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Joseph C. Blumel

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Joseph C. Blumel, Mildred Schwab, Frederic Littman
“Dedication: Frederic Littman sculpture *Farewell to Orpheus*”
Portland State University
February 26, 1975

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JOSEPH C. BLUMEL: Good morning. I think it important that we get on with the ceremony since the weather has cleared momentarily. The music that we have been enjoying is by the brass ensemble of the university's music department, and this part of the program was arranged by Professor John Trudeau. The group is directed this morning by John Ellis.

We are assembled to honor the university's distinguished professor emeritus of art, Frederic Littman, and to celebrate the permanent acquisition and siting here for the enjoyment and enrichment of the people now and in the future of one of his classic and classical sculptures. It perhaps is presumptuous to identify Frederic Littman as the university's, though I hope you will understand my pride in doing so. He of course is a man of the world in the very best sense of that expression, as any great artist belongs to the world. I speak for all of us here, and for the university with which he has so long been associated, when I express my delight and my appreciation that this gentle humanist chose to work with us.

The note in your programs describes the history of the acquisition of *Farewell to Orpheus*. I want simply to add the suggestion the sculpture be acquired and be sited in the Park Blocks for public enjoyment had originated, to the best of my knowledge, with former president Gregory Wolfe. Dr. Wolfe sent me a note of greetings and best wishes for this week, and I know he would like for me to extend them to his many friends here today.

May I also at this time acknowledge the presence of several special guests. Francis Ivancie, until recently Commissioner of Parks, and under whose administration this project was planned and

most certainly without whose enthusiastic support it would not have been accomplished [applause]; Director Dale Christianson of the Park Bureau [applause]; Elaine Cogan of the Portland Development Commission [applause]; Commission Executive Director John Kenward [applause]; and Chairman Henry Stanley of the Metropolitan Arts Commission [applause].

I want to acknowledge especially the donors who made it possible for the sculpture to be acquired. They have customarily asked to remain anonymous. I want to say for all of us and for those who will enjoy this gift in years to come how much we all appreciate their generosity. It is a pleasure also to welcome Professor Littman's personal friends who have been able to join us here today. And, finally, because my office overlooks this pool and the lovely lady who now graces it may I, selfishly, extend to her a personal welcome. [audience laughs, applause]

It is now my very pleasant duty to introduce to you the Portland City Commissioner of Parks, who as many of you are aware has responsibility also for the Metropolitan Arts Commission. She is a woman of many and diverse talents, not the least of them in the arts, as those of us fortunate enough to have attended yesterday's Portland composer concert now know. Commissioner Mildred Schwab.

MILDRED SCHWAB: Thank you. It is a special day for us as we gather to salute Frederic Littman, both as a humanist and as an artist. As a humanist, in its very truest sense, Frederic Littman is a beautiful blend of the old and the new worlds. He has retained all of the gentle, compassionate qualities of his native Hungary, while establishing himself as a leading artist, sculptor, and teacher in this country. His works, especially in our city and region, make him a vital partner in both campus and city communities. While his works of art will bring enjoyment and pleasure to the citizens of our area for many years to come, the inspiration of his teachings will continue to flourish through the contributions of his students. It's a pleasure Mr. Littman, thank you. [applause]

[pause]

FREDERIC LITTMAN: I must say I am somewhat overwhelmed. And I thank Mr. Blumel and Ms. Schwab for these loving introductions. And with this I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Blumel on the occasion of his presidency that we are celebrating this week.

I have been knowing about these Park Blocks and working here for almost half of my life—it just dawned upon me a few days ago. This is an extraordinary fact, and I would have never dreamt during these more than thirty years that one of my pieces of work would once be installed in this perfectly lovely place. This is a great honor for me and causes great joy to me. There is an aspect to it which is interesting that the sculpture faces almost due south. This is an old hobbyhorse of mine, I am sort of flirting with the sun which unfortunately is not out here today, but I like my sculptures facing the south. Now this sculpture I believe faces slightly

eastward, maybe about twenty degrees east of south, and I will be interested in finding out just what happens with the light conditions here, and well, I have written a few words about the sculpture itself and if you don't mind it, I will read them to you.

I was always interested in motion. Particularly in the idea of fighting the force of gravity. The best I could do in this respect was to lift a bronze figure away from the ground, giving it the floating feeling of motion and using the tensile strength of bronze by placing the bulk of the piece on very slender elements by means of a three-point balance in an open work concept. This is the structure, or perhaps abstract part of the idea, which is however obstructed or disguised completely by the use of a human figure, which for some reasons of ancient sympathies I always prefer to a geometric or other shape.

This is not my first *Farewell to Orpheus*. Years before, in a rather unhappy mood, which I liked to cultivate at that time, and associate with upsetting world situations and such, I made several figures expressing a feeling of disintegration. An image of Orpheus reaching towards the sky with his lyre. A metamorphosis of Aphrodite. A dying warrior; and just a few others. Among them, a small figure like this one, floating, very rough-textured and somber in its mood. At one time I had to enter this piece into a show and the little sculpture needed a title. Because of its character and my mood, the thought of Eurydice floating down from the murky waters of the Styx River toward Hades came spontaneously to my mind. And this superimposed theme, with Eurydice's involvement with the snake and Hades and other surrounding implications, then became quite integrated in my mind with the sculpture. There are, it seems, apparent contradictions and complications in its evolvment, the more so that under the sunny skies of Italy where I made this final version in 1968, she became nice and healthy, and even a little plump. [audience chuckles] But not without keeping her earnest countenance.

And so this calls for some meditation, and because of that I am grateful to the city of Portland for having provided us with this lovely reflecting pool and the benches that will be installed here in a little while, so that we may on some nice summer afternoon, sit here and contemplate the changing patterns of lights and shadows as the sun moves slowly around the sculpture and brings it to life. Thank you very, very much.

[applause]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I would take the liberty to make one additional mention of, I think, an individual who is present, and take the liberty on behalf of the Parks Department and the Portland State community that worked with him... and that's Roger Yost, whose sustained effort over a period of time to make this a place where the community and Portland State could gather together I think has succeeded so well, and he should be welcomed and thanked for his efforts on behalf of all of us. Roger? [applause]

Fred said that he was overwhelmed, and that by itself for the Portland State community and the city should be statement enough; we have been in the habit of underwhelming people so often that this is sort of a milestone. Fred, on behalf of the city of Portland, it is a pleasure to accept for my fellow citizens your sculpture, and I might express my envy, for it is rare that a person is able to leave his fellow citizens a legacy that is both remembered and appreciated. Its presence will grace and does grace the face of our city, and it enhances all of our daily lives. It is universal in its satisfaction because it brings enjoyment to all of us and each of us for many different reasons. We are better because of your presence, Fred, and because of your work, our children will share you too. Thank you very much. [applause]

[brass band begins playing in background]

[program ends]