Otto-Werner Mueller is an icon. More than a gifted maestro with a distinguished conducting career, he is widely regarded as the most important conducting pedagogue of the last 50 years. Maestro Mueller has spent more than half that time at Curtis, where he holds the Rita E. and Gustave M. Hauser Chair in Conducting Studies. Since joining the Curtis faculty in 1986, he has been an invaluable guide to young conductors; and “just as important,” asserts Curtis President Roberto Díaz, “are the many roles Maestro Mueller has played in the education of each and every instrumentalist at Curtis during
“The worst insult a conductor can give the orchestra is to not be well prepared. A conductor must know every line and see the whole phrase, like the curve on a building. He must know what’s just ahead and where you are going, and communicate: eye contact is the most important thing.”

Otto-Werner Mueller in Overtones, 2002
“Otto Werner Mueller remains one of the most important influences I have had in my musical development. My years studying with him were crucial and I literally think about things he taught me every day. Thank you, Mr. Mueller, for all you gave to me and all your other students, and for what you stand for as a musician and human being.”

—Alan Gilbert (Conducting ‘92), music director, New York Philharmonic

“My days at the Curtis Institute of Music were a turning point in my life. Up until age 19, I lived in Peru, and knew very little about the music that I now love and perform. Otto-Werner Mueller changed that. As my teacher, he was very clear to point out what I didn’t know—and then he encouraged and taught me throughout my time as his student not only how to learn, but also how to enjoy the process of learning. He always said: ‘If you don’t know something, say that you don’t know it, and find the answer.’ This advice has stayed with me ever since and informs how I work and live every day.”

—Miguel Harth-Bedoya (Conducting ‘91), music director, Fort Worth Symphony

“In my first informal reading with Maestro Mueller, Brahms’s First Symphony was slated to be the vehicle that would indoctrinate all of us newbies into the Curtis Symphony Orchestra. As I think back, we must have all looked like frantic puppies—wary of the maestro’s wrath, but extremely eager to please. As is the typical Mueller way, our introduction to the work didn’t begin with a runthrough of the first movement. In fact, we didn’t even start at the beginning. Maestro Mueller dissected the symphony in agonizingly minute detail, highlighting figures in the winds, connecting lines between each string section, and jumping between movements to point out motives planted in the symphony’s skeleton. ... In the end, this microscopic work allowed us to put all the pieces back together to make it more beautiful and more profound than ever before.”

—Benjamin Beilman (Violin ‘12)

“Mr. Mueller instilled in each of us the utmost respect for the composer’s intentions, and made certain that we placed the importance of the score before our own passing musical whims. He opened our ears to a new level of detail, and insisted upon a devout care for every note, in both quality of sound and in its contextual placement. In my years since graduating from Curtis, I am discovering how rare these elements of music-making can be, and I am all the more grateful to have been part of such a privileged, but more importantly honest, community of music-making.”

—Elena Urioste (Violin ‘08)