

A Tribute to Dorothy Straub Genualdi

Dorothy Straub Genualdi: CT music-world legend, remembered

(CT Post)

Violist Dorothy A. Straub Genualdi's legacy is that of an extraordinary musician who devoted her career to enriching the lives of thousands upon thousands as an educator and performer.

One of Connecticut's most beloved musicians, Straub (her professional name) died Thursday at her home at St. Mary's-By-the-Sea, in Bridgeport's Black Rock section. She was 74.

A tireless proponent of musical education for the young, she had served as a music educator in the Westport and Fairfield school systems for more than 20 years, a conductor and administrator for the Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestras, and as a past president of the National Association for Music Education. She also arranged, composed and edited instructional pieces for young musicians.

Born in Detroit, Straub received bachelor's and master's degrees in viola/strings from Indiana University in Bloomington, and a sixth year certificate in administration from Fairfield University.

Violist Christopher James Hisey, conductor of the Fairfield-based American Chamber Orchestra and music director of the GBYO, said Monday that he "had the incredible fortune of experiencing Dorothy in many different roles"—including his fourth-grade orchestra teacher. Their musical paths would cross many times over the years, with Hisey eventually becoming the chief of the GBYO in 2008, and Straub serving as his assistant music director from 2008-12.

"Dorothy was one of those people who operated on a different energy level than most. She was exceptionally kind, caring and compassionate (while demanding) excellence from all those around her." She "made you want to succeed, and the thought of letting her down was unbearable," Hisey said.

Straub was the widow of Robert S. Genualdi, a noted bassist, teacher and former music director of the GBYO. Genualdi died on March 14. Together, they were among the state's most dynamic musical couples and co-directors of the Barnum Festival's Jenny Lind Competition/Concert for young American sopranos.

Kathleen Maher, executive director/curator of the Barnum Museum, worked with the couple on several Jenny Lind events. "Dorothy's love for music shined in her eyes," Maher recalled. "It truly was her lifelong passion to bring beautiful music to people and she dedicated her heart and soul to this divine calling. Together with her husband, Bob, they touched countless lives, spreading joy through their work with the symphony or opera, and enlightening so many hearts to the magic of classical music." Both served with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony under the baton of Maestro Gustav Meier (who recently retired). Straub performed with the Greenwich and Bridgeport symphonies from 1970 to 2009.

"Dorothy was one of the most dedicated members of the GBS. I don't think she ever missed a rehearsal or a concert," Meier said in an email from his Ann Arbor, Mich., home. "From the spot where she was seated" in the orchestra, Meier could see her from the podium, always sending him "support and love. I loved her commitment to music and to the youngsters who needed a role model, which she was more than willing to be. I will miss her very much."

Barbara Upton, former executive director of the GBYO, said Monday that Straub "was indomitable in her commitment to the value of the arts, and particularly music, in the schools. She and Bob both worked extremely hard to support the school music programs and insisted the GBYO be an extension of the school programs, not a substitute for them. Together, Dorothy and Bob influenced generations of young musicians and many of their parents. Bob and Dorothy are gone, but their legacy will last a long, long time," Upton said.

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Statement from the Fairfield Board of Education:

Fairfield Public Schools are extremely sad to have lost Dorothy Straub on Wednesday, September 16. Ms. Straub gave so much to so many music students and staff, and truly shaped what Fairfield's music program is. After holding leadership positions in the Westport schools, Ms. Straub became an instructor and music coordinator in Fairfield in 1981. Until her retirement in 2001, she provided persistent and tireless leadership in overseeing the development and implementation of a music curriculum second to none in Connecticut. At the state level, Ms. Straub was president of Connecticut Music Educator's Association from 1979 to 1981. At the Regional Level, she was Eastern Division President from 1987 to 1989, and at the National level, she served as President of the Music Educator's National Conference from 1992-1994. Ms. Straub was deeply involved in the development of National Music Standards for public schools in America, which influences quality music education in Fairfield and across America. In addition to her work at the state and national level, Ms. Straub contributed so much to the local community. She was the Founder of the Fairfield County String Teachers and served as a conductor of the Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestra from 1982 to 2011. Ms. Straub also served on the Board of Fairfield County Children's Choir for many years. If there is one overarching accomplishment to Ms. Straub's lifelong musical pursuits, it may very well be her relentless efforts to develop an understanding of music, and to nurture a true love for music in ALL children pre-K through 12th grade. Through her efforts, Ms. Straub has helped to create a generation of adults whose respect for music and support of the arts will benefit children and young adults long into the future. In short, Dorothy Straub was an exceptional woman whose dedication, passion and commitment to instilling a love and appreciation of music in all students will never be forgotten. ~Mike Varga, Sara Hoefer

Dorothy A. Straub Genualdi, 74, a musician and educator, passed away in the early morning of Thursday, Sept. 17, 2015, at her home in Bridgeport. A violist with the Greenwich and Bridgeport symphonies, she taught strings and orchestra and was music coordinator in Fairfield County. She served as assistant music director of the Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestras from 1983 to 2010. Dorothy was president of the National Association for Music Education from 1992 to 1994 and won several awards over the years recognizing her contributions to the field. She composed, edited and arranged instructional material for student musicians. Her last work was "American Triple Crown," which is being published this year. She was the wife of Robert S. Genualdi, also a musician and educator, who died March 14, 2015. Born July 22, 1941, in Detroit to John C. Straub and the former Anne B. Pasterchalk, Dorothy grew up in South Bend, Ind. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Indiana University and received a professional diploma in administration from Fairfield University. She taught music in Chatham, N.Y., before moving to Westport in 1967. She married Bob in 2001, and they made their home in Bridgeport. The two collaborated on many projects, including the Barnum Festival's Jenny Lind Competition. Dorothy is survived by a sister, Mary Ellen (David) Cohn of Pasadena, Md., and a brother, Richard H. (Mary) Straub of Las Vegas, Nev.; sister-in-law Margaret McShane of Tampa, Fla.; nieces and nephews Christopher Straub and Melissa (Robert) Henderson of Tampa, Peter (Amy) Cohn of Granite, Md., Katherine Cohn, Dorothy's caregiver, of Bridgeport, Stephen Cohn of Boonton Township, N.J., and Jason (Dionna Courtney) Straub of Henderson, Nev.; grandnieces and grandnephews Mckinzie Henderson, Trimble Henderson and Graham Henderson of Tampa and Benjamin Courtney Straub of Henderson, Nev.; stepsons Joseph Genualdi of Kansas City, Mo., and Robert (Rena) Genualdi of Danbury; and stepgrandchildren Biagio Genualdi, Francesca Genualdi (Arturo Medina) and Sam Genualdi of Chicago, Joanna (Stephen) Yannantuono of Sandy Hook, and Robert Scott Genualdi of Danbury. A brother, Edward Straub of Tampa, died in 2000, and a niece, Nichol Straub of Tampa, died in 1977. Memorial donations may be made to the Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestras, Music for Youth, Fairfield County Children's Choir or Connecticut Dance School. Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestras (GBYO.org) P.O. Box 645 Fairfield, CT 06824 Music for Youth, Inc. (musicforyouth.net) P.O. Box 403 Westport, CT 06880 Fairfield County Children's Chorus (SingFCCC.org) P.O. Box 110588 Trumbull, CT 06611 Connecticut Dance School 42 Halley Ct. Fairfield, CT 06825

Eric Edberg, a former student of Dorothy and currently a cello professor at Depauw University in Indiana, penned a wonderful tribute to her on his website. Below is a brief excerpt mentioning the FCCC and a link to the full article.

There were hundreds of people at her funeral. Everyone I spoke with had similar stories of this unique friend who offered transforming love while being a wise and challenging mentor.

The Fairfield County Children's Choir (she was on their board) sang at the service with exquisite beauty. Moved and transported, I understood more powerfully than ever before how completely dedicated Dorothy was to the cause of children making music together at the highest level possible.

<https://ericedberg.wordpress.com/2015/09/27/wow-thanks-dorothy/>

Letters

These letters were received after the Chamber Singers performed at the funeral of Dorothy Straub.

Hi Jon,

I wanted to tell you how much your FCCC singers touched me during Dorothy Straub's service on Wednesday. All of their pieces were absolutely superb and heartfelt, but after the "Ave Maria" I leaned down to Mary Ellen Cohn before I sang "Panis Angelicus" and said "And I have to follow that?"

Now, we had spoken about the choir humming the canon of "Panis" and I figured no problem, shouldn't be an issue. Well, as soon as they started singing the sound was so amazingly angelic and beautiful it was hard for me to continue singing. It was so beautiful. It was all I could do to get a deep enough breath to continue singing. Now as you know, I have been singing professionally for over 35 years. That was the first time I was so touched in performance. I think they all know how much the congregation appreciated their singing and when I was leaving the church I ran into the priest and he thought that was probably the most beautiful funeral service he had ever been involved with and your FCCC singers were a great part of it.

Thanks for your hard work and dedication to music. Most of your students probably never knew Dorothy or Bob but I think that they really would have been so touched as was the entire congregation. From on high Bob and Dorothy were grinning from ear to ear.

Most Sincerely, Tom Woodman

Jon,

Your music was so worshipful and moving today at Dorothy's service. Uplifting, and glorifying to God beyond what words can express. Thank you for a little taste of Heaven!!!
Jeff Albright

Jon,

Just a note of thanks for a most remarkable musical tribute for Dorothy yesterday. I have never been so touched by a choir before. You and those amazing voices did indeed "sing her to heaven".
Kathy Reddy