

INTERVIEW WITH SERGIU LUCA -- NOVEMBER, 1995

Sergiu Luca was born in April, 1943 in Bucharest, Romania. A violinist, he has recorded for Nonesuch and other classical music labels. Sergiu is the founder of both the De Camera Society in Houston and the Chamber Music Northwest festival in Portland, Oregon. Sergiu featured Dave at numerous De Camera events, and introduced him to another great natural talent, singer Nancy King, when he booked the two of them together at the Cascade Head Festival in Oregon.

The De Camera Society was an idea that evolved out of years of all kinds of activity and organizing and my own concept of what music might mean. I also founded the festival in Portland, Oregon--which is still going--called Chamber Music Northwest. I have always had an interest in all kinds of music, not just in one kind, and I've always had an interest in the blending of those. Nowadays it's become somewhat in vogue to talk about cross-culturalism and different kinds of music being valid. I've been interested in that from way back, and that was a principal upon which this De Camera thing was founded in Houston; the idea that it would be a mix of classical, jazz and other music, and it would all remain at the same high level. In fact, the Cascade Head Festival, in Lincoln City, Oregon--Nancy King participated for the first few years of it--has always had a mix of classical and jazz in every program. There were no programs that weren't mixed.

But De Camera was this wild pipe dream that somehow became reality in 1987. It started as a million dollar arts organization that I created out of thin air. It was incredibly successful from the beginning and it's made a lot of difference in the community. When I started it I knew that I wanted to make it varied and very powerful, not just another dinky little arts organization. There was no board or anything, but that was created. De Camera very much had its own audience, and it brought classical music to the jazz audience and jazz to the classical listeners. I made the general decisions about who would be booked and how it would be done. The programs were quite unusual and they preceded the types of programming you find now.

I first heard of Dave Catney through my friend Brian Connelly, who is a wonderful pianist in Houston and who was one of the central performers at De Camera, and who I've worked with for many years now. I think what happened is that Dave went to have some lessons with Brian, but how they got together exactly I can't tell you. Brian has a wonderful standing in the community, and Dave must have heard him play. And then typical of Dave, who was always looking for how to do things better and how to improve himself, I think Dave went to Brian and asked if he'd give him some lessons. Brian had told me that there was this guy who he thought was very interesting because clearly he was a jazz player, but had enough interest to try to really make something of himself as a pianist, and would I be interested to hear him and all that. That's, I believe, how I came to Dave.

When I heard him I remember thinking that he was very talented, very natural in his approach to music. He had the genuine thing; he wasn't a sort of glorified bar-room pianist. His music really came from inside, and it was very personal and very strong.

This was after De Camera started. Dave was not really a part of the origins of the thing. But definitely once it started and was going on, and I had heard Dave, we involved him in various ways with De Camera. We did a lot of interesting, different things, one of which was a series called A Little Day Music, in the foyer of the Wortham Center, which is this humongous waste of space. It's bigger than most concert halls and it was never used for anything until we made use of it, and we had these free concerts at noon every month. I believe that Dave's first appearance at De Camera was at one of

these concerts. They were free to the public, and we gave out free drinks, and they could bring their lunches. Often these would be previews of programs that were upcoming, and I think that's where Dave played first. Then during the Crossover Series, some of which involved both classical and jazz and some of which involved Third World music--all kinds of music-- I think Dave and Nancy were part of that, on at least one occasion. People really liked Dave a lot. He had a very natural rapport with audiences, being a very direct performer.

I was particularly impressed with how much he grew, just in the three short years that I knew him; to what extent his playing matured and became more forceful and direct and even technically so much more commanding. It was like meteoric growth. The speed of his growth may have been hastened by his illness, but I think the fact of the growth and the intensity of it were unrelated to that. Dave was vitally concerned with, and I think it was in his nature to really play music in a meaningful way. Whatever it took to do that, I think he sort of went looking for that. He was intelligent enough and healthy enough and aware enough to know that talent alone wasn't going to do it; that there was something lacking in his basic training and his chops that he needed to improve, and the way to improve that would be through classical music training. So he went and found that with Brian Connelly, with whom he took lessons. And I believe that Brian developed a deeper appreciation for jazz through his association with Dave.

As a result of hearing him play I booked Dave at the Cascade Head Festival in Oregon, where he'd be able to have as much of an audience as possible. I ended up introducing him to Nancy King, and I wanted him to accompany her at the festival. She said, "I have my own pianist that I'm used to playing with and I don't really know that I want to do it with anybody else." But they did the gig, and it was a huge success. They were really wonderful together. It was one of those things where everything comes together. They played off each other in a way that was really, really healthy. He was a natural partner for Nancy because she was so strong a personality, yet she was used to playing with people who weren't quite of her caliber; they played very well, but as accompanists. I think that when she was put with someone of Dave's strength, it brought out her very best. I didn't know how they would work together; I just knew I liked both of them and that's why I did it. But they really are wonderful together.

Dave did some more things with De Camera. One of the things I always remember about him is the night that he came to a De Camera concert at the Manil Museum. It was a contemporary concert, and he came around tagging along this cute, little, unusual-looking dog. Dave stayed outside because he'd just found this little dog on the highway--he was afraid it was going to get run over; it was just running around-- so he had stopped and picked it up. So he brought the dog over there, and to make a long story short, I was standing there with Brian Connelly, and by the time it was over, Dave had convinced Brian that he should adopt this little dog, which Brian still has. It's such a cute little dog, and Brian loves this dog. I think it's so neat the way it all happened--that Dave found a dog for Brian--almost like in return for all the things Brian did for Dave. It's very sweet. Brian would not have known that he wanted a dog until that happened.

Dave was very direct and very natural in being who he was. Being gay seemed very natural with him. He neither hid it nor announced it. As a jazz musician he had no apologies for that; he had a very sober sense of his own quality. Once Dave sat at the piano, there was an incredible intensity. It was interesting because he was very clean-cut looking; he could have been a model. He dressed very nicely and he would come out and would look like a rather establishment, clean-cut, nice-looking guy, and he would sit down at the piano and suddenly this inner fire would come out. It seemed anachronistic to the "outside". But then when you talked to him, every so often his rapid-fire talk would give away that that was under

there. Although I'm maybe not the best judge of jazz talent, Dave's music meant enough to me that I tried to get him involved in everything that I was involved in. Dave's legacy stands on the merit of what he did and what he says to people when they hear his music.