



Dr. W. Darr Wise

Bachelor of Music

University of Cincinnati
Conservatory of Music (1950)

Masters of Music

Florida State University (1954)

Honorary Doctor of Music

Newberry College (2006)



Professor of Music Emeritus

Piano, Theory, College Organist

W. Darr Wise served Newberry College for a near-record 42 years as a full-time faculty member in the Department of Music and as the College Organist. He joined the College faculty as Assistant Professor of Music in 1956 and retired as Professor of Music Emeritus in 1998.

Darr Wise, a native of Newberry, excelled early as a piano student and in high school studied with Louise Miller and Doris Brubaker at Newberry College. The late Dr. Milton Moore, then chair of the music department, noted the exceptional talent of Wise and would later be effective in calling him to join the music faculty. Darr followed Louise Miller to Brevard College and after further study entered Cincinnati Conservatory where he earned the Bachelor of Music degree. Two years in the US Signal Corps took him to Germany and after his return he earned the Master of Music degree from Florida State University. Much later he met and studied with Thomas Richner at Columbia University in New York

Darr's first teaching position was at Andrew College in Cuthbert, Ga. His tenure there was a brief two years since Dr. Milton Moore and Dr. Chris Caughman, then college president, called him back to Newberry to join the faculty. At one time during his tenure he taught a full schedule, was accompanist for the Newberry College Singers, president of the South Carolina Music Teachers Association and Organist/Choirmaster for the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer---an almost insurmountable task. His students would agree that he was an exceptional piano and music theory teacher as well as a consummate performer.



Piano Students of Estel Forbes

Cincinnati Conservatory of Music 1950

Darr is seated at the piano.

Professor Wise was the Director of Music/Organist at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in downtown Newberry beginning in 1956 and continuing for 52 years. He is well known in the music circles of South Carolina not only as a Lutheran musician, but serving from 1982—1984 as President of the South Carolina Music Teachers Associations. Darr has many published articles and has judged piano competitions throughout South Carolina and Georgia, many connected with the Music Teachers National Association. He was elected to Phi Kappa Phi, scholastic honorary society, at Florida State University and Bachman Honor Society at Newberry College.

The State of South Carolina awarded Professor W. Darr Wise the *Order of the Palmetto* by Governor Mark Sanford on October 21, 2003. The **Order of the Palmetto** is the highest civilian honor awarded by the Governor of South Carolina. It is awarded to persons who make contributions of statewide significance. He is shown here with South Carolina Representative *Walton J. McLeod, III* during a ceremony at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Newberry.



Darr Wise is a legend among his peers and most notably among his students. He was a master teacher and the example of how life is to be viewed and lived. For many years, the first music class of the day was Music Theory. His theory skills were highly polished and conveyed to students in a unique way — even at 8 o'clock in the morning. He demanded excellence from his students. His greatest rewards came from a student's development and growth in musicianship and personal character to prepare them for a life of teaching and performing music. Many of his students continued their education achieving advanced graduate degrees serving as teachers, performers, musicians and administrators in all levels of education.

When Professor Wise came to Newberry College, the music building was located on the rear corner of the campus in an old (with emphasis on old) two story house. The main entrance to the building opened directly into the largest classroom. His studio overlooked the baseball field and the distant cemetery. Insulation was foreign to this building so noise and camaraderie were shared equally among each of the studios and practice rooms. Heating was provided by a small gas space heater and 'cooling' through an open window. His Steinway remains part of the piano fleet in use today. He taught organ on an old Hammond Concert model organ and then on the new 1955 M. P. Moller pipe organ (6 Ranks) in Holland Hall (a gift of the F. W. Fisher family). In 1972, the music department was moved to a new location further expanding the campus. The construction of the new facility was funded through strong support of the Alumni. Darr was the designer and curator of the 1966 Schantz pipe organ installed upon the completion of Wiles Chapel. Upon the announcement of his retirement in 1997, a secret campaign was begun to raise funds for the completion of the 1972 Alumni Music Center. From students, friends and family came support to fund, build and name the *W. Darr Wise Rehearsal Hall* on the second floor of the Alumni Music Center. The Hall today serves as the hub of choral activities and rehearsals.



Darr enjoys sports and supports our Newberry College teams - most notably the Baseball team. You will find him at practice on almost any given day sitting in the stands and rooting loudly during the home games.

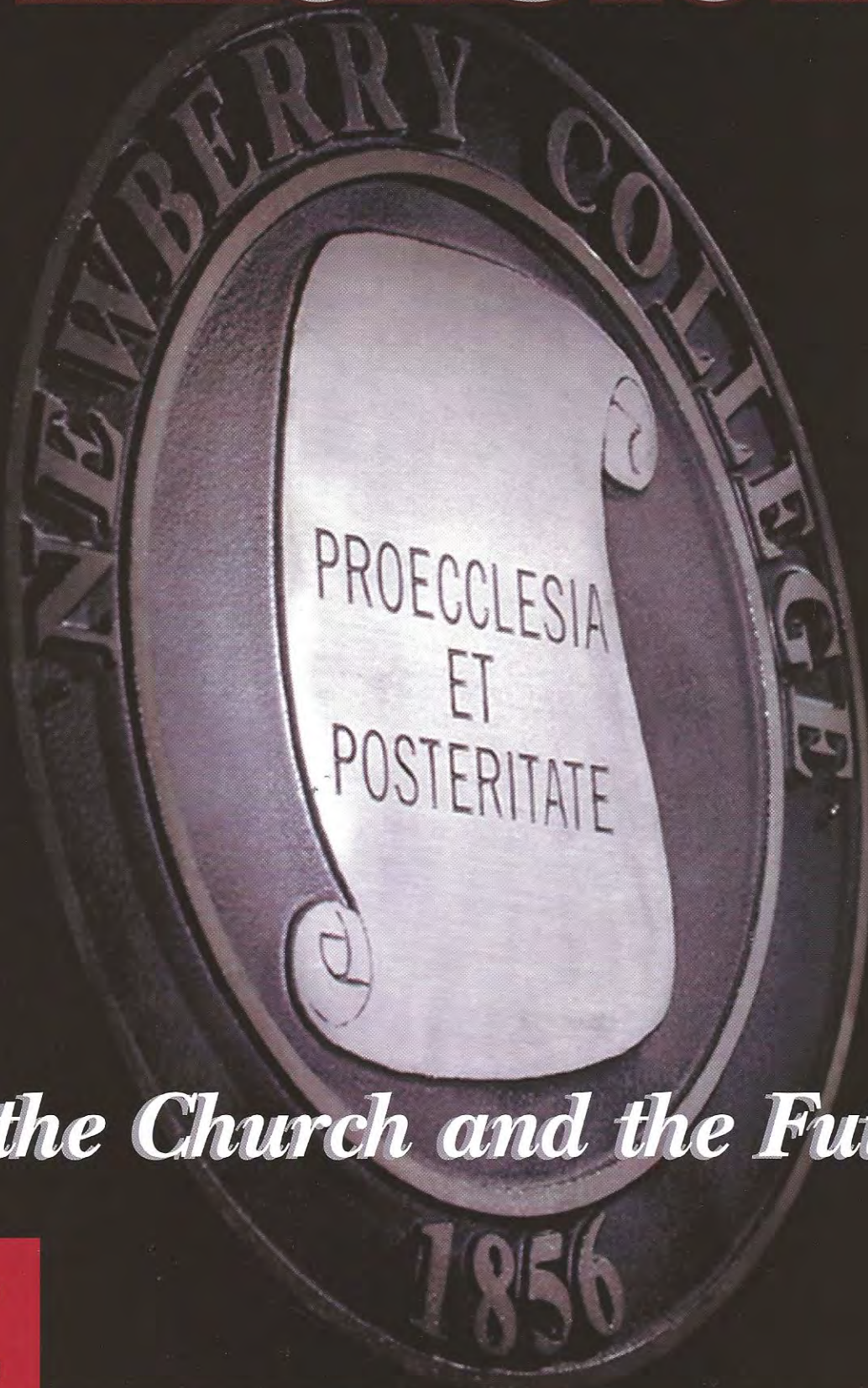
Darr will again be honored at a reunion of all his piano students and music majors in May of 2014 in conjunction with the celebration of his 85th birthday year!

Goodbye, Darr

The following is a reprint from the Newberry College Dimensions Fall 1998

Article by Betty Gardiner

Dimensions



For the Church and the Future

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Goodbye, Darr



Professor Darr Wise retired this spring as the senior member of the faculty after 42 years of service to Newberry College. He was conferred the title Professor Emeritus of Music at Spring Commencement Exercises.

by Betty Gardiner

Wise in his studio.

The Darr-ology

(to the tune Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow)

Praise Darr, from whom all theory flows,

*ii⁶ I⁴ V⁷ I**

You think this is all, but he

gives you more,

Oh, God, Thy help we do implore.

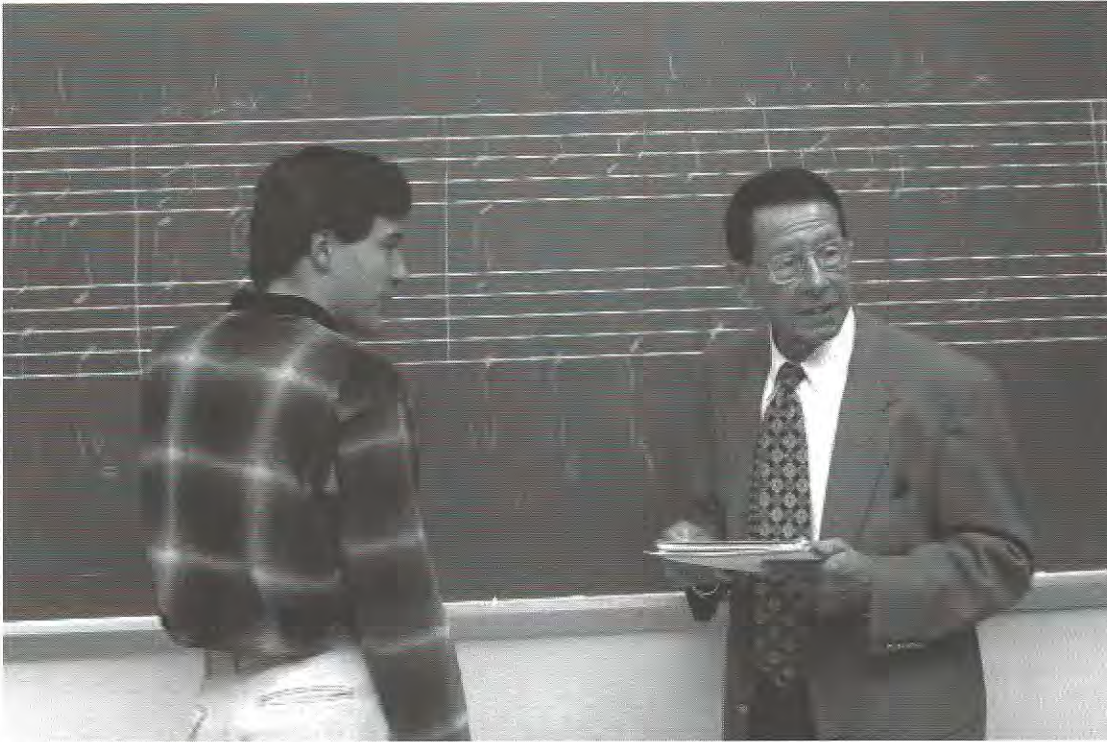
Author unknown

Composed and sung by music students in the early 1970s

**"two-six one-six-four five-seven one"*

For the past four decades, music majors at Newberry College have been reciting similar prayers every morning around 7:59 a.m. in preparation for their theory and ear training classes with Professor Darr Wise, who retired this spring as the senior member of the college faculty. "Darr has no patience for 'do-lessness,'" said colleague and longtime friend Julie McLeod. "He is very demanding of his students, but he is also the first person to reach out to a student who is struggling."

A native of Newberry County, Wise excelled early as a piano student, studying under the late Dr. Milton Moore, then a member of the music faculty, while playing basketball for Bush River High School. He left Newberry to study at Brevard Junior College before going on to the prestigious Cincinnati Conservatory of Music for his bachelor's degree and Florida State University for his Master of Music degree, concentrating in piano performance and music theory. Between degrees, he served in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Germany for a year-and-a-half.



Wise helps Paul Turner '98 with a four-part harmony lesson.

Wise's first teaching position was at Andrew College, a small women's Methodist college in Cuthbert, Georgia, where he headed the music department from 1954 to 1956. He and Dr. Moore, now department chair, kept in touch over the years, and when a position opened up at Newberry he called Wise. "He (Moore) is responsible for my being here," said Wise. "I had immense respect for his musical skills, and I felt very comfortable around him." Wise was the accompanist for the Newberry College Singers for 29 years under Dr. Moore. "It really was a unique and marvelous experience," Wise said. "We had 65 members in the touring and performing ensemble and a training choir of 35 waiting to get in. At that time, the college only had 500 students!" Owen Wingate '76, now head of the music department at Lake City Community College, recently wrote to the Alumni Office about his days in the Singers: "Each time I step in front of my choral groups, I hearken back to the Singers and my four years under the direction of Dr. Milton Moore and Darr Wise. Those experiences still ring in my ears and resonate in my heart. I am still inspired and motivated by those two Newberry men." Wise also taught piano for five years to Moore's son, who went on to study at the Juilliard School.

All music majors have Professor Wise for four semesters of music theory and ear training, four days a week at 8:00 a.m. "I've always looked forward to teaching that class," said Wise, "and I guess that's why it's always been easy to get up for

that class. I've often thought what it must be like for someone to go to work at eight o'clock in the morning and hate what they do." He considers himself somewhat demanding of his students, but he believes they appreciate it in the end. "It is just so wonderful to see a student get excited about something in theory class, when they say 'Oh, I see! I understand that now.'" Wise prides himself on the fact that all of his majors were exempted from basic theory in graduate school.

Said McLeod, "Academically and musically he is so secure that he's not afraid to learn from a student. One student a while back figured out a way to identify modal scales more easily, and ever since Darr has used that method in his class, always

crediting the student. That is what makes him the best kind of teacher."

One of the composers Wise features most prominently in his 20th century theory classes is French composer and organist Olivier Messiaen. "I admire his work so much," said Wise. "I will always be indebted to Dean (Conrad) Park for allowing me to miss two days of classes to see Messiaen perform. He was premiering a new organ work at Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Washington, D.C., on his first trip ever to the United States. I went to the concert with two former students, and I remember when Messiaen walked by I made them change seats with me so I could touch the hem of his garment as he went past. Not every dean would have appreciated how much that meant to me."

"The thing I would really like most, if I had one wish, would be to see all of my majors again."

Though Wise is best-known on campus as the college organist, he is first and foremost a piano teacher. When asked if he preferred teaching piano or theory, Wise said, "That's a very difficult question. I love both so much. But I can't tell you what it's like to see a student develop his technique and grow musically. It's the best reward a teacher could have. The satisfaction from that makes it all

worthwhile.” His piano students have gone on to study at the country’s most prestigious music schools, including the Cincinnati Conservatory, Eastman, and Juilliard. **Judy Jackson Patrick ‘61**, a former piano student of Wise, wrote this about her teacher: “Not only did Professor Wise teach me, he gave me encouragement and the will to do my best. His patience and love for young people have been an inspiration to me, and this is what I try to instill in my students.”

Wise is well-known around the state’s Lutheran congregations, having taught many of their organists and performed several organ dedication ceremonies. He has served as organist and choirmaster for the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Newberry since he joined the college faculty in 1956, a job he plans to continue for the foreseeable future. He still practices a minimum of two hours every day. “If I don’t do it, I get tremendous guilt pangs. It’s almost like an addiction.”

His passion for practicing is but one of many interests Wise will busy himself with after retirement. Teaching for 42 years has its advantages, namely former students with spare bedrooms and fold-out couches in places like New York City, Washington, D.C. and Heidelberg, Germany. Braves baseball, reading and musical theater are just a few of his favorite pastimes.

Another is having lunch with fellow faculty member Julie McLeod, a practice they have continued since 1961. McLeod was a sophomore piano student at Newberry when Wise joined the faculty, and their relationship has evolved from student-teacher to best friends. “I remember when he first came to Newberry,” said McLeod. “My roommate, Nelle Epting, and I decided one day to go to the music building and check out ‘the new guy.’ Darr was inside practicing and Nelle and I just plopped down on his piano bench and started talking to him. We probably scared the starch out of him!”

When asked to look back on his accomplishments, Wise would say only this. “The thing that I really feel best about is my students. Teaching has been the great love of my life. The thing I would really like most, if I had one wish, would be to see all of my majors again.” **NC**

Best friends: McLeod and Wise at May Commencement.



Wise in 1956

The W. Darr Wise Rehearsal Hall

Ever since the Alumni Music Center opened 26 years ago, much of the second floor has remained unfinished. That will change very soon, thanks to a campaign led by the music department and alumnus **James Ingram ‘69** to raise \$60,000 for its completion. The William Darr Wise Rehearsal Hall will feature an acoustically-designed rehearsal space, offices and storage facilities. The campaign was kept secret from Wise until he was conferred Professor Emeritus of Music at Commencement May 10. Ingram described his former teacher to the audience at graduation in this manner:

“He taught us how to communicate through music. He taught us to be good purveyors of musical health to those who listened. He taught us that being nervous was OK. He taught us how to continue when things went wrong, and how to prepare for life’s surprises.”

Thus far, the campaign has raised approximately half of the needed funds. To contribute to the W. Darr Wise Rehearsal Hall, send a check payable to Newberry College to the Institutional Advancement Office, 2100 College Street, Newberry, SC 29108. Please indicate on the check that the money is to go towards the Rehearsal Hall Campaign.

Sustaining the Legacy: Stories of Mentoring

FROM J. MICHAEL GRANT

Mentoring young musicians today is something that is needed more than ever. As I grow as a musician and a person who is dedicated to passing on the tradition of good church music, it is time for me to recognize a dedicated musician who has given me a great gift.

My mentor is my former piano teacher at Newberry College, W. Darr Wise. Darr is a wonderful man who took a special interest in me. I went to Newberry College because I wanted to major in organ and church music at a school that had a liturgical tradition. Newberry College is a small Lutheran college in Newberry, SC, not far from my hometown, with a good reputation for church music. I had a scholarship to play the organ in the chapel on campus every Sunday and accompany the chapel choir. So for four years I was the assistant chapel organist on campus.

It was with Darr Wise that I studied piano, music theory, and counterpoint. I suppose he saw a spark in me that I didn't know that I had myself. He spent endless hours in piano lessons making sure that I had a good piano technique, because he knew as an organist himself, that the foundation for a good organist was a good piano technique. He also made sure that I had a thorough knowledge of music theory and counterpoint, because he knew that I would use these tools as a church musician for the rest of my life. There is not a Sunday when I play the organ that I don't use something that Darr Wise taught me. He and his teaching are the very core of who I am and what I do as a church musician.

During my four years at Newberry, I was Darr's assistant on choir tours and at rehearsals and performances with him accompanying the Newberry College Singers. I learned from looking at his scores how to prepare my own accompaniment scores. He carefully wrote fingering in the difficult passages as well as pedal marks when he was accompanying on the organ. His attention to detail is something that has always stuck with me, and I continue to do the same things that I saw Darr do years ago.

He is a man of great wisdom, and also a man of great humor. I can remember one time on choir tour when we were performing in a very small church with a very bad electronic organ. Darr was accompanying the Newberry College Singers on this instrument since there was no piano. I knew that he was unhappy with the instrument, and I asked him what he would do. He replied, "I'll just pretend that it is an Aeolian Skinner."

It has been over forty years since I graduated from Newberry College and I still go back to Newberry to visit with Darr to let him know what I have been doing and to catch up with him. He is always interested in what new pieces that I am learning and what my choir is singing. He is now retired from teaching and playing the organ every Sunday, but he still keeps up with his former students. In a lot of ways, Darr has lived through his students by keeping in touch with them through

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the years, and his former students continue doing the work of musicians with a small bit of our beloved teacher in each one of us. He continues to be one of my dearest and closest friends for support and advice.

I still play the organ every Sunday at Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. I still practice piano literature and piano accompaniments, and this year I will be teaching AP Music Theory at the Charlotte Latin School. Now it is time for me to start passing on the tradition that was so generously given to me.

FROM RICHARD B. NELSON

My family had just moved to Newberry, SC, in 1957. I was an impressionable five year-old, and we began to attend the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. The church's architecture placed the organist in full view, and there, for the entire congregation to see, was Darr Wise. Watching him play the organ quickly became the most exciting part of my week, and the sound of the organ fascinated me every time that I heard it (I later found out that it was Möller's Opus 460—a tracker organ from ca. 1900).

This was the beginning of the spark which has flared into who I am and what I do today, and Darr has been a vital part of every step. Along the way, I studied piano, organ, and music theory with him. I sang in his choir. And I sought his advice on almost everything.

Darr is the type of teacher who serves as the ultimate model. His playing is meticulous, expressive, and inspiring. In

all of these years, I can count on the fingers of my hands the number of missed notes I have heard. He has always practiced faithfully. He believes that it is necessary to know something about the composer and the time when he or she lived. And he insists that the performer understand what is going on in the music—the elements of the piece, its structure, etc. I can vividly recall his explanation of sonata form and the fugal process before assigning such pieces. As I began music theory instruction with him at Newberry College, I realized that I already knew most of the class material from our lessons.

When Horowitz made his momentous return to Carnegie Hall in 1965, the recital was broadcast live, and Darr explained to my parents that I needed to stay up past my bedtime to watch it. As I began to ask for recordings and scores, Darr helped my parents obtain the Toscanini LPs of the Beethoven Symphonies, along with the Kalmus scores (I still use those heavily annotated scores today when I teach my Beethoven Symphonies seminar at the Cleveland Institute). Darr was looking out for me to develop as a complete musician, not only as a pianist.

Growing up at Redeemer in the 60s, I received a valuable musical education. We sang Mendelssohn, Bach, Mozart, Willan, and others. Darr's organ repertoire included such composers as Bach, Handel, Franck, Dupré, Preston, Alain, and Messiaen (remember, this was in a small, rural Southern town in the 60s). And I was a sponge, soaking it all in. When the church erected a new building with superb acoustics, he explained the value of such a thing. Then along came a new Schantz three-manual organ. I was allowed to turn pages for Darr's dedicatory recital, and the proximity to all of the action was almost too much for this seventh-grader to bear. Finally,

some years later, I was deemed ready for organ lessons, and that was one of the happiest days of my life.

Soon thereafter, I was appointed organist at the local First Baptist Church (I shudder to imagine what that must have sounded like). At a lesson, I announced that I was going to be playing Marcello's *Psalm XIX* at a service there. I had heard Darr play it and figured that I would surprise him with my rendition, entirely self-taught. "Sport, maybe I should hear this before the Baptists do," he suggested. After listening patiently, he gently began to tear apart a lot of my concept. I still remember his insisting that I play what was on the page, and that it was not ok to fake certain passages if they were a little difficult.

My professional career has followed Darr's to a large extent. My day job is teaching music theory at the Cleveland Institute, and I have always had a part-time church position since age sixteen. As the years have gone by, no trip home has been complete without time with Darr. In fact, he has become part of our family, always coming over for birthdays, New Year's Eve, and many other occasions. On every encounter with him, I remember to tell him how much his tutelage has meant to me, that I use his advice every day, whether at school or at church, and that I will always pass forward his model of selfless teaching and concern for students.

I am not alone. Darr has always had many successful students who keep in touch with him, and he revels in shop talk with them now that he is retired. What a profound influence this man has had with his hundreds of students, and through them with their students. I could not have asked for a more profound mentor!

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