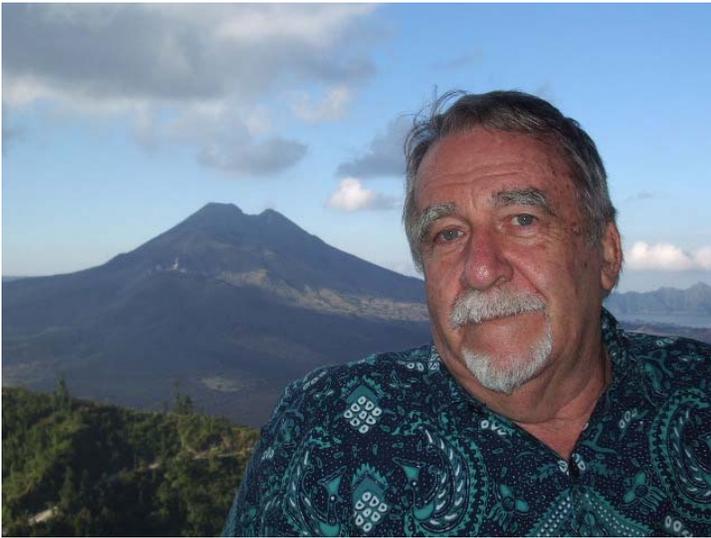


Obituary

Ithaka: A Tribute to Robert E. Brown (1927-2005)

By Lewis Peterman, San Diego State University



Robert E. Brown in Central Java near Mt. Merapi, July, 2005 (Photo courtesy of Lewis Peterman)

As you set out for Ithaka
 hope your road is a long one,
 full of adventure, full of discovery.
 Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
 angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
 you'll never find things like that one on your way
 as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
 as long as a rare excitement
 stirs your spirit and your body.
 Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
 wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
 unless you bring them along inside your soul,
 unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

During the final twenty-five years of Bob Brown's life, I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to work intimately with him, both as a friend and as a colleague. For those twenty-five years we traveled a long road together, through Europe, India, Indonesia, and Turkey. For those twenty-five years we collaborated on diverse world music projects for universities in America and Indonesia, for the College Music Society, and for the Center for World Music. For those twenty-five years we shared exciting adventures full of discovery, during which I was able to observe Bob's pronounced affinity for his favorite poet and the author of the poem *Ithaka*, Constantine P. Cavafy, as well as his identification with the hero of that poem, Odysseus. It was clear to me that Bob's thoughts were certainly always raised high, just as Cavafy and Odysseus, particularly as rare excitements stirred *his* spirit. As with his models, Cavafy and Odysseus, Bob viewed himself as an unconventional guide—a maverick leading the way for others toward a life of meaning, morality, and beauty through resourcefulness, courage, and persistence. Those of us who knew Bob well viewed him as a clever thinker, an eloquent speaker, a gifted writer, and a tireless champion for his ideal of a fully lived life: meaningful accomplishments, correct action, and appreciation of beauty. It seemed to many of us that Bob was particularly motivated by challenges of trying to accomplish the impossible. Too, he appeared to be directed by a strong sense of service to what was right, particularly when others disagreed with his sensibilities. Certainly no one could help but notice Bob's intense sensitivity to things of beauty and his sense of urgency in sharing that appreciation with others.

Hope your road is a long one.
 May there be many summer mornings when,
 with what pleasure, what joy,
 you enter harbours you're seeing for the first time;
 may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
 to buy fine things,
 mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
 sensual perfumes of every kind—
 as many sensual perfumes as you can;
 and may you visit many Egyptian cities
 to learn and go on learning from their scholars.

For Bob Brown every morning of his seventy-eight-year-long road represented a new beginning, a new summer pregnant with hope and possibility. Whether the harbors he entered promised new trading stations with sensual perfumes of every kind or were portals to cities and villages that he loved and had visited many times, Bob's radar for beauty was always on full alert, in search of sparkling jewels and precious stones, in search of fine things to buy, and in search of learned scholars with whom to collaborate. Beautiful works of art, beautiful cities, beautiful music, beautiful thoughts, beautiful aspirations—these were the stuff that filled Bob Brown with intense pleasure and joy.

Bob loved to share his appreciation of beauty with others: his family; his tour group members (to India, Turkey, or Indonesia); his university students studying ethnomusicology; and, late in his life, to young children. During his last five years Bob developed a passion—it seemed that almost everything was a passion for Bob—for enriching the education of children in the public schools of San Diego. Under the auspices of the Center for World Music, for which he served as President for over twenty years, Bob created an innovative Schools Program that brought the traditional performing arts of Africa, Indonesia, and India to public schools in San Diego. With the support of school principals and with grants from NEA, grade school children were provided with Ghanaian, Balinese, and Indian musicians and dancers for weekly private and group instruction during school hours. Bob invited some of the young students enrolled in a Balinese Gamelan and Dance course to continue their studies on location in Bali during the summer of 2005, where they performed to the utter delight of the parents and children of Payangan village in Central Bali. These San Diego children, their parents, their native instructors, those of us on the Board of Directors of the Center for World Music—all of us were privileged to view the world through Bob's eyes and to feel life through his sensibilities. We were all affected by his charisma, his charm, his dedication, and his infectious enthusiasm for things of lasting beauty and value.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
 Arriving there is what you're destined for.
 But don't hurry the journey at all.
 Better if it lasts for years,
 so you're old by the time you reach the island,
 wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
 not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvellous journey.
 Without her you wouldn't have set out.
 She has nothing left to give you now.
 And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
 Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
 you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

From 1963 to his passing in 2005, Bob was intimately associated with the Center for World Music, as Executive Director and as President. The Center was surely one of Bob's Ithakas, a home for his dreams, for he often expressed concern about limitations to cultural and arts studies in the context of modern American education: too little art in the public schools and too much abstraction in the universities. He was convinced that fully understanding culture could best be achieved by participating in the lifestyle of those who carry culture—speaking their language, eating their food, singing their songs, dancing their dances. The Center for World Music was thus the organization through which Bob endeavored to implement his ideals of international understanding through intercultural sharing.

He loved the Center for World Music, his Ithaka; he created it, he nourished it, and he promoted its mission. Under Bob's supervision the Center sponsored hundreds of concerts, introduced Americans to many prominent Asian artists through national tours, and was instrumental in creating the rich mix of world performing arts activities in the Bay Area of San Francisco by training hundreds of American students, many of whom are now distinguished leaders in their respective fields. Under Bob's guidance, at its height in the mid-1970s, the Center had no fewer than forty-five artists in residence, many from India and Indonesia.

In 1979 when Bob accepted the chairmanship of the Department of Music at San Diego State University, he relocated his Center to San Diego, where it continued to foster world music appreciation and performance through association with the four universities in the area. The Center further expanded its outreach to include special projects with the local Hmong, Filipino, and Chicano communities.

As early as 1971, under Bob's guidance, the Center for World Music began to organize summer study-abroad programs for American students. In recent years the programs have been held in Payangan, Bali, using facilities built for that purpose by Bob himself. These performance-study programs were given in cooperation with an Indonesian foundation that Bob also created—the Center for Traditional Arts of the World (*Seni Dunia Tradisional*, otherwise known as SenDuTra)—whose officers consist largely of artists who taught for the Center for World Music in the United States. In the summer of 2000, SenDuTra and the Center for World Music hosted a group of students of the Indonesian performing arts from the University of Illinois and another group from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California. Since 1976 and under the auspices of the Center for World Music, Bob personally conducted

yearly cultural tours to Indonesia (as well as less frequent cultural tours to India and Turkey), with emphasis on the performing arts. Yes, Bob loved his Center for World Music, a home that gave him his marvelous journey. For Bob Brown the Center was an Ithaka that gave him opportunities to visit new harbors, to enjoy sensual perfumes of every kind, to search for sparkling jewels and precious stones, and to understand “what these Ithakas mean.”



Robert E. Brown (back right) in Yogyakarta, Java with Lewis Peterman (back left) and K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat (front). July, 2005 (Photo courtesy of Lewis Peterman)