REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
K. M. KNITTEL

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for K. M. (Kay) Knittel, professor, music, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Dean P. Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
K. M. KNITTEL

Friends and colleagues of K. M. (Kay) Knittel were deeply saddened to learn of her sudden death at the age of forty-six on August 6, 2012, at her home in Philadelphia, PA.

Born on October 11, 1965, in Norwich, New York, Kay Knittel grew up in Corvallis, Oregon. An accomplished violinist, she earned a B.A. in Music at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1987 (cum laude), and a Ph.D. in historical musicology at Princeton University in 1992, writing a dissertation on the reception of Beethoven’s late string quartets. Important for her scholarly outlook was a year of post-doctoral study in European history at Cornell University (1992-93), where she studied with Sander Gilman.

Kay Knittel was an innovative scholar whose research and teaching often challenged orthodoxies. Working primarily with the tools of reception history, Knittel studied the ways in which nineteenth-century biographers and critics shaped many of the terms of historiographical and critical discourse that are still with us today. The focal points of her research were Beethoven and Mahler. Her writings on Beethoven, published in JAMS, Beethoven Forum, Music & Letters, and The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music, examine the development of the “Beethoven Myth” in the nineteenth century by interrogating the role that biographical tropes such as his defiance of deafness or his alleged inaccessibility colored the interpretation of his oeuvre, in particular fostering a “heroic” image that in turn distorted or marginalized portions of his output that did not accord with this image. Knittel was also concerned that biographers and critics sacrificed Beethoven, the human being, to his mythical alter ego, a theme that she explored in a study of the Heiligenstadt Testament, on which she was working at the time of her death. In two published articles on Mahler in 19th-Century Music, Knittel investigated the language and imagery of contemporary concert reviews and caricatures of Mahler’s activities as conductor for evidence of the ways that these betray anti-Semitic prejudices. Her last published work, Seeing Mahler: Music and Antisemitism in Fin-de-siècle Vienna (Ashgate Publishers, 2010), brings the reception of Mahler’s music into play as well, advancing the thesis that many of the seemingly objective statements that Mahler’s early critics made about his works originated in stereotypes traceable back to Wagner’s notorious anti-Semitic essay, “Das Judentum in der Musik.” Various awards, including an AMS (American Musicology Society) 50 Doctoral Fellowship, a research grant from the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, and an NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities) Fellowship for College Teachers and Independent Scholars, supported her research.

Knittel’s career as a teacher took her first to Seton Hall University (1993-2001) and then to the Butler School of Music of The University of Texas at Austin (2001-12). At UT Austin, she regularly taught courses on eighteenth-century music, chamber music, and nineteenth-century opera, as well as seminars on topics related to her own research. Knittel’s commitment to the Socratic Method in both her undergraduate and graduate courses challenged students to think critically and independently. For her opera courses, she innovated the use of historical methods to stage and perform opera scenes, so her classes became laboratories for students to experience the challenges of historical reconstruction of unfamiliar and neglected repertories. Her greatest
satisfactions as a teacher came, however, in her role as a tireless and loyal mentor to her many advisees in the M.M., Ph.D., and D.M.A. programs.

Kay’s contributions as a faculty member also included a significant amount of service, both as a member of Butler School of Music committees, like the Executive Committee and the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee, and as an overseer of many of the comprehensive examinations administered by the Division of Musicology/Ethnomusicology.

Those of us who knew Kay Knittel as colleague, mentor and/or friend will long miss her keen intellect, her self-deprecating and ironic sense of humor, her healthy skepticism about received wisdom, and the honesty with which she assessed scholarship and the larger world.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Michael C. Tusa (chair), James Buhler, and Glenn A. Richter.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts on October 4, 2013, and posted under “Memorials” at http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.