



## The Hartt School: 23andMe or A Short Rage Against the Machine

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*Remarks by the founder and chief judge of The American Prize  
National Nonprofit Competitions in the Performing Arts,  
on receiving the Hartt Alumni Award, at the Lincoln Theater,  
University of Hartford, Sunday, May 19, 2019*

**D**istinguished faculty, honored guests, students and graduates of the Hartt School, family and friends, thank you for this delightful honor.

Forty one years ago—forty one!—on October 6, 1978, I conducted at the dedication of this theater. The film star Lauren Bacall, wife of Humphrey Bogart, was guest of honor. She broke a bottle of champagne over a *photograph* of the building—right here—center stage.

I am an unusual choice to receive the Hartt Alumni Award, but so pleased for the recognition, having made my own rules. For twenty years, I have been self-employed, completely responsible for my income and what I do each day—knowing the terrors of the unknown and the joys of the freedom I cherish. As an artist, I make things:

A lawyers orchestra in Chicago I've conducted for thirty-three years; a national nonprofit called The American Prize, which has awarded more than \$75,000 to artists; a new, online publisher of music; a one-man play about conducting called MUSE of FIRE, which I have performed nearly seventy times from Chicago to Boston and Baltimore to Halifax.

But, as it is written in Psalm 40, it was here, at Hartt, that I

“set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings.” This place, it's in my DNA.

“The music is better than you.” That is what he said. That is what my father said when I told him I wanted to go to Hartt. “The music is better than you.” Whatever you achieve, you must remain humble in front of the creators of this great art.

And so I have tried to live my life, like the old motto of the Hartt School, “in service of the beautiful.”

I came to Hartt to be a conductor.

When I tried to crash the graduate level conducting course led by the magnificent Vytautas Marijosius, he wondered why my entry card was so much smaller than the others. “He's just a sophomore,” one of them sneered. But I had sung my heart out in the chorus when Marijosius conducted *Lohengrin* the year before, and the

Maestro had noticed: “Mr. Katz, you stay with me.” And so I did—for the rest of his life. Now, The American Prize gives an award in his memory.

**H**aving auditioned more than five thousand performers and composers as chief judge of The American Prize, I am sometimes asked if I worry about the future of music—the graying audience, the media's disinterest.

No. What worries me is what I see as the slavish focus on technique—technique alone—technique above all—faster, louder, more brilliant. I hear it too often in the performances of the most famous artists and ensembles, the ones that get on PBS. Those modern conductors with their uninvolved faces of emotional indifference, focussed only on what the music



sounds like, not what it *feels* like. All surface. Only sheen. Their music without reason for being, except for the notes themselves. We do not need live musicians for that.

Because what really worries me is the invention of the iHorowitz, the iRubinstein, the iPiano, that robotic marvel that never makes a mistake, programmed to play any piece, any time, without complaint or fatigue.

What orchestra for a million dollars wouldn't buy a machine to play any concerto from Bach to John Adams, instantly, perfectly? What audience wouldn't marvel at the magnificence of it, having been carefully taught by us to know no different?

Don't doubt me. The iPiano is coming. And the iOrchestra, the Hologram Opera, the A.I. Ballet. They will be amazing to look at, their sound will gleam, and they will be cheaper.

So, if we focus only on how perfectly we can play, how fast, how spectacularly; if we expunge emotion from our performing as irrelevant, or too personal, or—for fear of playing a wrong note—never take a chance, because we risk being moved and moving others, what makes us any better than the iM, the inevitable Machine? As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.”

As our world turns more and more towards robotics, it is emotion, real emotion, that will be the remaining gift to make our species unique—worthy of preservation. Let us not cede holy ground to technology by giving up the one aspect of our artistry that cannot be manufactured, only faked—that unseen connection, that secret communion between you and me, from heart to heart.

**M**any commencement speakers tell you to “follow your dream” or to “seize the day.” I say: “Your vision is too small.” Whatever you are planning to do with your life, this month, this

week, this day—your vision is too small. These words greet me in my studio every morning, reminding me that each day needs the best of me, the best of my mind, and my talent, and my heart, because though time may be limitless, mine is not.

Are you an instrumentalist who wants to compose, or an actor who thinks to write a play, or a singer who desires to build an opera company? (Or a conductor who composes, write plays, acts in them, authors books, creates ensembles, competitions?) As another Hartt professor taught me, “who does prevent you?”

Yes, this place. It's in my DNA—which, because of my teachers, includes strands of Debussy, and Stravinsky, and Ravel—all the way back to Berlioz. As students of this very special school, yours does too.



And my 23 pairs of x and y chromosomes? Well, I must Call the Names. Call the Names as they join me on the stage at Orchestra Hall in Chicago next month when I conduct more than three hundred lawyer-musicians in Beethoven's 9th, on the same stage where Marijosius conducted the Chicago Symphony fifty years ago.

Call the Names of those living and dead, to thank them for setting my feet upon a rock:

Paranov. Marijosius. Charles Bruck. Sam Berkman.  
Norman Dinerstein. Irene Kahn. Eddie Diemante.  
Arnold Franchetti. Ginny Schorr. Ray Hanson.  
Libby Warner. Ethel Bacon. Gerry Mack. Don Harris.  
Bill Willett. Bernie Lurie. Helen Hubbard.  
Will Morrison. Bill Diard. Arthur Koret.  
Jack Zei. Brenda Lewis. Tom Putsche.  
and—Immanuel Willheim.

That's 23 and me.

I knew them all. Loved them all. Learned from them all.  
And am grateful to all of them, as I am to you.

You have your own names.  
Forty-one years from now, don't forget.  
Thank you.