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Celebration of Life for Henry H. Arnhold

Speech by Prof. Dr. Hans Vorländer



As we all know, Henry was born and raised in Dresden – the beautiful capital of the German state of Saxony that you see on the panoramic view behind me. We can only guess how immensely important his nativity must have been to Henry. In any case, we can be sure that he felt a very strong connection to his Saxon roots. And there is something else we can be very sure of: the heartfelt friendship, the overwhelming gratitude and the unlimited respect the city of Dresden feels for him.

Today, I have the great honour to speak in the name of all the friends Henry made in Dresden throughout the years – and there are many. I will name only a few of them: It is my pleasure to convey warmest regards from the Saxon Prime Minister, Michael Kretschmer, who strongly *“hopes that the young generations (...) take up the ties which Henry Arnhold has spun between America and Dresden”*; I convey warmest regards from the Minister of Science and the Arts, Eva-Maria Stange; the Mayor of Dresden, Dirk Hilbert; the Director General of the Dresden State Art Collections, Marion Ackermann; the Rector of the Palucca School of Dance, Jason Beechey; and of course the rector of my university, the Technische Universität Dresden, Hans Müller-Steinhagen.

The spectrum of names and institutions I just mentioned gives a very slight idea of the impact Henry and the entire Arnhold family had on Dresden. In 2011, we were honoured and delighted when Henry accepted the appointment as Honorary Senator of the Technische Universität Dresden – a title that had also been bestowed upon his father, grandfather and uncle. I'm sure many of you remember that unforgettable event. I had the honour to deliver the laudation, which gave me an opportunity to dig a bit deeper into the long history of the Arnholds' philanthropy and social commitment. Georg Arnhold, Henry's grandfather, for example, was Treasurer of the Saxonian Art Society, supported the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra and donated to the public baths that bear his name to this day. Heinrich Arnhold, Henry's father, supported the State Art

Collections with a donation of 19 paintings by avant-garde artists such as Nolde, Kirchner, Dix, Klee and Marc. At the centre of all these activities were the famous salons: events to which artists, intellectuals and scientists such as Albert Einstein, Walter Gropius, Gret Palucca and Wassily Kandinsky flocked to exchange their ideas. In a nutshell – it is an astonishing legacy of dedication and idealism with which the Arnholds enriched public life and contributed to an open-minded, cosmopolitan atmosphere in Dresden.

To me, however, the most astonishing part is the way in which Henry Arnhold continued his family's legacy, the "heritage of the ancestors", as he put it. Due to his wisdom and deep sense of humour and self-irony, and his calm, very reserved, and at the same time firm and steadfast character, "he sought not only to revive seemingly lost traditions, but also to initiate and create new ones" (Hans Müller-Steinhagen). And this after the Nazi regime, that destroyed the family's reputation, dispossessed them of their property and forced them out of the country; after Henry himself was arrested by the German secret service in Norway and had to flee to the United States on a banana freighter by way of Cuba; after all the years of the Cold War and the Communist regime, this man came back to his hometown to continue the family tradition. Maybe it was the impression of his first visit to Dresden after the war that already planted the seed for his later activities. Let me quote his own words:

"I never believed in collective guilt. In 1974 my wife and I went to Dresden to visit the cemetery, where both my father's (...) and my mother's (...) urn had found a resting place – The city was a sad rundown place. It was only in 1989 that my former homeland Saxony rejoined a Western democracy – of which all can be proud."

Continue to build bridges – that was his motto, amazingly simple and incredibly strong at once. And that is what he did. He established an academic exchange program between the TU Dresden and the New School, he supported cooperation between the Dresden State Art Collections and the Metropolitan Museum New York. He was involved in the new construction of the synagogue and the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche. And he established the Esther-Arnhold-Seligmann-Scholarship at the Palucca School of

Dance. Just to give you a brief glimpse of the impact he made, let me quote the Palucca School's Rector, Jason Beechey:

"Every visit of Henry Arnhold to the Palucca School of Dance involved a magical story telling of how he grew up with Gret Palucca as a part of his family. With a glint and glimmer in his eyes, you could hear a pin drop in the Auditorium as he would recount their dinners together and the tales from his sister being one of Palucca's original dance students."

These are just a few examples of his dedication to Dresden, but they all have one thing in common: the true commitment of a man who was idealistic in the best sense of the word. Of someone who truly and steadfastly believed that wounds can heal, and that art, education and science can change the world for the better.

I had the great honour to get to know Henry in the 1990s, when I took charge of the exchange program between my university and The New School. Over the 20 years that followed, I had the fortune to have many inspiring conversations with him – in New York, in Dresden and often on the phone. And through those conversations a friendship developed that profoundly influenced me personally as well as my work. The latest venture we launched together, in 2012, was the Henry Arnhold Dresden Summer School, an annual program that hosts young scholars and museum professionals from all over the world and brings them together with the five major institutions of art and science in Dresden. Henry loved this project because it gets to the heart of what he meant with his idea of building bridges between people, institutions and ideas. A sentence he wrote in one of the last letters I had the pleasure to receive from him makes it overwhelmingly clear how serious he was about this idea.

To conclude my brief remarks, I will read it to you because I can't think of any better words to describe how Henry Arnhold was, and what we should never forget if we ourselves want to continue the legacy of this unforgettable man:

"I wish for us, wherever we are, that the future will be bright again and that humanism is not only a dream."