

Larry H. Smith

Professor of Music and Chairperson, Department of Organ

Professor Larry Smith, chair of the Organ Department, has retired following 27 years of distinguished service to Indiana University. His influence as a performer and pedagogue has been widespread, as his many former students now populate important teaching and church positions, where they are playing a vital role in the training and development of musicians and those who eventually will be the profession's future.

An active organ soloist, Professor Smith has traveled across the country performing varied programs of music from early Baroque to the most recent contemporary works. As a virtuoso, his playing has been heralded for his impeccable technique focused on detailed precision, brilliance, and definitive musical persuasiveness. The densest polyphonic textures were rendered with remarkable clarity; complex and difficult modern scores were executed with the highest level of rhythmic control. And all was accomplished with nearly undetectable movement, despite having both feet and hands engaged in the affair. He possessed both dexterity and technical refinement, but he was also a musician's muse.

For years he displayed these skills in annual concerts for the university and public at IU's Auditorium and area churches. He was, of course, a major national figure as well, performing highly praised recitals, all from memory, for three national gatherings of the American Guild of Organists in the 1980s, as well as giving numerous performances at regional conventions, and making appearances with orchestras. His playing is documented on two recordings, including a thrilling performance of Vierne's Third Symphony, as well as a contrasting collection of Germanic music spanning almost three centuries. Perhaps less known is that he was thoroughly trained as a church organist, serving in various full- and part-time capacities throughout his career.

Larry's pedigree is as gilded as his musicianship, having been trained under the finest teachers and organists of the age. Raised in Guttenberg, Iowa, he commenced organ study with John G. Lammers. He received his bachelor's degree in 1965 from Drake University as a pupil of the legendary Russell Saunders. Perhaps this is where he developed his ability to appreciate humor of, shall we say, all colors and varieties. Another consummate musician and star of the emerging performance practice world, Arthur Poister, guided Larry for his master's degree at Syracuse University. His Doctor of Musical Arts degree was completed at the Eastman School of Music under David Craighead, where he earned that school's prized Performer's Certificate in Organ. Craighead likely solidified Larry's gift for clarity, and imbued him with a love of contemporary music which he maintains to this day.

Prior to coming to Indiana University, Professor Smith held teaching positions at Converse College and Kent State University. Perhaps the best thing to come from his early teaching position at Converse was meeting his delightful wife, Caroline, a vocalist and

Depauw University associate professor of music. The two regularly performed together in recital, and shared the musical leadership at Calvary United Methodist Church in Brownsburg, Indiana, for a decade. They also have a delightful daughter, Johna, who is a talented violinist currently studying at Vanderbilt University.

Perhaps the best indicator of Larry's success in teaching—he is considered to be a thoughtful and challenging teacher—is the high level of achievement of his students, who not only rave about his pedagogical approach, but also hold him in the highest esteem as a musician and human being. It is no accident that his office phone used to ring frequently with news from past students wanting to check in with their master, either to report on their professional or personal lives, or perhaps just to share a joke or two (church musicians can have *quite* the colorful sense of humor). They likely called to at least hear one of Larry's many metaphors—his organ students report that various aspects of playing the instrument and making music were compared to virtually everything imaginable, from fine cooking to automobiles (he loves his cars!) to Dolly Parton!

Of course, as his colleague I particularly appreciated what I consider to be his greatest gift—that of inspiring music-making, not merely playing the notes on the page. Larry was always able to, dare I say, inspire each and every student, regardless of his or her level of skill or talent, to get past the nuts and bolts of technique and proper execution, and delve deeply into the emotional and expressive aspects of organ playing. The weakest among the students could still say something about the music he or she was playing. His finest students are all top-notch communicators, and purveyors of the thought that playing music is not about the mechanics, but instead about the rhetorical and emotional qualities that are waiting to be mined from the score. Of course, his musical *progeny* are brilliant technicians, but, to borrow from the '90s, "it's the music, stupid." And, unlike many teachers, he actively induced students to create their own musical narratives rather than simply implanting only his ideas into their playing. In so doing, he embodied the liberal arts ideal of teaching students to learn on their own. Professor of Music Larry Smith will be missed for all that he offered as a colleague, pedagogue, performer, and church musician. And we'll miss the jokes, too.

~Chris Young