early translator of the great music theorist, Heinrich Schenker, whose theories are now so in vogue and widespread in American colleges, universities, conservatories, music schools, and music theory societies. Our F. John translated into English part of Schenker's great monograph on the Beethoven 5th Symphony, and this was way ahead of the curve. Now almost everybody in music theory has translated or studied some of Schenker at some time or other in their studies or careers. But F. John was a very early proponent and advocate before it was ever fashionable.

Well, this is long-winded. But warm recollections get that way. And warm these are. I stayed in touch from time to time with F., mostly by phone from New York to Cambridge, but seeing him in person those special few times such as the 150th Glee Club gala were both touching and sad all at the same time. Alzheimer's had taken its dreadful toll far too soon. I asked him once if there was anything I could do, or that he needed from a friend, and he asked quite unexpectedly if I had a spare or extra turntable — this in the early era of MP3 files, not even CD's anymore. I asked him if he would at least like, or could use, a CD player, and he said no, that it would be too complicated at this point in his life to learn how to use one, and that he still wanted to use only turntables for his old vinyl LP's — this affected me tremendously at the time, and I've not forgotten the exchange. I was quite upset at the implications for my wonderful old friend, teacher, conductor. Life can be harsh ...

He influenced my life greatly, and I felt and continue to feel a sense of comraderie, nostalgia, and affection for him, and for the times past that he represents for us, in which he played an central important role in the lives of many.

I hope his spirit is at peace, and thank him for everything good that he stood for. We can ask no more of a human being. Pax.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=54#respond>)



Jim Mastracco says:

October 21, 2011 at 4:48 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-53>)

This afternoon, I've spent some time reading tributes to F. John Adams. I discovered the news of his passing impersonally from the Internet, ironically the mechanism that I will employ to express personal loss. Last year, I had heard from one of his former glee club clubbers of the Alzheimer's that was getting worse, but it is still a shock to read about this — at age 66. Though I feel loss, Prof. Adams was someone I did not know well, certainly not as well as those who have offered remembrances on this blog posted in memoriam. They come mostly from fellow musicians, many of them singers, some of them fellow struggling sight readers, recounting a reference to the “look” of a conductor's eyes, of

great intensity and stage presence. Others come from students and classmates, but all reflect gratitude. As I read these expressions of love and respect for this man, I am reliving the loss of my college glee club director, Hugh Allen Wilson, who passed away last December and who I have been missing since.

In 1978, a glee club from Union was invited to participate in Harvard's Festival for Men's Choruses. We were a last minute replacement for another group that had cancelled, one that couldn't decide to participate for one reason or another. Can you imagine? Union did not have more than a few motets in its repertoire, some Brumel and Josquin, but not a full program. Renaissance polyphony, Prof. Adams' passion, was the theme of the Festival that year. What Union did have under its belt, was a compliment of Schubert songs performed at Town Hall in New York and for simulcast intended for distribution on public radio and television. Still, word of a group from Schenectady singing Schubert part songs made for lighthearted banter and some serious barbs, or so it seemed, wherever we walked that weekend in April of 1978.

It was the professional respect that F. John Adams and Hugh Wilson had for each other that allowed for an upstart group of singers to share their interpretation of Schubert, indeed our Hugh, with the audience gathered in the Fogg. Union would return to sing at Harvard again in 1979. F. John Adams later would come to Union to conduct its choruses for a year while Hugh was on sabbatical.

It was during this year that I had the pleasure of getting to know Prof. Adams and as I write these words, I can clearly see him rehearsing the group in Arts 202, the old chemistry lecture hall. It was the intention of Adams and some of Union's drama professors to stage a production of Felix Mendelssohn's Antigone. If truth be told, for many of us singing the incidental music that accompanied the presentation, the drama became known as the Agony not Antigone. It was getting through this production, rehearsing this music that allowed the Union men, particularly those of us who were alumni singers, a chance to kick back with Prof. Adams, have a few beers, to call him John. He was now one of the guys. The Union men and women, under the moniker of the Union College Chorale had the pleasure of being a part of a larger chorus under his direction, a performance of Verdi's Requiem at Mechanics Hall. For many of us it was the first opportunity to sing the Verdi.

As one who has taught professionally appreciates, sticking to your convictions and not lowering standards because of pressure, is more than a code of ethics, it is part of an inner core. In retrospect years later; this was illustrated in Adams' preparation of the Mendelssohn, pushing us to do it and his commitment to the production. Reading that F. John Adams did not waiver on the importance of maintaining a men's chorus at Harvard at a time when so many undergraduate institutions, including Union, faced pressures to combine male and female singing groups, is a testament not only to his inner core convictions, but his appreciation and understanding of history, particularly in preserving choral repertoire for men's voices and the musical institutions needed to perform the repertoire.

How fortunate and blessed to have had people like Adams and Wilson, who just happened to be musical contemporaries of Leonard Bernstein as teachers. They were great teachers who cared about their students as people, passing on their love and passion for learning, and the importance of not compromising standards.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=53#respond>)



Jim Mastracco says:

October 18, 2011 at 11:44 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-52>)

This afternoon, I am reading tributes to F. John Adams. I discovered the news of his passing impersonally from the Internet, ironically the very mechanism that I will rely upon to express a sense of personal loss. Last year, I had heard from one of his former glee clubbers of Alzheimer's Disease, that it was getting worse, but it is still – a shock – to read about this, and at age 66. Though I feel loss, Prof. Adams was someone I did not know well, certainly not as well as those who have offered remembrances here, many from singers, some who struggle with sight reading as I do, some who recount a reference to a look in a conductor's eyes, of great intensity and stage presence. I conclude that all of these expressions are tied together with a common thread of gratitude, and soon realize that I'm reliving the passing of my own college glee club director, Hugh Allen Wilson, who died last December, who I still mourn.

In 1978, a glee club from Union was invited to participate in Harvard's Festival of Men's Choruses. We were a last minute replacement for another group that had canceled, that couldn't decide to participate for one reason or another. Can you imagine? Union did not have more than a couple of motets in its repertoire, Brumel and Josquin, but not a full program. Renaissance polyphony, Prof. Adams' passion, was the theme of the Festival that year. What Union DID have under its belt, was a complement of Schubert songs that we had performed in New York City and for broadcast for syndication on public television. Still, word of a group from Schenectady, New York singing Schubert part songs made for lighthearted banter and some serious barbs, or so it seemed, wherever we walked that weekend that April.

It was the professional respect that F. John Adams and Hugh Wilson had for each other that allowed for an upstart group of singers to share their interpretation of Schubert, indeed their Hugh, with the audience gathered in the Fogg Museum. Union would return in 1979 to sing in Sanders Theater, and F. John Adams would later come to Schenectady to conduct Union while Hugh was on sabbatical leave. The Union men and women had the pleasure of being part of a larger chorus under Prof. Adams' direction to experience Verdi's Requiem with him, in Mechanics Hall, in February of 1982

During his sojourn in Schenectady I had the pleasure of getting to know F. John Adams, to call him John, and as I write these words I clearly see him conducting in Arts 202, rehearsing the incidental music of Mendelssohn Antigone which, with the help of some of Union's drama professors, was staged in the college's Memorial Chapel. If truth be told, many of us referred to the music as "The Agony", not Antigone. But it was getting through the rehearsals and performance that allowed the Union men to kick back with F. John, to talk, to drink beer, to raise a glass to music. In retrospect, our year together as life itself was too short, not enough time to get to know each other.

Something that one who teaches appreciates over time, is that a great teacher must have the courage of convictions, to not lower the bar. That is the heart of academic integrity. When I think and recall F. John Adams and Antigone, I think of these principles in teaching, of not compromising. To read here that he was denied tenure astonishes me. To read of his efforts to preserve the all male chorus at Harvard, the mechanism to perform TTBB repertoire, does not surprise me but does makes me wish that my alma mater, could rediscover its own choral history and truly honor its musical roots, and the memories of Professors Wilson and Adams and their love of learning and of music.

Bravo to Harvard to champion the memory of F. John Adams.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=52#respond>)



Ed Koh says:

October 3, 2011 at 6:17 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-50>)

I am so sad to hear of F. John's death, and especially too late to attend his memorial. I have a few remembrances to offer:

On tour one year my brother Harold, Tom Lansdale, Brian McConville and I formed a barbershop quartet called "The Accidental Occidentals" largely to sing one song, called "F. John", a parody of the Jimmy Dean hit "Big John". I can't say I remember many of the words (which were written mainly by Ha and McConville, but I do know that it started something like this: "Every Tuesday at rehearsal you could see him arrive he stood five foot eight he weighed one forty-five. Kinda broad at the shoulder kinda narrow at the HIP, and everybody knew ya didn't give no LIP to F. John!") (Chorus: "F. Joohn, F. Joohn, F.F. John, F. John!")

The only other thing I remember was a punch line that "He always stood by us in stormy weather, and taught us that blue and brown DO go together, F. John."

F. John took the teasing with good humor and aplomb.

On the tour bus one day I showed John the score of (as I recall) a Mozart lied (please help me to identify it—one line is "der Tod klopf am meinem Tur—Death knocks on my door). He read through it as if it were the Boston Globe, then handed it back to me. "That's very lovely" he said.

At one point John decided to form a small acapella group comprising the best sightreaders from Collegium. I don't remember all the invitees, but I do remember that Tom Lansdale and I were the two basses. We met in John's suite high in one of the Leverett towers, with a great view and lots of sunlight. He gave us a pep talk, then handed out the sheet music for the first song.

It was an unmitigated disaster. We were all so intimidated that we were paralyzed by self-doubt. Tom and I kept looking at each other to see who knew the entrance, and then both of us would come in late. The other parts seemed to be having similar problems.

The "group" never convened again. However, to this day, I hold my head high and brag that F. John Adams considered me one of the best sightreaders in Collegium.

On a random day ten to fifteen years after I left Harvard I was in the parking lot of the Star Market on Mt. Auburn St., when I saw John walking by. I was very excited to see him, and jumped out of my car to greet him. His hair was white, but other than that he looked much the same as he had. His acuity and alertness were unchanged, and he remembered me right away. We had a brief friendly chat and went our separate ways. I remember how happy I was to see him that day. Later I heard a rumor that he had a chronic illness, but was unable to verify it.

I remember that John was big on eye contact—he always wanted you to be looking right at him. I took this expectation very seriously, and my eyes were always glued to his. (Just like the Red Sox great Luis Tiant, at some point in the game he turns and looks right at you!) This strategy usually worked quite well except during one performance of the Brahms Requiem, when during the "Herr du bist würdig zu nehmen Preis und Ehre" section, John apparently went into a trance while conducting. His spine became erect, he threw back his head and closed his eyes, and continued to conduct like this for the rest of the section. This drove all of us eye-glueers nuts, including Joan Sobel, Margot Lukens, and Wendy Bennett. We were totally thrown off. Luckily he came out of it after the big "und Kraft" finish.

The Brahms was what got me into Collegium in the first place. I had sung the piece with a summer chorus but wasn't able to sing in the performance. I felt unfinished, until I saw a flyer announcing an open sightreading of the Brahms Requiem in Holden Chapel. This was my junior year, 1972. I went to Holden and sang my heart out, and afterwards went to John and asked him if I could join the Collegium. He said, "Sure, if you can learn the Lord Nelson Mass in two days!" They were about to go on their Washington's Birthday tour to Toronto. Bob Stanton stepped up and said "We'll help you! You can do it!" John gave me a wink and said "It's not really that hard." Three days later I was on the bus, a new member of Collegium.

Sometimes after rehearsals we were all in such a state of euphoria that we couldn't stop singing. A group of six or eight of us tended to wander down to the Square and walk through Holyoke Center singing our favorite songs: "Fa una canzone" "In these delightful pleasant groves" and our very favorite "Mon coeur se recommande a vous". For some reason I always conducted "Mon coeur" (until I left Collegium, when I heard that Brian took over), and it was always magical. For those few moments I felt that I was channeling F. John, and could feel the joy that came from molding that beautiful sound, and hear it reverberating around us in that cavernous concrete space.

I have always loved music. F. John taught me to love it even more.

In Korea they say "Anyongheekashipshio." Go in peace, my friend.

(old friends please feel free to write me at:  
[edwardtkoh@gmail.com](mailto:edwardtkoh@gmail.com) (<mailto:edwardtkoh@gmail.com>)  
or on Facebook)

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=50#respond>)



Kelly says:

October 1, 2011 at 3:08 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-49>)

I am very sad to hear of his passing. I had the pleasure of being under his direction in RIYPO in 1994-1996. That experience is why I am in music now. I owe him my livelihood. I wish his family the best and hope that he is resting in peace.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=49#respond>)



Nadina Yanko Gardner says:

September 23, 2011 at 10:38 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-48>)

for John,

Ist die Sage umsonst, dass einst in der Klage um Linos  
wagende erste Musik durre Erstarrung durchdrang;  
dass erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah gottlicher Jungling  
plotzlich fur immer enttrat, das Leere in jene  
Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreist und trostet und hilft.

Is the legend in vain that tells of music's beginning  
in the midst of the mourning for Linos?  
The daring first sounds of song piercing  
the barren numbness, and how in that stunned space  
an almost godlike youth suddenly left forever,  
and the emptiness felt for the first time  
those harmonious vibrations which now enrapture  
and comfort and help us.

The First Elegy  
Duino Elegies  
Rainer Maria Rilke

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=48#respond>)



Bob Stanton says:

September 17, 2011 at 8:59 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-47>)

I was very sad to hear of F. John's death. I was both a Glee Club member and one of the original members of the Collegium Musicum. I spent a lot of time each week with F. John rehearsing and performing. I would echo much of what Vicki wrote. I was part of the group that helped to arrange the joke on F. John concerning his blue shirts and brown pants (that he wore seemingly every day). When we walked in for rehearsal that evening and saw him in that ridiculous white shirt he was clearly annoyed. But when he looked up and saw all of us in blue shirts and brown pants he just flashed that infectious, impish smile. Certainly a big part of college students' life is one of designing and playing practical jokes and F. John clearly enjoyed it. Another one involved the Bach Magnificat. F. John started the rehearsal (each of us secretly brought a kazoo), he lifted his baton, and rather than singing we used the kazoos. Initially he looked stunned, then smiled, then conducted the entire movement with a ever widening smile— it actually sounded great with kazoos.

The rehearsals with F. John were rigorous yet very rewarding. I learned a lot from F. John about music and performance. Certainly a high point was Oedipus Rex with Leonard Bernstein. Early that year after we had finished tryouts, I think F. John was worried he had too many people in the Glee Club and that he only wanted people who were truly committed to work hard. We had just started working on one part which I will never forget – nor I suspect has anyone else in the Glee Club at that time has forgotten the part that goes "Mulier in vestibulo ...." Suddenly F. John got furious that we were terrible and not working hard enough and was surprisingly very angry with us even though we had just started working on it. He then looked at each section and called one name from each section to the front (I was the baritone who was called down) and asked us to sing it as a quartet – we were terrible to say the least. This surprise tactic had never been done before. The next day about 10 people (I think) left the Glee Club. I think it was F. John's way to weed out the group and to tell us we have very big things to do this year. Needless to say we very prepared when Leonard Bernstein arrived and the performances at Symphony Hall, the recording for Columbia records, and the filming for WGBH remain one of the great experiences of my life. The whole Bernstein lecture series and performances are on DVD available from Amazon. Showing my son singing at that age was quite an experience.

Another very memorable moment with F. John was a single performance of the Mozart Requiem in Memorial Church. After a Harvard Professor was murdered on her way home in Cambridge, her husband (also a Harvard Professor) asked for a memorial service at Memorial Church and requested a performance of the Mozart Requiem. F. John asked around for anyone who had sung this before and we quickly rehearsed the music for a performance in a few weeks. Each rehearsal was deeply felt (F. John used to talk about his personal affinity for Mozart). Indeed the anniversary of Mozart's death (December 5th) occurred during our rehearsals. We finished that evening's rehearsal by singing the first 8 bars of the lachrymosae that are thought to be the last measures Mozart finished before he died. Then we silently left the rehearsal. The concert was a deeply emotional even religious experience. When we finished singing to a completely packed Memorial Church there was silence and – after a few minutes – everyone silently filed out. F. John brilliantly pulled this together in this very meaningful moment.

F. John had a major impact on my life. Many formative, important life lessons and experiences happened during my time in Glee Club and Collegium. About 7-10 years ago, a friend of mine invited me to visit her and her family for a summer beach concert in Rhode Island. As we lay on the blanket on the beach, and listened to the orchestra warming up, they announced that the conductor F. John Adams would be starting the concert shortly. I had no idea that F. John was the conductor. It was a wonderful evening and wonderful concert. I had not seen F. John for over

20 years at that point. I nervously walked in to say hello wondering if he even remembered me. As I approached him, F. John flashed that wonderful smile and said with great joy, "Bob!! It's wonderful to see you here". He was the same charming, warm person I remembered. I continue to vividly remember that meeting. Unfortunately I won't be there at his memorial service (I am going to Florida for a birthday party for my mother). I wish I could be there and share his passing with everyone else.

**Reply** (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=47#respond>)



Mark Holland, H'71 says:

November 20, 2011 at 8:39 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-58>)

Though the occasion is for the saddest of reasons, it's still great to see your name again here in print, Bob, nonetheless. You brought back fond memories with the mentioning of that Oedipus Rex of Stravinsky that we did in Symphony Hall. How John got us to intone that fractured rhythm for the words "OE-di-pus, oe-DI-pus"!

We did so many pieces of every period and sort, that the entire gamut and range take on the golden haze feeling almost of "repertoire soup" — remember, Phyllis Brin Juleson in the "Alice" of David del Tredici? "Soo-oup!"

It was very moving to hear Dave Steinhaus' tribute to F. at the recent memorial in Mem church. It brought back so much from our era ... particularly since we also lost Bob Lower, '69, so shortly after F. John.

Send along your email and contact info here if you can.

At least we have the shared memory and experience of our time together with F. John.

**Reply** (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=58#respond>)



Mark Holland, H'71 says:

November 20, 2011 at 9:15 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-59>)

Though the occasion is for the saddest of reasons, it's still great to see your name again here in print, Bob Stanton, nonetheless. You brought back fond memories with the mentioning of that Oedipus Rex of Stravinsky that we did in Symphony Hall. How John got us to intone that fractured rhythm for the words "OE-di-pus, oe-DI-pus"!

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**Reply** (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=59#respond>)



Robert Hutchison says:

September 14, 2011 at 5:47 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-46>)

Sadly I did not learn of F. John's death or illness until well after his passing. It hit me very hard as we were close friends, despite the fact we did not see each other very often of late. Our friendship always seemed to pick up just where we left off, no matter how long it had been since our last meeting. I last saw F. John at my son's wedding in Boston, about six years, and all seemed well. I was F. John's first HGC manager, a situation which was guaranteed to foster a strong bond and close relationship. While his musicianship was superb, I too will remember him most for his great sense of humor. I would have to say that at the outset of his tenure with HGC he was more naive than was good for him. I will never forget the night on spring tour in Florida when we convinced him there was an ocelot in the back yard of our host that he just had to see; he could never quite get a glimpse of it. Certainly we never let him forget it either. The world will be a sadder and less musical place now that he is gone.

**Reply** (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=46#respond>)



Mark Holland, H'71 says:

November 20, 2011 at 12:23 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-56>)

Seeing your name again in print here, Bob, and of Bob Stanton's as well, brings back endless fond memories of the F. John era, and all the glorious singing and laughing that we all did in both Glee Club and Collegium. Send along your current email address if you're able to here. When I spoke with F. on the phone, your name came up frequently. Your ears must have been buzzing!

**Reply** (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=56#respond>)



Vicki Smith says:

September 14, 2011 at 2:32 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-45>)

When I think about F. John I immediately think about those dark blue rehearsal shirts he always wore, and that memorable night in Sever 11 when some of us had conveniently "borrowed" every one of his blue shirts out of his rooms in Leverett and left him only his translucent white Philippine wedding shirt to wear. He arrived at Sever, red-faced, to confront a sea of dark blue shirts. Every singer was wearing one that night! The look on F. John's face was priceless. That he could be teased was one of his wonderful traits. A truly committed conductor and musician, a true friend, a generous and gentle soul. Requiescat in pace, F. John.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=45#respond>)



Mark Holland, H'71 says:

November 20, 2011 at 12:19 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-55>)

Very well put, Vicki. The sea of blue shirts. The singers' affectionate identification with him. It was then, and remains even today, a great touch that you spearheaded. An expression of love...

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=55#respond>)



Lee Story says:

September 7, 2011 at 6:22 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-44>)

This sorrow caught me entirely by surprise. One of the greatest intellects of my generation is crippled, then destroyed. I was one of John's roommates freshman year, on the top floor of Matthews Hall. Friends would gather about John in our suite and ply him with questions about music, as well as many from the problem sets of all the most difficult freshman courses of the time: Physics 13, Math 55, etc., and he would have a special insight to offer on each. It was clear that he was someone very special, even among Harvard students. As Charlie and Major note, John majored (with astonishing intensity) in math; in fact he earned a summa, and was immediately accepted into the Harvard's doctoral program. Owing to some family events and the growing realization that his place was in music, about a month before he was to arrive as a first year grad student he asked to enter the music doctoral program instead. This of course was unheard of, but evidently the GSAS dean was quickly apprised of his brilliance. I'm very sorry that I only rarely met John again after graduation. He was a wonderful musician and a wonderful person.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=44#respond>)



Lucie Binger Spieler says:

September 2, 2011 at 1:09 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-43>)

I heard about John's Alzheimer's from Tag Murphy and Bernie Kreger, so wasn't entirely blindsided to hear that he has left our planet.

He was, as so many have said, central to what Harvard was for me—so much so that when he was denied tenure, I lost that "rah-rah" feeling of allegiance to one's alma mater that I see in many college graduates. Another thing that John has spoiled for me is choral singing! Although I have sung in other choruses after my four years in Collegium, and have certainly had a few wonderful musical experiences in the 35 years since I left Fair Harvard, I still compare other choral conductors to John, almost always to their detriment. There was something about those blue eyes that called on you to give the best account of yourself that you possibly could—or better. We—men and women—were all in love with John when we sang for him.

One of the musical highlights of my life was singing in the summer of 1976 at Sainte-Chappelle in Paris. Something happened that night, and the 50 members of the Collegium tour were transported out of themselves into something I, at least, had never felt so strongly before—at least not while sober. When we finished singing, there was silence before the applause; and later, when we left, we were still too overwhelmed to talk much.

I actually know when John's birthday is—I'm ten years younger than he to the day.

I hope I will be able to make it to Cambridge on September 25 to pay tribute to a beautiful soul.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=43#respond>)



Gabrielle Roseman says:

October 18, 2011 at 10:19 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-51>)

Dear Lucie, Yes, I remember that concert as well. Later, when I lived there, I often thought of that moment with F John passing by the place..It is lovely to hear you speak of it. I had no knowledge of F John's illness, as of many things these past years, but was outraged — though typical of what we often saw as policy at Harvard — to hear of the refusal for tenure. My reaction in many languages does not bear printing here, but let "les imbéciles!" suffice.



His respect for each of us, and appropriate rejection of bs in general was a delight and gift to us each and all. The European Tour changed my life, quite simply, and allowed me breath again. I am glad to see heart's speak here from many, and hope that that was heard as well in the memorial service, through whatever politicking, something that he stood up against often from my memories of him, that was likely injected officially or not alongside the real grief and celebration that came in response to his conducting our hearts into their truth and music. The Rilke poem seemed most appropriate as a choice for him. Best to you all, keep that heart's noting of music alive in honour also of him. Gabrielle

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=51#respond>)



David Calfee '68 (<http://DCalfee@bridgestrategy.com>) says:

August 26, 2011 at 10:18 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-42>)

I am so sorry that binding family commitments prevent me from paying tribute to a quiet giant of the Harvard Glee Club, F John Adams. I was fortunate to have sung under his direction, both in Glee Club concerts in Cambridge and as a member of the 1967 Asian Tour. John's personal kindness, coupled with a fierce musicality and dedication to the repertoire of the Renaissance, made him a joy, both to sing with and to know. I still relish my aging vinyl copy of his Lamentations, especially the Brumel (who was then and may be now an under-appreciated master of the genre)...

I was glad to have attended the 150th celebration of the Glee Club in Boston a few years ago, and I remember finding John and reintroducing myself. He struggled a bit but finally got the connection and was warm and gracious in returning my greetings. It is a truism to say he will be missed, but of course he will...He leaves behind, however, a majestic and magisterial body of work, as well as the fond memories of those who were privileged to know him and share with him the joy of a cappella singing....

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=42#respond>)

Pingback: F. John Adams Memorial Service – Harvard Glee Club Foundation: Long may continue our unity and joy! (<http://hgcfoundation.org/?p=885>)



Major Gray says:

August 19, 2011 at 3:05 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-40>)

I, too, knew John as his roommate for three years in Leverett House. During that time John, through his passion, instilled in the three of us fortunate to live with him a life-long love of music. Though none of us was a musician, we came to appreciate that which inspired John. Math was just a concentration. Music, especially choral works, gave meaning to his undergraduate life. I remember his introducing me to Poulenc and Faure; I would lie on the floor of our sitting room after dinner listening to the Gloria or Requiem – sublime procrastination. I especially recall those magnificent glissandos John performed in the Harvard fight songs as accompanist. Although John seldom conducted the Glee Club when in college, I would try to go to every concert. Once when he did, Yale's performance preceded HGC's at Sanders. The Elis had carried their music folders with them. When Harvard took the stage, John approached the podium and lowered his music stand in an exaggerated fashion, dramatizing that neither he nor the Harvard Glee Club had need for unsightly sheets as required by the clearly inadequate Yalies. The twinkle in John's eye revealed his glorious mischievous sense of humor: once he lent me his tails and white tie to wear on a blind date at a local junior college. I think the joke was as much on me as on my date. We who have known and lived with John, are tremendously richer for having done so.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=40#respond>)



James Bryan says:

July 28, 2011 at 12:10 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-39>)

These comments are all extraordinarily moving. I knew John (he was John when I knew him, not F. John) somewhat differently than those who write here. I was one of his roommates for three years, from 1963 to 1966, at Leverett House. I was a government major, with scant musical talent. John did make me appreciate and love it though. He did major in math, not music, as another commentator noted, and I knew him as a mathematician (and thought he was brilliant!). He switched to music as his graduate major only at the last minute (okay, month). John was one of the most intelligent and decent people I've ever known. He also had the ability to focus with total intensity on whatever he was doing from math to music, which I guess is one way of defining genius. We had many a discussion about just about everything. I met both his parents and his brother, all decent people. I always told him that one day I would read about his famous career in music. I am sorry to have to do it under these circumstances. He will clearly be missed by all who knew him. There can be few finer tributes than that.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=39#respond>)

George Vallatini says:



June 23, 2011 at 3:47 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-38>)

I had the good fortune of playing for F. John in the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra many years ago. He was a brilliant conductor, easy to follow, expressive, and he intimately knew the music he was making. Dr. Adams never opened a score during a performance, but always conducted from memory. I asked him if he learned the music by playing through the scores on a piano. He replied, "No, I like to walk down by the Charles River reading the scores and hearing each part in my head." It was a lesson I never forgot. I am a better musician and person for having known and having worked with F. John Adams.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=38#respond>)



Cindy Dunbar says:

June 20, 2011 at 4:04 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-37>)

Singing in Collegium with F. John beginning freshman year completely defined my friendships and my Harvard experience. He treated as an intelligent adults, with an ability to both intellectually and emotionally understand and then transmit the best in the music to the audience. Ever since, I have sought out conductors that do the same (John Ferris at Harvard Norman Scribner in Washington), and avoided those that drill and drill and treat the singers like children. Musical high points included the Faure Requiem at the Bow and Arrow church. And many fun times (singing "oh we like sheep" with to a live lamb in Harvard Yard, for some reason being required to emerge from a giant cardboard birthday cake covered in shaving cream within a few weeks of my arrival at Harvard, along with Joan Sobel and Margo Lukens, and serenade F John on his birthday)

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=37#respond>)



Rob Schafer '76 says:

June 17, 2011 at 10:13 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-36>)

Though never a member of the HGC, I had the high honor to take Music 1 with him. This is my F. John story.

My freshman year turned out to be the Grand Maestro, Elliot Forbes' final year teaching Music 1 – Introduction to Western Music. I missed that great opportunity, and was forced the following year to "settle" for his assistant, some guy named F. John Adams.

How fortunate I was.

"F. John" as he was known was so exquisitely passionate about his subject, it was truly infectious. A scene that has vividly stayed with me my whole life is illustrative.

We were learning about the baroque period, and F. John wanted us to understand and appreciate the subtlety and grandeur of both the period and its most majestic instrument – the pipe organ. So one day he held class in Memorial Church.

He spent the class's entire hour explaining in patient, fascinating detail both the workings of the complex instrument and the subtleties and beauty of a J.S. Bach Toccata & Fugue.

He was so impassioned by both subjects that the hour slipped quickly away. He paused. He explained that he certainly understood if we had other commitments, but he now wanted to play the Bach Toccata & Fugue in its entirety on Memorial Church's grand organ – a wonderful finale to this riveting hour of learning.

And so it was. Hardly anyone left. We all remained transfixed by his excellent musical skills, but most of all by his infectious passion for the music and for music making. He had painstakingly reviewed the complex subtleties of both Bach's music and his primary instrument, and was now brilliantly demonstrating how the whole is so vastly much more than the sum of the parts.

It was and to this day remains, a transformational moment for me – F. John Adams made a difference in my life.

Requiescat in pace

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=36#respond>)



Dede Fairchild Ruggles says:

June 17, 2011 at 2:17 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-35>)

How wonderful to read these reminiscences. J. John taught music history to many of us Harvard undergraduates, and it was memorable. In addition to F. John's piano and voice, the classes often included live guest performances. One day he brought in a chorus of medieval monks (recent converts from the Glee Club) to sing chants. I'll never forget it, or him.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=35#respond>)



Gregory W. Smith says:

June 15, 2011 at 1:27 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-33>)

I can't believe he's gone. Even with all the warnings, I can't believe F. John is dead. In a way I never expected, it feels like a part of me died. I came to the Harvard Glee Club in 1974 as a first-year law-school student looking for a second chance at collegiate fraternity and frivolity. I left it five years later madly, profoundly, perpetually in love with music. To this day, I recall pieces that we sang in the Glee Club and they paralyze me with emotion. I hear in my head a particular passage – just a measure or two, a memorable dissonance – and my heart breaks all over again. I burst into tears on the spot. It's both an embarrassing curse and a glorious gift: a door onto the infinite and sublime that I can open at will – anywhere, anytime. F. John Adams showed me that door, and took me through it so often that I cannot count the tears of joy I have shed since. Even now, as I write this, tears of grief mix with tears of music – heartfelt and almost unbearably moving, but still joyful and empowering. I know to a certainty that F. John gave that same gift to hundreds, if not thousands, of others. It is a legacy that we should not only celebrate and emulate, but also envy. I know I do.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=33#respond>)



Tag Murphy (<http://www.mbaib.gsbs.tsukuba.ac.jp/faculty/TaggartMurphy.html>) says:

June 16, 2011 at 6:45 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-34>)

Greg,

Could you e-mail me please at [tagmurphy@gmail.com](mailto:tagmurphy@gmail.com) (<mailto:tagmurphy@gmail.com>) ?

Tag

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=34#respond>)



Steitz, Otfried says:

November 20, 2011 at 2:11 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-57>)

Dear Carl,  
unfortunately I came to know John's death very late. I was shocked. My sincere sympathy to You. He was a agreeable contemporary and friend. I will have him in very good memoy. Tristfull greatings from Saarbruecken.

Otfried.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=57#respond>)



Carl B. Adams says:

June 13, 2011 at 4:41 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-32>)

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR BEAUTIFUL AND MEANINGFUL COMMENTS. I AM CERTAIN THAT JOHN IS VERY PLEASED.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=32#respond>)



David Frutkoff says:

June 11, 2011 at 2:08 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-31>)

What a pleasure to read these fond remembrances of such a terrific, quirky, and compelling man and artist.

F. John taught me, and so many of my fellow HGCers, what music, beauty, passion, striving, and excellence could be. He brought us to a place where we our minds and spirits soared, collectively and individually. I'm not religious, but many of the moments I've felt closest to some greater divine force came when I sang with the HGC.

I have forgotten many moments of my college career, but I can still muster very specific feelings of singing, for instance, Dum Transiset at St. John the Divine in New York, the final concert of the North American '78 tour in Toronto, the St. Matthew Passion in Sanders, among many other great moments

F. was also, of course, a man who felt free to laugh wildly, mix dastardly Black Russians, make a hilariously withering remark, and was a person who had a terrific and wry sense of humor—and could really take a joke. (How old was he? How many times did the Glee Club sing him happy birthday? Rostropovich conducted a lovely rendition in the Hollywood Bowl in '78, but that was just one of dozens of times.) He will remain in the hearts and souls of the hundreds and hundreds of people he touched. Rest in peace, John.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=31#respond>)



Charlie Cerf says:

June 7, 2011 at 11:13 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-30>)

As John's classmate I'll clear up for younger folks the mystery of his name. He was John Adams until John Adams '69 turned up; both were conductors (the other one, of course, is the well-known composer). So they became known around Cambridge as F. John Adams and John C. Adams. When our John became Freshman Glee Club conductor the singers for some reason began calling him just "F". After that, I guess, the "F" remained.

By the way, he majored in math at Harvard, not music. A smart guy.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=30#respond>)



Ginny Siggia says:

June 2, 2011 at 3:29 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-29>)

I first met F John when the Harvard Glee Club joined the Wellesley College Choir in a performance of Handel's "Saul." Many years later, after I moved to Acton, I learned that he was conductor of the nearby Concord Chorus, and that they would perform Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers in a few months. I raced to join the audition queue, and was delighted to be accepted into the chorus.

That particular concert is legendary, because it was held on a very hot and suffocating night (very close to 100 degrees) in May 1987. We sat in the balcony of the First Parish in Concord, passed around rolls of paper towels to mop up the sweat, and discreetly adjusted our clothing to maximize ventilation. F John's concession to the heat was to remove his jacket and conduct in shirtsleeves. We were expiring from the heat, but could sit down and fan ourselves if necessary. He was totally in the public eye, a professional to his fingertips.

We have so many concert-specific memories, but the one that will resonate with those who knew his early conducting years is this:

In 1991 the Concord Chorus sang in New Bedford on the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death, beginning precisely at 7:05 PM; allowing for the 6-hour time difference between Boston and Vienna, it was the time of his death as well as the date (1:05 AM). We sang by candlelight, and the program was, of course, his Requiem. The bus ride took about 1.5 hours. On the way down we watched the first half of "Amadeus", and the second half on the return trip. The film ended just as we pulled into the parking lot back in Concord. Most of us were in tears by then. (The final scene shows Constanza weeping as Mozart's shrouded body is slid into what I understood to be a pauper's grave. I'm not sure if that bit was correct.)

We were blessed to have a conductor who thoroughly enjoyed working with a community chorus, and because of his affiliation with the New Bedford Symphony, we had access to an excellent orchestra, and thus the opportunity to perform big pieces that would be out of reach to many groups. We cut a reasonable swath through the classical choral repertoire: Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in Symphony Hall, with the Dedham Choral Society. Requiems by Berlioz, Verdi, Mozart, Dvorak, Cherubini. Oratorios by Handel, Bach, and Mendelssohn. Vaughan Williams' Hodie. Berlioz's L'Enfance du Christ. Masses galore. Commissioned works by Dave Brubeck, Andrew McWain. Britten's War Requiem. The Passions. An evening of choruses from Verdi's incomparable operas. Concert versions of MacBeth, Masked Ball, Pelleas et Melisande. Beethoven's 9th. Catulli Carmina. And selected works by the medieval composer A. Nony Mous. Working with F John was not only a musical delight, but one heck of a musical education.

A great light has dimmed, but will never be extinguished in the hearts of the Concord Chorus.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=29#respond>)



Glen Howard says:

June 1, 2011 at 9:36 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-28>)

F. John and I roomed together during the Glee Club's California tour in the spring of '69 or '70. It was then that I learned of his eclectic musical tastes and wonderfully wicked sense of humor (only hinted at when he was at the podium).

But my favorite non-musical story about John stems from an evening at which a portion of the Glee Club performed its then-annual short gig at the Algonquin Club on Comm Ave in Boston. One of the special appeals of that gig was the Club's open bar with excellent single-malts available. Many of us, including Maestro Adams, fully availed ourselves of this opportunity and, after leaving the Club, decided to get something to eat at a Friendly's. John — who was having significant problems just staying aboard the stool at the Friendly's counter — quite loudly stated to the waiter that he wasn't interested in any food. Even more loudly, he slurred, "Gimme a scotch and Fribble!" This attracted not only stares from the other customers but also a suggestion from the manager that we all leave. Insulted by the very notion that we were being at all disorderly, I officiously responded, "Don't you know, sir, that this man is the associate conductor of the Harvard Glee Club?!"

(F. John never got his scotch and Fribble, but we were allowed to get our burgers and Fribbles sans booze.)

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=28#respond>)



Peter Rogers says:

May 31, 2011 at 3:44 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-27>)

I started with John in the Glee Club and Collegium my freshman year (it was not long after freshman were first allowed to join HGC) and also sang in Kroks – it's hard to remember what (if anything) other than music occupied my time, and John was the main influence. The Kroks/HGC issue created a conflict in rehearsal times, concert tours, and other challenges. John handled these potentially contentious topics well, as I recall – always in a restrained and gentlemanly manner. The summer tour of '73 was a remarkable experience, and we created exquisite music in a series of memorable settings (30 concerts in 60 days). He knew how to inspire and extract the highest level of quality and focus – and we worked hard for him. I stayed in Europe after the tour for a year of vocal training in Vienna – such was John's inspiration. I mourn his passing, as he was a significant factor in my young life.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=27#respond>)



Mary Mistovich says:

May 29, 2011 at 9:03 am (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-26>)

I sang with John from '82 until '94, with just 2 years off while I sang at another chorus to broaden my experience. I returned when somebody sent an emissary to bring me back as John was so distressed at my leaving.

I have so many memories of those Monday night rehearsals, the dress rehearsals and the concerts. We butt heads constantly; he would say or do something terribly wrong; I would just look at him and he would start, "Don't you say a word! Not one word! I know exactly what you are thinking..." and would take off on a rant, holding both ends of our "conversation" while I sat silently laughing.

I'll never forget the premiere of the short-lived orchestra he founded, Boston Premiere Ensemble. The chorus was somewhat under-rehearsed on the premier piece; they got lost when the tenors missed an entrance and the rest of the parts followed them. John turned to me with panic in his eyes; it seems he and I were the only ones who knew where we were supposed to be. I turned and blasted our part to the soprano on my right until she got it, then she and I each turned and blasted the singer on our other side. Major relief as heads turned and the correction flow across the chorus like a wave. Within a few measures we were back on track. Afterwards, in the entrance hall at Sanders, John hugged me and held my hand as he greeted guests. It was then I fell in love with him.

Other classic memories: Conducting a concert in an ill-fitting, somewhat frilly, borrowed tux when his apartment building had a fire the night before a concert. (My fault: he turned to me for advice whether or not to conduct in street clothes. I had never imagined such a silly-looking outfit when I voted for the tux!) Conducting the Brahms's Requiem in his socks when he broke his toe the day before a concert and couldn't fit his foot into a shoe. A Christmas concert with people packed in the aisles, on the stage, and even turned away at the doors. I remain forever grateful for the wonderful memories he left, all I learned from him and the music and the bond we shared.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=26#respond>)



Kit Emory says:

May 27, 2011 at 8:49 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-25>)

F. John was my introduction to music-making in the Boston area. I loved being in Collegium, getting to tour to Buffalo to sing with Michael Tilson Thomas, working with Seiji Ozawa.... I remember doing a Penderecki "Stabat Mater" where the entire 2nd movement was spoken and somehow being able to come in on a pitch for the 3rd (if this is inaccurate, it's because I've never sung it since!). Chichester Psalms and, I believe, Bach's Mass in b minor. All highlights of my time singing at Harvard. F. John was lovely, musically radiant, and very kind. I am so grateful for his setting me on the path to being a professional musician.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=25#respond>)



Matilda Stoddard says:

May 27, 2011 at 2:22 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/#comment-24>)

I have sung all over the world with many different conductors and I think F. John Adams was the best all around conductor I ever had the pleasure of working with, it was for six years. He always made us reach for the stars by having us learn many works at one time. He was ever focused but my favorite part was that he could get the best from his singers by leaning in when the music was particularly moving, climatic or beautiful—when he leaned in towards us, he would transmit in his eyes exactly what we were to do and we did it! I loved him and thought of him many times since working with him. I will think of him tonight especially as I sing in concert.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memoriām-f-john-adams/?replytocom=24#respond>)

Tag Murphy (<http://www.mbaib.gsbs.tsukuba.ac.jp/faculty/TaggartMurphy.html>) says:



May 26, 2011 at 11:32 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-23>)

I heard about John's death yesterday thanks to an e-mail from Hugh Wolff. As I've already written to Kathy and Lou Staudt, this has hit me awfully hard — I couldn't sleep last night and sat up listening to old HGC recordings and blubbering like an idiot. I knew John was dying and really it's a blessing that he's been delivered from an ugly disease like Alzheimer's. Still, he was one of the most important people in my life; I don't think anyone other perhaps than my parents had more influence on the direction my life took. I'm so glad I had a chance to see him while he still knew who I was and I could say goodbye after a fashion; David Griesinger and I drove out to the facility where Carl had arranged for him to spend his last years in June of 2009 when I was in Cambridge for my Harvard 35th. I must say, I don't think I've ever seen a more beautiful room in a nursing home than what Carl had fixed up for him; he was surrounded by the rare books he had been collecting, posters of some of his greatest concerts, and photographs of the past (including the famous one of him with the Pope on the '73 tour, with members of the Collegium on their '76 European Tour clustered around the feet of Nadia Boulanger, and one of him heart-rendingly young with Bill Christie banging away on the old upright pianos in Sever 11 when they were both HGC accompanists.)

I saw John from time to time in the later years; he visited my partner Osamu and me in Japan in the summer of 1998, I think it was. Together with one of his Japanese students at NEC, I arranged for him to stay for a few days in a Buddhist monastery that would occasionally take in serious laypeople for a time. I went with him for the first night — nobody there spoke much English and I wanted him to make sure everything was alright. It was just his sort of place; austere but beautiful; emotion transformed into art (the temple itself and the chanting). He was a tremendous hit; he rose in the wee hours with the young monks and the older abbot; he soon "got" how they were singing/chanting and was able to participate. They loved him so much they gave him one of their ancient scrolls with the chants written in traditional Japanese musical notation. In the summer of 2005, John and I spent a week in Seattle as guests of Mike Verretto and his wife Sachiko. Mike had gotten great tickets for the four of us to attend the Ring cycle at the newly refurbished Seattle Opera House. John knew the score — he'd served as an assistant conductor for a production of the Ring — and his insights were, as usual, beyond compare. I saw John again a little over a year later and he seemed, well, not quite himself. I realized later that I had been witnessing the first symptoms of Alzheimer's.

I'm dealing with my grief as I usually do with stuff that won't let go by writing about it. If I end up with something I think worth reading, I'll post it here, send it to Bernie, or otherwise make it available. As Phil Sheldon suggested in an e-mail, Domine salvum fac, conductorum nostrum.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=23#respond>)



Willy White says:

May 26, 2011 at 3:40 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-22>)

I knew John first when he was accompanist for the HGC, and I was a tour manager. I have especially strong recollections of his enthusiastic renditions of the Harvard fight songs (in collaboration with Bill Christie) on the North American Tour in 1964. I have an even stronger recollection of my last conversation with John at the time of the 150th celebration. I tried to persuade him to join the NAT group gathering in connection with that occasion. He explained to me that he was feeling the early stages of Alzheimers, and was having to limit his activities. It was clear that he was facing this terrible disease with common sense and great courage. He was a person of great talent who will be much missed.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=22#respond>)



Walter Swap says:

May 26, 2011 at 3:25 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-21>)

John (he was just "John" then) was HGC accompanist along with Bill Christie during my junior and senior years in the Glee Club. Bob McKelvey, Cathy Nichols, my late wife, Sue McAllister, and I used to hang out with him quite a lot. In fact, John was the organist for Sue's and my wedding in 1966. He was a wonderfully good sport, humoring us by playing some of our favorite music that I'm sure left the wedding attendees bemused: for example, organ realizations of Hugo Wolf lieder! The only compromise we made (on the insistence of the bride's mother) was "Here Comes the Bride." Otherwise, Sue's mother insisted, people wouldn't know when to stand up! John absolutely refused to take any compensation for his contribution—so typical for this humble, dear man.

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=21#respond>)



Paul H. Merry (<http://Fairworkplace@Earthlink.net>) says:

May 26, 2011 at 1:04 pm (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/#comment-20>)

Sad to hear this distressing news. I was in F. John's class, and was honored to be invited by him to join a chamber chorus and orchestra he established in our senior year. It was one of my most satisfying musical experiences at Harvard. I also remember fondly spending time with him in Alaska as part of the NAT (carrying him on my back across a swamp when we lost our way during a hike outside Juneau.) I also recall how excited he was (in his softspoken way) when he was chosen to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris after Harvard. My wife and I also had him over to our house when he was conducting the Wellesley College Choir; and I followed his career in music around the New England area. Friends spoke of him when he was conducting the Concord Chorus. What a sad shame his untimely passing is. Paul Merry, H.C. '66

Reply (<http://hgcfoundationorg.fatcow.com/in-memori-am-f-john-adams/?replytocom=20#respond>)