



For Immediate Release
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WASHINGTON BACH CONSORT AND CATHEDRAL CHORAL SOCIETY ANNOUNCE THE PASSING OF MUSIC DIRECTOR, J. REILLY LEWIS

J. Reilly Lewis, the founding Music Director of Washington Bach Consort and the Music Director of the Cathedral Choral Society, died unexpectedly on Thursday, June 9, in Arlington, VA at his home. He was 71. Reilly was beloved in the Washington, DC music community. He was a vibrant, talented musician, passionate about his work, known for his generosity of spirit and joyful soul by his many friends, family, and everyone with whom he came into contact. He deeply loved music and people, and was thrilled to be able to dedicate his life to both.

One of the world's leading Bach specialists, Lewis founded the internationally acclaimed Washington Bach Consort in 1977. Under his direction as Artistic Director, the ensemble became one of the nation's most critically acclaimed and widely recognized period ensembles, appearing at numerous festivals both in the United States and throughout Europe.

"No matter how successful we became, no matter how many awards we received, or where we toured, what mattered most to Reilly was the music," said Bach Consort Executive Director, Marc Eisenberg. "As our organization grew, Reilly developed deep connections with people. It was the music that started these relationships, but it was Reilly who sustained these incredible friendships. For Reilly, his work with the Bach Consort wasn't a job, it was his passion and pleasure."

In 1985, Lewis was appointed Music Director of the Cathedral Choral Society, the 140-voice symphonic chorus-in-residence at Washington National Cathedral. Under his leadership the chorus delivered notable performances at the Cathedral, the Kennedy Center, Strathmore, and Wolf Trap, as well as nine recordings. Lewis was committed to developing the careers of young soloists and composers. He commissioned over twenty-one new works for chorus from composers including John Tavener, Libby Larsen, John Rutter, and Dominick Argento, among others.

"Reilly has been the heart and soul of the Cathedral Choral Society, inspiring us all with his musical artistry and passion," said Board President Ernie Abbott. "His warmth and whimsical personality created a community of choristers, stimulating me and so many others to 'go deeper' musically than I ever would have imagined."

As a keyboard artist, Lewis has been the featured organ soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra, has presented numerous solo organ recitals, and has performed the complete Bach Goldberg Variations in recital on multiple occasions both in the United States and abroad. He performed at the Aspen Music Festival, the

International Handel and Bach festivals held in Halle and Leipzig, respectively, the Cologne New Music Festival, and in Washington, DC, with the Smithsonian Chamber Players and the Folger Consort.

In 1971, Reilly was appointed Organist and Choirmaster at Clarendon United Methodist Church. He served the congregation there faithfully for 45 years and he delighted in conducting Messiah sing-alongs that were a gift to the community of professional and amateur musicians alike.

“We grieve with Reilly’s family and all of Washington. We have lost a true maestro and friend. Countless musicians have known the gift of Reilly’s guiding hand and unfailing support. Untold thousands have been blessed by his artistry and generous spirit. We pray God’s mercy on all who are still attempting to absorb this devastating news, even as we prepare to honor his life with gratitude and awe,” said the Right Reverend Mariann Edgar Budde, Bishop of Washington and Interim Dean of the Cathedral.

Among Lewis’ many honors are Washingtonian Magazine’s Music Hall of Fame and Washingtonian of the Year, the University Club of Washington’s Distinguished Washingtonian Award for the Arts, Special Recognition Mayor’s Arts Award for contributions to the arts and cultural community of Washington, the Shenandoah Conservatory’s Medal of Excellence for Outstanding Leadership in the Performing Arts, Yale University’s Cultural Leadership Citation, the Choralis GRACIE Award for Outstanding Contributions to Choral Music, and the Choralis Ovation Award for Most Creative Programming. In 2014 he received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the Virginia Theological Seminary.

Lewis began his musical career at the age of eight as a member of the Junior Boys Choir at Washington National Cathedral. He received his bachelor’s degree from Oberlin Conservatory and master’s and doctoral degrees from The Juilliard School.

Lewis dedicated his life to music and to transforming the lives of others through music. In his own words: “I believe in the power of music to create community - to touch, and to heal, and to transform. I’ve seen people with the most diverse backgrounds come together in one place and be touched by the hand of God through the inspiration - the genius - of Bach or Brahms or Verdi or Mozart. That power to bring people together isn’t restricted to music, but music is my language.”

The Cathedral Choral Society and the Washington Bach Consort mourn this tremendous loss and our thoughts are with Reilly’s wife, Beth, and their families.

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