

LAWRENCE MORTON (1904 - 1987)

Peter Heyworth

LAWRENCE MORTON'S name is shamefully absent from the new American Grove, but in a sense he was more remarkable for what he was than for what he did.

His achievements were none the less not inconsiderable. As readers of TEMPO will know, his infrequent writings* had characteristic directness and style. His 'Evening on the Roof' concerts brought new perspectives to Los Angeles, as well as world premières of works by Stravinsky and Boulez. At Ojai he created one of the most distinguished small festivals in America.

The man himself was a true touchstone. Lawrence was incapable of bunkum. Though his conversation was full of liveliness and wit, he never seemed to utter a foolish or an ill-considered word. What he said was as precise as his cooking, and wholly devoid of artifice and affectation. He had his prejudices of course, but, unlike most of us, he knew exactly what they were.

Evenings in his modest apartment off Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood were a rare privilege; one came away intellectually refreshed. No wonder that first Stravinsky and later Boulez honoured this deeply unassuming American with their friendship, and that Boulez travelled specially to Los Angeles to conduct one of the three concerts given in his memory at the County Museum last October.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lawrence Morton

The following essay by Lawrence Morton was written on the occasion of a 75th birthday mini-marathon concert in his honour at the Hollywood Bowl on August 27, 1979. It is reprinted here in its entirety.

I WAS BORN on July 1904 in Duluth, Minnesota, and have often wondered if the chill of my native climate generated my preference for the 'coolth' of Classicism in the arts to the excessive warmth of Romanticism. During my freshman year in high school my family moved to Minneapolis where summer heat and humidity reinforced my dislike of climatic-musical 'Fahrenheit.' But years later I learned to detest Midwestern winters as heartily as Czerny exercises, and not until I moved to California in 1939 did I achieve thermal composure and, with it, musical equanimity to the point where I am happy with both Mozart and Brahms.

My musical education was merely normal. Of the many pedagogues under whom I served

* See especially 'Footnotes to Stravinsky Studies: *Le Sacre du Printemps*' in TEMPO 128 (March 1979).