Memorial Service
David Griggs-Janower
August 30, 2013

Remarks
Karen R. Hitchcock, Ph.D.
President, Board of Directors
Albany Pro Musica

Paige, Michael and Katy – and all the Griggs-Janower family – my deepest condolences at this most difficult of times. All of us here in this, David’s favorite “Hall”, are holding you in our hearts.

When Paige did me the tremendous honor of asking me to speak today and reflect on David’s impact at
the University at Albany, my mind was instantly filled with memories too numerous to recall in these few minutes. Over the 32 years he spent at UAlbany, David created a legacy of artistic enrichment and quality, and a legacy of thousands of students forever changed by their encounter with this master teacher, this compassionate and sharing man. David’s passion for music took many forms, but few more important to him than introducing young people to the joy of singing, to the joy of creating musical experiences which were uplifting and transformative.

David’s philosophy of teaching was straightforward. In his own words, “I strive to give my students a love of learning ... I encourage them to strive for excellence, to express themselves clearly and to develop their curiosity. I also hope to impart a respect for great art, and an understanding of ... how it enriches our lives.” David was inspirational –
and, demanding. He set high expectations, leavened with humor, for his students. With characteristic wit, David once said, and I quote, “I expect our students to write well, and will not accept papers written in a grammar I don’t recognize.”

And, listen to his students: “DJ has earned the students’ highest respect and we love him;” Great sense of humor – made me laugh even when I was failing a test;” “DJ is my hero;” “DJ rules;” “DJ for Prez;” He’s an inspiring man to be around.”

The gentle smile on David’s face and the sparkle in his eyes were never so great as when he spoke of his students, and what they meant to him over the years. And, one in particular, named Paige, caught his eye - and his heart. No wonder he would often tell me, with a twinkle in his eye, that UAlbany gave him more than he could ever repay.
Over the years, David earned the deep respect of his faculty colleagues at UAlbany. Beyond his nationally-recognized scholarship, and his inspiring teaching, David was a true citizen of the University, contributing to the quality of life on the campus in so many ways. No wonder that he was the first-ever recipient of both the UAlbany and the SUNY-wide Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activity. Beloved in his department and across the entire university, his promotion to full professor was unanimously and enthusiastically approved and celebrated.

David’s awards and accolades, at the University, in the community and nationally, were numerous; but, to him, his UAlbany ensembles, and Albany Pro Musica, remained his passion – his most eloquent form of teaching. The University Chorale and, of course, his Chamber Singers, became beloved
fixtures at UAlbany, choirs which provide hundreds and hundreds of individuals with the opportunity to make beautiful music and share it with others. As opposed to other auditioned university ensembles around the country, David was particularly proud of the fact that membership in the Chamber Singers was not limited to music majors ... students from across the spectrum of the university were able to experience the joy of creating music under the baton of the Maestro.

How David loved this group! I still remember meeting David on campus one day, and him saying, “Boss, I need a meeting with you.” What you need to know is that David routinely called me “Boss” whenever he had an idea which was going to cost a bit of money. Funny how that worked; and, it usually did. This time was no exception. He came to my office, a number of chamber singers in tow, and said, “they need proper attire when we are on tour
for YOUR university” ... oh, but he was good. The result: not one, but two sets of outfits, one for daytime gigs, and one for more formal evening concerts. Yes, he was really very good!

A line from Ralph Waldo Emerson has always evoked for me the perfect “teacher”:

“Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee.”

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And such an “opener of doors” was David. I think it is telling that so many of the hundreds and hundreds of tributes that have poured in over the course of his illness have been from his students.
And virtually every tribute spoke to what the individual – young and not so young – had learned from David in the classroom or from the podium: about music, about performance, about giving and sharing. I don’t think David ever realized the sheer magnitude of his impact on others. He never thought of what he did in those terms. Rather, he simply relished the opportunity to share his joy in music – and, in life – with others.

On our Albany Pro Musica web site, David tells us that he has heard it expressed that music reaches the places in the heart (and soul) that words fail to reach. He goes on to say, and I quote, “maybe that’s why I’m in this business.” And, we all give thanks that he was, for too short a time, in “this business” – at UAlbany, in the Capital Region and around the world. David, truly, has been an “opener of doors” – his impact incalculable; his legacy enduring. Today, even as we grieve the loss of this exceptional
human being, we also celebrate him in all his dimensions.

And, we all, I am sure, can hear David saying, “Enough of this. Let’s get back to the music.”