

ELLY NADEL 1927-2002

by Hillary Hauser

She never took no for an answer; she was as brash as she was smart. She was intelligent and sophisticated, and wore black leather pants as she drove around town in a big, shiny, black Rolls with "MAESTRA" on her license plate—a tag she earned from conducting an orchestra in "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Hollywood Bowl.

I got to know Elly in the late 1980s, when I was doing many music reviews, and we began attending concerts together. I soon learned she was a major force in Santa Barbara's art and music world, and that she was serving on the board of the Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra and the Arts Commission of Santa Barbara. She had tried to bring Jascha Heifetz's practice room to Santa Barbara, she was involved in the computer program of the Music Academy of the West. At the time of her passing, she was on the board of the Ensemble Theater and an advisory board member of Speaking of Stories. She raised money for these organizations, and worked hard to make sure they survived.

With her husband, author/business executive Jack Nadel, Elly had a hand in founding the Santa Barbara Jazz Society, and was the producer of "Out of the Box," a local television series created by Jack, which focused on Santa Barbara's most inspirational entrepreneurs. In Los Angeles, Elly was a member of the Club 100 of the Music Center, and served on the boards of the American Youth Symphony and the Mancini Institute.

For Elly, music was the essence of life, and she



often said, "If humanity loses music, then we turn into beasts." She did everything to promote it, to share it, and to support it. She herself played the piano, both classical and jazz.

Elly had a special spot in her heart for young artists just starting out. She knew that an artist's life can be excruciatingly difficult in the beginning, that it involves sacrifice and hard work, as well as long, lonely hours on the road. And so she often went backstage, to invite a struggling artist out for coffee, tea, or late supper. In at least two cases, lifelong friendships were formed—one was violinist Joshua Bell, and the other, pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. She befriended the late pianist David Golub and opened her house, and pianos, to him, and Andre Watts also practiced many times in the Nadel's living room.

During the fall of 2000 Elly was diagnosed with lung cancer. An old spot that was "being watched" had gotten out of control, and the doctors suspected it was an old pneumonia scar. While Elly began chemotherapy, Jack immediately got on the Internet and began his research for alternative cures to augment her medical treatment. The two had always been inseparable during their 54-year marriage, but now they were glued together as one. Together they visited the renowned dietician Andrew Weill, and they enrolled in a weekend seminar

with Carl O. Simonton, to review the connection between mind and body. Elly also began a course of Chinese herbal medicine.

The results were near miraculous. Despite heavy chemotherapy, Elly continued to go to concerts, to hear music she loved, and she didn't miss a thing. And finally, when she couldn't go to the music, the music came to her. A number of illustrious artists came to the house to play for her, including Thibaudet, who performed Ravel and Gershwin. The Rosetti String Quartet came to play Shostakovich and Beethoven: Knowing the revitalizing effects music had on his wife, Jack arranged an intimate gathering during which the great songwriter Hal David sang his famous "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head," Marilyn Gilbert,

founder of Santa Barbara Grand Opera, sang various songs and arias, and talented New York pianist/composer Joel Silberman performed original compositions that included the beautiful nocturne, "Elly's Song." However, the most unforgettable performance that day was Jack singing to his wife, "I've Grown Accustomed to Your Face."

The last "live performance" given to Elly just before she passed away was a performance of a Bach cello concerto by Santa Barbara Chamber Orchestra conductor Heiichiro Ohyama and pianist Ann Epperson, who transcribed the work, from cello and harpsichord to viola and piano. Elly, already beginning her slide into That Other World, heard the music and moved her fingers as if playing a piano. A few days later, she was gone.

On a shelf in my kitchen, I keep a special coffee cup that is cracked, stained, and chipped. I wish I'd taken better care of it, because its message represents the deep friendship I experienced with Elly Nadel. On one side is imprinted a classic black and white picture of her at the age of seven, playing the piano. On the other side there is the inscription:

At 7, I learned to play.

At 70, I embrace and cherish the real music of my life... a composition of close friends and family.

Thank you for being part of my song.

Godspeed, dear Elly—we won't forget you. ■

in memoriam