

DR. ALTON LAWRENCE

(1922-1972)

Dr. Alton Forrest Raymond Lawrence died on Oct. 9, 1972, in New York City. Dr. Lawrence, a recording archivist, assembled over a period of ten years the record library for Columbia Records, Inc., said to be the only one of its kind ever commissioned by a major commercial record company.

Dr. Lawrence was born in Madison, Iowa, and earned degrees in jurisprudence and history from the University of Iowa and Drake University.

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Larry Lawrence--A Memoir

Larry Lawrence is dead. The formidable, feisty, sometimes Dr. Alton Forrest Raymond Lawrence died in New York at 50 from a perforated ulcer.

To those outside his circle of close friends he seemed vain in his overlearnedness, but we who knew him saw this as the obverse of his passion for uncompromising accuracy. It was also his defense against casual time-nibblers.

He believed in sound recordings as historical documents, was a founding member of ARSC, and built up what is probably the major collection of Historical Diction recordings in the world--private or institutional. He was responsible for establishing and organizing Columbia Record's company archive. As a founding director of the International Piano Library, he saved it from extinction more than once.

Larry did much to try to upgrade the quality of engineering on a number of the "pirate" opera labels (often through moral disapproval, one of his strongest

weapons). He published or collaborated, often without credit, on many discographies (his last being that of Percy Grainger in a recent issue of Recorded Sound), articles, liner notes, and reviews.

We were friends since my teens, sharing the same birthday and often, particularly when my folks were alive, celebrating it together. From him I learned tape editing, the principles of discography, and much of true friendship. Without his pushing I probably would never have stepped out on my own, nor carried through many projects to completion. He had the rare gift of giving good advice--and the even rarer one of unshackling one's courage to apply it.

The long phone call was among his great enemies. Calls would often be on a "blitz" basis. ("Just answer this particular question--we'll talk later.") And we did. Marathon sessions of two, three hours, with much running to printed authorities and the piecing together of the solution to a particular question by combined induction.

He had a quiet, absurd sense of humor, and a passion for puns. He was also a science-fiction fan. Television's "Star-Trek" time period was sacred--no calls received. If he had to be away, a friend was always delegated to tape the show's sound track to keep Larry up-to-date.

We shared passions for Mahler, Verdi, Richard Strauss, Korngold, and the other German romantics. It was he who introduced me to the extraordinary music written in this vein by a fellow Iowan, Philip Greeley Clapp, a remarkable composer who had also been one of Larry's teachers.

We who read this magazine and, even more, we who write for it, tend to consider each other one-dimensional record-centered characters whose outside lives are incidental. Larry's far-ranging interests contributed to his expertise in the recorded sound field. He was a professional historian (having taught it at the

college level), a member of the Iowa bar, a lover of pageantry (he once admitted this as a contributing reason for his conversion to Roman Catholicism), a passionate opera-goer, widely read, truly erudite and, in spite of his forbidding exterior, compassionate and wise. As an advisor, conscience, and fellow researcher, we'll all miss him. As one of my truest friends, I mourn his passing.

Steven Smolian