



Stephen Zegree

May 5, 1953 - March 7, 2015

With his own chorus of family and friends at his side, and the music that was his life's work playing in the background, Stephen (Steve) Zegree passed away on Saturday morning, March 7, in Bloomington, Indiana. He was internationally respected as one of the giants of vocal jazz conducting and education, as well as being a gifted pianist, arranger, and producer. "The mentor to so many in his field, the creator of so much of what we hear, the passionate enthusiast of his art and a supreme motivator of the young," reflected Gwyn Richards, Dean of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University where Steve was a full professor and director of The Singing Hoosiers and the award-winning Vocal Jazz Ensemble I.

Prior to coming to Indiana three years ago, he was the Bobby McFerrin Distinguished Professor of Music at Western Michigan University, a position endowed by Mr. McFerrin in recognition of Steve's exceptional talents. In his 34 years at the University, his singing group, Gold Company, toured the world, performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center several times, and won almost 50 performance awards from Downbeat Magazine. Steve himself was selected for the Downbeat Jazz Educator's Hall of Fame. Known as a demanding and inspiring teacher, Steve was a man of great good

humor, kindness and exceptional passion.

Born in 1953, Steve, the son of Thaddeus and Lili Zegree, spent his childhood in Washington and California. He was recognized as a musical prodigy, playing the piano with his father from the age of three. By the 7th grade, he had organized and led a group of older boys in a garage band, "The Zigs", that played at school dances and clubs. His first piano teacher, Mrs. Lackey, was prescient in allowing him to stray from the classical training traditions thus engaging his interest and keeping him at the piano. He went on to receive degrees and a doctorate in piano performance and choral conducting and was a Steinway Artist. He served on the selection committee for the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival. In addition to his full engagement in conducting and teaching, Steve continued piano performance with symphony orchestras, solo concerts, in national Broadway touring shows, and for 34 years with the jazz group, Western Jazz Quartet.

He credited his older sister Joan for introducing him to jazz music very early on, though his love for the classics--especially his parents' beloved Chopin--remained with him throughout his life. His inquisitive spirit, immense talents and professional drive led Steve to conducting and teaching gigs at major jazz festivals, at international vocal conferences and symposiums, and performances with such luminaries as Manhattan Transfer, Dave Brubeck, Mark Murphy, Paquito D'Rivera, Jon Hendricks, and Bobby McFerrin. He was the arranger and rehearsal director for Nick Lachey's winning choir on NBC's telecast of "Clash of the Choirs". During the 2008 Olympics in China, Steve conducted the World Youth Choir with guest singer Jackie Chan (yes, that Jackie Chan) as well as for the

Opening Ceremonies.

More than 100 of Steve's arrangements have been published and are in use by choral groups around the world. He wrote two of the definitive books on jazz singing and performance. Publisher of his book, *The Wow Factor: How to Create it, Inspire it and Achieve it*, Emily Crocker of Hal Leonard wrote, "Steve was the sweetest man ever and a giant of an educator. We would need a U-Haul truck to remove the exclamation points and ellipses from that manuscript, but like Steve, it was effusive and full of wisdom and humor."

Steve is survived by his wife and love of his life, Laurie Hofmann, his two best productions-- children Sarah and Nat (in whose school lunch boxes he would put handwritten notes each day), both fine musicians, and his sister Joan Zegree. Steve also leaves a legacy to a larger family on 6 continents: the thousands of singers and musicians, both professional and amateur, who had the opportunity to study, learn, and perform with this most extraordinary man of such exceptional talent and warmth. When asked about his own singing gifts, Steve would say, with intended irony, that he had "a small but ugly voice." Those who knew him would say different. He had a magnificent voice. We love you, we already miss you, and we will treasure you always.

Two scholarship funds have been established. At Indiana University: The Steve Zegree Vocal Jazz Scholarship Fund (iufoundation.iu.edu). At Western Michigan University: The Steve Zegree Vocal Jazz Endowed Scholarship, (mywmu.com/zegreefund) WMU Foundation, 1903 W. Michigan

Ave., Kalamazoo, MI,49008-5403.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory 4155 South Old Highway 37 is handling the arrangements and online condolences may be sent to the family at www.allenfuneralhome.org.

Tribute Wall

TO

“ Steve and I graduated from Walsh Jesuit HS together in 1971. He was talented and eccentric, a unique guy who was positive and lived his life his way, truly gifted with a passion for piano. His brothers from the class of '71 will always remember his enthusiasm for life and his smile. My sincere condolences to his family and friends.

RIP Steve

Tom Platner - October 26, 2015 at 04:01 PM

MA

“ All my love and prayers during this time. I know there is a blanket of grace upon all of you that will carry you through. There is no death - there is only life, and although the letting go is so hard, I am knowing that Steve's love for you all will only continue to grow, and grow, and grow ... and you will forever feel it and be lifted by it.

mark lord - October 26, 2015 at 04:01 PM

TO

“ Homage to a friend...

It was in late June of 1976 that Andrea and I met STEVE ZEGREE. Both Steve and I had been hired to work for the late great Fred Waring at his summer workshops in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

I was 22, and had just finished my graduate degree in piano from IU in Bloomington. Steve was going there the upcoming fall of 1976 to do the same degree I had just finished. I think he studied with Abbey Simon during his Bloomington time. (Please forgive me if I am wrong!)

Dr. Steve Zegree was kind, probing, fun, gentle, witty, popular, gregarious, and gentlemanly. I liked him immediately, and enjoyed our every little discourse regarding a plethora of facets of being a young musician. I was so pleased that he returned to work for Mr. Waring the following summer. He was a joy to know. We both championed an extraordinary singer we met with Mr. Waring named Timothy Noble. Tim eventually left the Waring show and became a leading operatic baritone. He positively shined as a musician/singer/performer.

Steve eventually became very wisely determined to pursue the jazz side of things...the more complicated the chords, the better. But, in all of that labyrinth of understanding of the world of jazz, he never lost a desire to work with young people...and, to become their champion as they enjoyed success following success in the ensembles he led, or the albums they made, or the concerts that were presented. He also wanted to help the rest of the music world understand how to "do it". This was evidenced in his writings and the courses he taught.

Sadly, the last time I saw him was a few years ago in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I had been invited to go there to work with some of the singers, pianists, and Joe Miller's choirs there at that time. I was

most excited to be able to visit, if only briefly, with Steve while there. He was just as interesting as I had found him to be in that first summer of 1976. When he joined the faculty at IU in Bloomington, I called him to express my sincere congratulations.

The fact that he has passed from this life is troubling news indeed. When I learned of this deep sadness yesterday afternoon, I found it difficult to believe. This morning, it still feels the same.

But, I do know that our world was made better for his having lived and moved and expressed and made music in it.

Tom Jaber - October 26, 2015 at 04:01 PM