



## Frederick Alfred Fox, Jr.

January 17, 1931 - August 24, 2011

Frederick Alfred Fox, Jr., a composer and former professor of music at the Indiana University Jacob School of Music, died peacefully at home in his sleep on August 24th, 2011. For many years he had been in declining health, which he endured with humor and without complaint. He was 80.

He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Ramona, who cared for him with the doggedness and fierce attention that only love can bring, and by three sons Brian, Eric (Cheryl), and Curtis (Kathryn). His two granddaughters (Nora and Zanny) are too young to have known him in his prime, when his explosive laughter would shake the house and scare the cats, but they will eventually internalize the stories about a no-nonsense sacrilegious man whose presence loomed very large for his immediate family as well as for friends, colleagues and former students (several of whom turned out to be all three).

He was a family man, but the center of his life was always music. He would laugh when Ramona teasingly reminded him that, not long after they were married, he had told her earnestly that music, not marriage, would always come first. Indeed, he was almost always thinking about music, and

had been his whole life.

Fred was born January 17, 1931 in Detroit, Michigan to Frederick Alfred Fox, Sr., a WWI vet and a carpenter, and Otha Esther Smith, a homemaker from rural Arkansas. His ancestry is English, Scots-Irish and German. In his junior high school there was a good band program and he learned to play saxophone. By the age of 17, he was taking private lessons from Larry Teal, and playing in pick-up dance hall jazz bands around Detroit. (He himself couldn't dance, and said he found it silly, but his children caught him more than once watching American Bandstand on TV). Soon he began traveling the Midwest with touring bands, writing interludes and intros and arranging.

His first love was jazz, but after studying composition at Wayne State and later at Indiana University (under Bernard Heiden), his musical interests largely shifted to contemporary music in the Western classical tradition, with a heavy jazz inflection. By 1959 he had earned his doctorate in music from I.U. In 1974, after two academic jobs in small colleges, a Ford Foundation post in DC, and ten years at Cal State Hayward (now California State University, East Bay), he was invited back to teach at I.U., where he spent the rest of his career. One of his first major undertakings was the founding of the Indiana University New Music Ensemble, serving as its first director. Throughout his career, Fred always considered himself a "composer who teaches," rather than a "teacher who composes." But he did take teaching seriously, becoming quite close with many of his students over the years. He also dutifully served as chairman of the composition department for thirteen years. His office at the Music School was notable for its collection of what he called "true

American tacky": a boxing nun toy, a velvet portrait of Elvis, an obscene light switch, etc. He retired in 1997.

Fred considered Béla Bartok to be the main influence on his compositional style and structure, followed closely by Anton Webern, then by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Debussy (in that order). Bebop, especially the melodic-driven sound of Charlie Parker, was also a major influence. He composed more than a hundred pieces, everything from solos and chamber music to major orchestral works. His spirit, his personality, and the very specific tension of his being are very much alive in his music, for those who care to listen.

There will be no visitation; all arrangements are private. Memorial contributions may be sent to either the I.U. Foundation (P. O. Box 6460, Indianapolis, IN 46206) for the benefit of the Frederick Fox scholarship at the Jacobs School of Music, or to I.U. Health, Bloomington Hospital Hospice. The family wishes to thank all the caregivers who attended to Fred's needs over the years, in particular Traci Inman and Stephanie Newlin.

Allen Funeral Home 4155 South Old Highway 37 is handling the arrangements and online condolences may be sent to the family at [www.allenfuneralhome.org](http://www.allenfuneralhome.org)

# Tribute Wall

JA

“ Dear Ramona, Curtis, Eric, Brian and family,

*As you must know, Fred was a musical father to me. His solidly information-packed, musical, non-academic yet spot-on mentorship not only helped me traverse the many hurdles of graduate degree programs, but he taught me how to be a composer first, yet also a strong voice in the ears and lives of my students. Going to lunch with Fred was always an honor, and he used to schedule my lessons just before lunch, so that we could share a meal together. He would teach pairs of students, knowing that we learned far more from comments he would make to other students, for our connection with the music was less personal. That must be why those of us graced to be his students during the remarkable years that he ran the IU composition department hear Fred's voice when we teach, and when we compose. He would often study a piece I had brought in, not saying anything for many minutes, while I awaited anxiously to hear his view of it. This is what made Fred such a uniquely gifted teacher, the fact that he was first a composer, a great musician, who genuinely wanted to help the students follow their own path using age-old principles in current musical architecture. I remember hearing his seminars in which he would humbly present his gorgeously evocative music, and in summing up, would say, "thanks for putting up with me." I also remember the Saint Louis Symphony performance of his Night Ceremonies and how his incredible orchestration made Debussy's LaMer which followed seem pale in comparison. I could go on and on about how this remarkable man made an impact on my life, and on the lives of so many others. At the core, behind the gruff, critical, good-humored witty man that was his public persona, was a man full of love for those in whom he saw a bit of himself. I will forever be indebted for the years I had with him. But those years, and the extraordinarily positive effect he had on my life, are only a fraction of the same that he had on you. He is profoundly and deeply missed, but his spirit lives, in his music, in his teachings, in the immediate, joyous bursts of laughter that echo in our memories, and in the warmth of knowing he loved us.*

*My very best to you, James*

**james Aikman** - October 26, 2015 at 04:22 PM

GL

“ *Dear Fred, You made such a huge difference in my life and I am grateful to have had you as a mentor. I love you*  
-Glenn Smith

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**Glenn Smith** - October 26, 2015 at 04:22 PM

DA

“ *Ramona: My deepest sympathies. Fred was such an important influence in my life, and he had such a strong, wonderful spirit. I'm sure many stories will be recounted by former students and colleagues. Mine include the time he sent a letter of recommendation for me for a grant, and I forwarded his envelope on without opening it, not knowing there were TWO letters, one of which was more than a little insulting and still one of the funniest things I've ever read. Fortunately the assistant opening the mail caught it and returned it - but she got a huge laugh at it as well. Another one was the time he picked up my phone call (in his office) and, instead of saying hello, played his signing ice cream scoop ("Ice Cream") into the phone. I practically fell on the floor laughing. I could go on... And all the while, he was such a giving and supportive teacher and mentor, and model composer for the kind of music I try to write. All our love to you and your family.*

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**David Heuser** - October 26, 2015 at 04:22 PM