



An open letter the campus of the
University of North Carolina School of the Arts
Thursday, November 27, 2008

Thanksgiving Greetings John Mauceri

Dear Campus Community,

On the eve of America's unique and cherished holiday, my thoughts turn to you and the phenomenal months we have just experienced together. And together is the best word for it, since alumni and students from as far east as Leipzig, Germany, and as far west as Hawaii and China, are all working together to create a better world and confront the euphemistically termed "down turn" with a glorious and passionate upswing.

UNCSA has recently triumphed again on Broadway, in Hollywood and Chicago, and very much in our own back yard. Mrs. Mauceri and I marveled at the end of term productions and the transformation that has occurred during your transition from talented kids to incipient professionals in what seems like a very few months. The dancing, the lighting, the sounds, the physical and metaphysical -- all are wrapped up in one holiday package after another, and we haven't even gotten to *The Nutcracker* yet!

I wanted to take a moment to thank all the staff and faculty who have worked more diligently and creatively than anyone thought possible. It does really matter, you know, even when it doesn't feel that way. Just look into the faces of our students if you are unsure of that.

And a special thanks to our boards, our special friends -- new and old -- who continue to give us so much. This past weekend celebrated a 25 year milestone relationship between our school and our city, with the concert at the Stevens Center and its special encore with one student from each school singing Leonard Bernstein's "Take Care of this House." And yes, you made many people cry with that song, including Leonard Bernstein's daughter, Jamie.

I also wanted to tell you about Sunday, when a hundred music school students (our orchestra) traveled to the Grove Park Inn in Asheville and performed the Shostakovich Fifth Symphony in the ballroom there. Dean Rothkopf and Ken Wilmot were there, too, of course and PAM student Charlie Owen got the experience of a lifetime by running the operation, never once betraying the fact that we were inventing this event.

Three hundred and fifty seats had been set up. We had no idea whether one person or a full house would appear, but thanks to Sam Neill and Tina McGuire, and their friends, 20,000 e-mail invitations went out. There were multiple stories with color photography in the papers and it was billed as UNCSA's thank you to the taxpayers of the Asheville area.

Well, another 500 chairs had to be found! The fire marshal had to stop people from entering the room and so the back doors were left open -- and hundreds more sat in the hallway on chairs dragged from the lobby. By the time I was allowed to introduce the symphony, the room was so full, I invited those guests who were physically up to it, to sit on the carpet right in front of the cellos and violins -- and they did -- including young children and their parents.

I introduced the eight students from the Asheville area who were playing and each received a hero's welcome from the public. And then came the music -- that sad, angry, uplifting and beautiful journey Shostakovich called his fifth symphony. No one seemed to move. No one coughed. The attention to the music making of our students was as intense as anything I have ever experienced. And at the end, a cheering standing ovation.

UNCSA made over a thousand friends Sunday afternoon. It was an extra effort on everyone's part. The orchestra made it onto the six o'clock and eleven o'clock newscasts. Phones rang off the hook on Monday. We had made music and we took all we are to people whose tax money allows us to be who we are.

So, thank you everyone. There is much to be grateful for. The world is counting on us, as it always does, when things get tough. The artists always lead the way and I am proud and humble to be with you on our journey together.

Happy Thanksgiving from Mrs. Betty, Pickles the Dog and me.

John