

OBERLIN COLLEGE

OBERLIN, OHIO 44074

THE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

REMARKS BY DAVID BOE AT THE DINNER HONORING ROBERT WILLOUGHBY Sept. 14, 1980

To what President Danenberg has just said, may I add my welcome to all of you, friends and family of Grace Wheeler, friends and family of Bob Willoughby, guest performers, and members of the Conservatory family. I would like to say a special word of thanks to the performers, flutists and pianists, who came here today from points East and West to pay musical tribute. It was a splendid program and we are grateful to all of you for your fine performances. Since the announcement last November of Bob Willoughby's appointment to this chair, and during the time we have been making preparations for today's festivities, I've been kidding Bob about his "coronation". Perhaps I could have more accurately characterized today's events as a "high-falutin affair". But in fact, we are calling this an inauguration, a term which Webster defines variously as "the induction into office with a formal ceremony," or "the marking of the formal beginning of something," or "the formal celebration of the first use of something." With the happy convergence of circumstances that we celebrate today, all three definitions would seem to apply. President Danenberg has spoken eloquently to the life and work of Robert Wheeler. If Bob Willoughby will forgive me if I embarrass him, I would like to say a few words of appreciation. Many of you, but I'm sure not all, may be aware that Bob Willoughby served his country during World War II as a bomber pilot in Europe. Rumor has it that he went through a harrowing experience as he was training for these missions. As you probably know, military personnel are required to wear parachutes when flying, and as training for any eventual aerial mishap, flight crews are often given training in parachute jumping, but under conditions which are controlled and normally safe. Before making the first jump, the trainees are given precise instructions -- they are told that as they jump from the plane they are to wait while a cord attached to the plane automatically opens the chute. Should that system fail, a rip cord at the top of the chute can be pulled manually. And if for some reason, the main chute would not open, an additional emergency chute is available which can be activated by pulling a second rip cord located underneath. The jumpers are informed that when they land, a truck from the main base will be circling the area to pick them up. Now what happened with Bob's first jump was this: As he left the plane, he started counting, but waited in vain for the chute to appear. Remembering the instructions he reached for the rip cord, pulled it, but again, no chute. Confident that he was still alright, he remembered to reach for the cord to the emergency chute, but unfortunately again no chute came out. Undaunted, but with a growing concern about the outcome of this exercise, Bob muttered to himself --- With my luck, I'll get down there and that truck won't be there either."

Seriously, it is no exaggeration to say that Bob Willoughby is held in the highest esteem by his students and colleagues in the Conservatory, and that his appointment to the Wheeler Chair is not only a fitting tribute to a splendid career, but establishes for the Wheeler Professorship a notably high standard as well. I am not going to try to summarize all of the accomplishments of Bob's career. Certainly, the success of his performing and of his teaching speaks eloquently for itself. But I would like to mention very briefly three aspects of his work which have been of such enormous benefit both to his students and to the Conservatory. The first is his unflagging support for the performance of the music of today. His willingness to perform the new, the untried, the experimental has been exemplary, a model for all performers who wish to keep fully abreast of the changing demands of the

profession. Second, and at the other end of the historical spectrum, he successfully managed in mid-career to learn a new instrument, to master the technique and intricacies of the baroque flute, so that the music of that period could be more faithfully and more beautifully realized. And finally, as a responsible member of the College and Conservatory community, he has gone well beyond the call of duty in providing yeoman's service -- especially on those committees that always seem to have the longest and toughest agenda.

One of the guests we had hoped to have with us tonight is Robert Finn, music critic for the Plain Dealer. Unfortunately, he had a previous engagement away from the Cleveland area and thus is unable to attend. When he sent his regrets he added this note: "Please express to Bob Willoughby my sincerest congratulations, for he is one of my favorite people, whether working on the business end of a flute or not."

Bob -- I think that pretty well sums up the feeling of all of us here, so again I offer you our heartiest congratulations on the beginning of your term in the Wheeler Professorship.