

Robert Tear: Address by James Whitbourn
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Like Groucho Marx, Robert Tear famously described himself as 'unclubbable', although it was not so much that he would decline membership of any club that would have him as a member; more that, fundamentally, he did not want to be in a club at all. He disliked labels or structures that confined. But among all the memberships, fellowships and awards that were piled upon him in recognition of his achievements, one stood out and gave him enduring pleasure: his Honorary Fellowship of this great college was one he cherished. He loved his connection with this building of such beauty and yet of so many contradictions. He was proud of his brief association with Boris Ord and his long-lasting friendships and collaborations with Ord's three successors. But more, he loved his place in a community of intellectuals who understood free thought and who could still see the value of qualities that cannot be measured.

His mind was always searching. "The search for the spirit of eternal love", he said in a radio programme we worked on together "has been my absolute obsession for more than thirty years. Some years ago," he went on, "strolling through a park in San Diego, I was struck motionless and dumb. I was paralysed, pipetted from my body into an awareness that, from lack of words, I can only call 'the light'. I did return, reluctantly, it must be said, but quite changed."

Ever since that time - more than forty years ago now - his quest continued, and he would find the spirit of eternal love in everything he could. He found it though his own creations in music - as a world-renowned tenor and a conductor of high repute; he found it also in his own inventive style of writing - poetry and prose; and he found it in his extraordinary and brilliant paintings, etchings and other works of art, which one day will surely be revealed to an astonished world.

But mainly he looked for a spirit of love in people, and his finely-tuned antennae and his intuitive knowledge of what really made people who they are, made him one of the most perceptive and instinctive people I have met. It was extremely difficult to pull the wool over Bob's eyes, because he would always manage to discard the outer layers and seek out the kernel within.

For someone who died in 2011, it is perhaps surprising that he never owned or used a computer. Yet he was the richer for that; he never experienced the dulling effects of the World Wide Web on his personal interactions with people and the keen observations he made of them.

What made this man with such qualities of mysticism, depth and penetrating insight unique, though, was that fact that these qualities were all applied through a veil of cheerful and light-hearted breeziness, and a witty humour - not always of the most reverend kind.

That combination was always there, but some who met him only casually might not see beyond the jokes and stories that characterised his presence and some might miss the extraordinary depth and understanding of the Spirit of eternal love that was

inseparable from everything he did. Those who could see and enjoy both sides of the man became his friends, and were people he valued enormously. One of them also became his wife, and the richness of their relationship over so many years was one he loved to ponder on. Far from experiencing the fading that some people identify, he would talk of the growing intensity of colour that came through longevity in their marriage.

Bob was a truly great person to know. He was also a wonderful man with whom to collaborate. He was a man who would trust totally in his collaborators and I personally experienced his incredible generosity of spirit, of encouragement and belief on many occasions when we worked together.

Bob had little time for immortality. His hundreds of recordings certainly served no purpose of that kind in his mind. But for those of us who miss him terribly, they are one small reminder of an extraordinary talent and an extraordinary spirit which encircled so many people and enriched the world through its honesty, humour, understanding and love.