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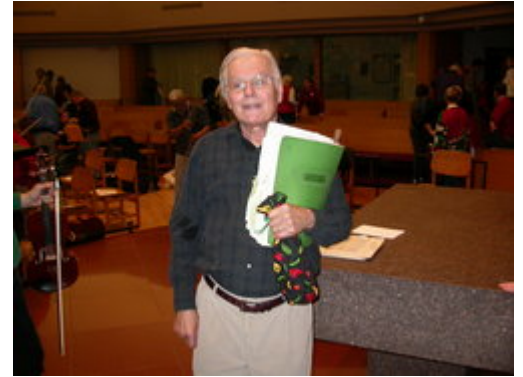
Posted on Wed, Dec 2, 2009 : 5:56 p.m.

Ann Arbor's Robert Pratt left a rich musical legacy

By Roger LeLievre

Longtime Ann Arbor music educator **Robert Pratt**, 83, died Tuesday in Jackson. He had been battling cancer for the past six months.

For 25 years, Pratt was chairman of the music department, director of choral activities and founder of the music history portion of the humanities program at Pioneer High School ([http://www.annarbor.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-search.cgi?blog_id=1&tag=Pioneer High School&limit=20](http://www.annarbor.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-search.cgi?blog_id=1&tag=Pioneer+High+School&limit=20)). His name is listed on the Ann Arbor Public Schools' Roll of Honor.



Robert Pratt

He was also involved in a host of local musical endeavors, and conducted the annual Community "Messiah" Sing (<http://www.annarbor.com/events/45th-annual-handels-messiah-sing-along/>) from 1988-2007.

"We all just loved him," said Melody "Meg" Gower, organizer of the event. "He was a fabulous conductor, sharing his joy and enthusiasm with the music."

Long active in church music, Pratt was director of music at Ann Arbor's Zion Lutheran Church and conductor of the Chancel Choir at the First United Methodist Church. He was the founding conductor of the Plymouth Oratorio Society and also conducted the Ann Arbor Cantata Singers (<http://www.a2cantatasingers.org/>).

His involvement with the Youth for Understanding Chorale (<http://choralealumni.com/>) from 1964-73 led to 10 tours of Europe and South America, appearing in major concert halls and on radio and TV. After the chorales ended, Pratt and his wife, Mary, spent a sabbatical year in Brazil studying Brazilian culture and music and conducting and teaching. He conducted a reunion concert of the Youth for Understanding Chorale in June 2008.

He received his degrees from Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the University of Michigan (http://www.annarbor.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-search.cgi?blog_id=1&tag=University%20of%20Michigan&limit=20) School of Music.

"He was the choral conductor when I was at Pioneer," recalled Mary Steffek Blaske, who is now executive director of the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra (http://www.annarbor.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-search.cgi?blog_id=1&tag=Ann%20Arbor%20Symphony%20Orchestra&limit=20). "He trained (Huron High choral director) Richard Ingram, he trained (Pioneer High choral director) Ken Westerman – he was just the best teacher. His legacy is living on with these people teaching at our schools today."

Westerman said Pratt “is fondly remembered by 18 years of singers at Ann Arbor High School and Pioneer High School. ...I have credited him with much of our methodology and drive and success. Certainly a lot of our emotional connection to what we do came from his passion.”

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Being in the choir with Bob always set a high standard and he chose a challenging repertoire, Ingram observed. “It really gave me a good model and certainly provided me with an idea of what a program could be like with a knowledgeable person at the helm.”

A member, song leader and past president of the Ann Arbor Rotary Club (<http://www.annarborrotary.org/>), Pratt was designated an Honorary Paul Harris Fellow, Rotary's highest award, and was recently honored with emeritus status.

Ingrid Sheldon, Rotary past president, former Ann Arbor mayor and former student of Pratt's, said she is saddened by Pratt's passing.

His legacy will be as a music educator “who recognized the value of music and fine arts and the education of the whole child, as well as being a real leader in musical education, especially for high school youth,” Sheldon added.

A private service for family has already been held. A memorial service is planned for early January at First United Methodist Church in Ann Arbor, where he had been a conductor for a number of years. Those arrangements, including the date, are incomplete.

He is survived by his wife Mary, three children, 10 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.

Roger LeLievre is a free-lance writer who covers music for AnnArbor.com.

Comments

Lucy O'Neal

Tue, Dec 8, 2009 : 12:25 a.m.

I had the good fortune to sing under Mr. Pratt's direction at Ann Arbor High from 1958 to 1961: The King and I, The Faure Requiem, Brahms Lieder. Thank you Mr. Pratt for the great gift of your life. It is like yesterday - you standing, ready for us to begin, with your hand at your side, jet black hair, black rimmed glasses, upright, filled with the music of our souls. I continue to sing, thinking of You. Thank you.

Toms A. Munk

Sat, Dec 5, 2009 : 11:17 p.m.

With tears in my eyes, I present myself as an Argentine native, who studied in Ann Arbor High School thanks to Youth for Understanding, and had the privilege to live for practically five months with the Pratt Family as an exchange student. I still consider Carolyn, Don and Bob my American

sister and brothers, and Mary and Bob my American mother and father. I have been in touch with them for 45 years, that's how for example my older daughter lived and studied with Don & family in 1991. Of all the experiences that now flash in front of my eyes, I choose the enormous privilege that Bob celebrated his 70th birthday in Buenos Aires, staying a couple of days in my house. Hopefully I will travel next year to the U.S.A., and this time Mary & Bob wont fly down to Florida to get together with my family, this time itll be my turn to go once again to Michigan, and pay my last respects to my beloved Dad and embrace his (my) beloved Pratt family. Thomas Munk Buenos Aires, Argentina

Sylvia Shippey

Fri, Dec 4, 2009 : 8:47 a.m.

I am sorry to hear of Bob Pratt's passing. I was in the Chorus and A Capella choirs at Ann Arbor High 1962 to 1965. He was one of the teacher's that made a lasting impact on my life. He demanded excellence and in so doing knew that it would bring out the best in us not only musically but also personally. His contribution through his musical gifts was felt not only locally but globally as well. My sincerest condolences to the Pratt family.

Will Hathaway

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 11:03 p.m.

I was lucky to have Mr. Pratt as a teacher beginning in 8th grade when I was in "The King and I." I learned from him throughout my high school years at Pioneer, singing in choir and performing in several more musicals. He was a great teacher who respected his students and earned their respect in return.

redhead74

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 5:15 p.m.

In my senior year at Pioneer in 1969-70 I took Humanities and met Mr Pratt. I remember how every day he came to class dressed to perfection. He was very serious and expected each student to take his passion seriously. I took Humanities because I wanted to connect art and literature to history. I knew nothing about the history of music. Mr Pratt added that forth component and changed the way I listened to music forever. The Humanities program that he helped build is one of the best classes any high school student can take. Mr Pratt was the kind of teacher I wish we had more of. I will remember him and send my regards to his family. I am sorry for your loss.

Snarf Oscar Boondoggle

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 4:26 p.m.

singing in bob pratt's choir was a joy. thank you, sir. rest in peace. now it's our turn. are we up to it?

Stan Bidlack

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 1:35 p.m.

Mr. Pratt was one of the finest teachers we ever had. He was the star of Ann Arbor High's staff and the epitome of a perfect educator, whether teaching Choir or Humanities: a scholar in his discipline, a believer in the aspirations of kids, a kind and wise mentor. We will never forget the wonderful Mr. Pratt. Stan & Nan (Joiner) Bidlack Ann Arbor High, Class of '63

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Mary Elizabeth Low

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 1:23 p.m.

My sympathies to Mary Pratt, Don Pratt and family. What an honor to have known and been conducted by Robert Pratt. His unique love of music and people (Onward Ye People) in every way, and for the better, changed the lives of all those who were privileged enough to meet him, know him, or be conducted by him, all the world round. I met him in 1964 at just 17, when he suddenly and gingerly took over as the conductor/director of the Ann Arbor based Michigan Youth Chorale; and bravely and lovingly agreed to take 66 Michigan teenagers for a 2 month tour of Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. In 1964, South America was an unknown place to most "North Americans"--referenced as a jungle with the Amazon River running through it. But as Teenage Ambassadors (Lord Make Me An Instrument Of Thy Peace) we learned and sang our way through the hearts of the wonderful people of America Latina. A first for us all, but the beginning of a wonderful 45 years of knowing, growing and singing under Bob Pratt. The Michigan Youth Chorale, the Alumni Chorale and all the Reunions at Hill (I'm Going To Sing When the Spirit Says Sing). Not only will he be missed, he can never be replaced.

James Stewart

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 10:42 a.m.

I've truly lost one of my heroes as I'm sure all YFU ALUMS will agree. The Angelic Choir will certainly be in finer voice now. God Bless you Bob Pratt, it was an honor to have known you and my prayers go out to your family. You will be terribly missed.

Jeanne Ruskin

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 10:12 a.m.

Robert Pratt touched more lives around the globe than anyone will ever count. I was a member of the first Michigan Youth Chorale which he conducted (in 1964), touring South America. He certainly helped change mine. With fond remembrance, Jeanne Knowlton

Donald J. Pratt

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 9:50 a.m.

Note: A memorial service for Bob will be held on Sat. January 9, 2010 at 2:00p at the First United Methodist Church in AA. Donations can be made to the FUMC music fund. Don Pratt

Donald J. Pratt

Thu, Dec 3, 2009 : 9:36 a.m.

Thank you the article on Robert Pratt. He also founded the Plymouth Oratorio Society. A Plymouth-Canton and beyond classical choir. In January, it will begin its 24th season. Its current conductor is Rick Ingram, his former student. Mr. Pratt's first church choir position was at Bethlehem Church in Ann Arbor. He ushered for 47 years at U of M stadium. The last 23 with his sons Bob & Don. You are viewing this article in the AnnArbor.com archives. For the latest breaking news and updates in Ann Arbor and the surrounding area, see MLive.com/ann-arbor (<http://www.mlive.com/ann-arbor/>)

gogmagog8

Wed, Dec 2, 2009 : 11:22 p.m.

He also was the Head Usher for University Musical Society events for many years.

Bobby Pratt

Wed, Dec 2, 2009 : 10 p.m.

Mr. LeLievre, Thank you for such a great article about my grandpa. As I read the article I was reminded of the legacy that grandpa left behind and the many lives that he touched. Bobby Pratt

Roger LeLievre

Wed, Dec 2, 2009 : 9:23 p.m.

Thank you Jan. The story has been updated to reflect the correct number of great-grandchildren.

Jan Pratt

Wed, Dec 2, 2009 : 9:03 p.m.

Mr. Pratt had battled cancer for the last six months. Actually, Mr. Pratt is survived by eight great-grandchildren. Posted by Jan Pratt, his daughter-in-law

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