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A life of music

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The choir of angels is in for a sing-along of biblical proportions.

George Zimmerman, University of Dayton music instructor from 1976 to 1994, died Jan. 1, 2014. He was 91.

Zimmerman came to UD after retiring as supervisor of music for the Dayton Public Schools, where he taught for 25 years.

"I always encourage everyone to sing along," he said in a 1994 interview. "I have never told a child he can't sing. Never. Music is for doing, not listening. It gives you a chance to get your insides out."

At the University of Dayton, he served as a lecturer in American music and for 15 years organized the Old-Fashioned Christmas Carol Sing. Professor of music emerita Linda Snyder remembers Zimmerman — sporting a bow tie and handlebar moustache — sitting center stage at a grand piano and conducting carolers in a packed Boll Theatre.

"He was a music educator with a personality that made music really come alive for his students and for his audiences," she said.

Remembrances posted on the University of Dayton Band Alumni Facebook page included this exchange: "He'll have the angels singing better than ever" ... "and laughing through every rehearsal."

Born in Philadelphia Oct. 25, 1922, to what he described as a "nonmusical" family, Zimmerman told *Dayton Daily News* reporter Dale Huffman about the \$25 used piano his father purchased for a son who would feign keyboard playing on the end table. "In a world of problems, and distractions, I found that music was a wonderful alternative," Zimmerman said. "Music, as they say, can soothe, and music can change your mood."

Zimmerman earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Miami University after serving in World War II with the 242d Infantry, 42nd Infantry Rainbow Division, which helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp. It was in 1946, after opening a nightclub for GI's across from Vienna's Volksoper (People's Opera), that he fell in love with the city and its music. He brought that love to University of Dayton and, with professor Edward Hatch, later founded the long-running Encore Vienna travel and culture program.

Zimmerman committed much of his life to his passion for music, writing and producing. Among his many published articles are two edited collections of folk songs, *Start with a Song* and *Reflections*. He also wrote "Seasons in Song," a collection of original children's songs for the holidays. Zimmerman was the creator and host of two local weekly television series at WLW-D, *Passport to Music* and *By George*. Among his many honors was the Ohio Music Association's 1989 Distinguished Service Award. He donated his piano and a collection of dozens of musical instruments from around the world, more than 1,200 pieces of rare American sheet music, and scores of American musicals to the University of Dayton in 1994.

When Zimmerman moved to Florida in 1996, he created a lecture series for the Naples Philharmonic Center for the Arts. He presented 10 lectures each year for six years for the popular series "Our American Music Heritage."

Students remember Zimmerman for introducing them to American popular music — one student came expecting the Beatles and left enthralled by Debussy and Copland — and for his generous hospitality. He would invite ravenous students to his home for gourmet meals and sing-alongs around the piano. Many of his recipes ended up in his annual Christmas cards or in the many editions of his cookbook, *Everything Makes Me Think of Food*.

"A meal at his table was certain to provide delicious food, great laughter and stimulating conversation," said Mark Strickler '82, president of the UD band alumni. "While George never married or had any children, he had a music-based family that included thousands. His love of life was infectious. We all wanted to be a part of his family, and he willingly added us all."

Zimmerman returned to Dayton from Florida in 2006 and took up residence at Bethany Village. Snyder said she visited with him

in December, when Zimmerman again lent his rich tenor to Christmas carols. He died after a brief illness.

A campus memorial service is being planned, with details to be announced later this semester.

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