

1-1-2010

Richard Cass, distinguished artist and teacher

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Recommended Citation

University, Furman (2010) "Richard Cass, distinguished artist and teacher," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 52 : Iss. 4 , Article 32.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol52/iss4/32>

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RICHARD CASS, DISTINGUISHED ARTIST AND TEACHER

Richard Cass was a pianist of great distinction who thrilled audiences in concert halls throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. Known for his technical virtuosity and artistry, he was described by *The New York Times* as “a genuine musical personality” and by the London Daily Telegraph as “a complete artist . . . an important pianist from America.”

While he maintained a steady schedule of recitals and concerts from 1953, when he graduated *summa cum laude* from Furman, until his death November 29 at the age of 78, he was also a highly influential teacher. After working for a time at the University of North Texas, he accepted a position in 1975 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory, where he would remain for more than 25 years until his retirement. In 1999 UMKC named him a Distinguished Teaching Professor, and a scholarship at the school bears his name. In 1993 he was featured in the book *The Most Wanted Piano Teachers in the USA*.

Noted pianist Robert Blocker '68, Henry and Lucy Moses Dean of Music at Yale University, was one of Cass' students and became his close friend and colleague. Blocker spoke at Cass' funeral, and in his eulogy he offered an eloquent description of his friend's philosophy:

“Music was the garden of Richard's soul, and he tended it with great care,” said Blocker. “He embraced the premise that talent is a divine gift and, as such, it must be shared.

“Richard believed that artists must be involved in and affect the cultural fabric of their communities. That is precisely why his recitals were first for people —

whether in a Kansas City retirement home, a high school in Greenville, Carnegie Hall, or the great halls of Europe. For him, being a pianist carried a higher moral obligation than fame or money . . . Richard's artistry connected his heart to that of the listener.”

A Greenville native, Cass was a student of Wendell Keeney at Furman and was elected to Quaternion, the select honorary men's society. Upon graduation he



earned a Fulbright Scholarship and studied for two years at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris with such renowned artists as Nadia Boulanger, Alfred Cortot and Jules Gentil. After his well-received Paris debut, he won a top prize in the Viotti International Contest in Italy and went on to a series of concert triumphs in Europe and the United States.

Cass was known for his winning personality and widespread interests, among them science, philosophy, religion and politics. He loved gardening, cooking, the outdoors, and spending time with family and friends.

Throughout his life Cass remained close to his hometown and to Furman. The university presented him its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1981, and in recent years he worked with Furman students as a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Music.

“For Richard, teaching was a noble calling rather than a vocation,” said Blocker. “His sensitivity to individual personalities and needs made each student feel special — almost as if you were his only student. Simply put, his teaching inspired us and compelled us to be more than a pianist.”

Richard Cass is survived by his wife, Sanna Bryan '59 Cass, four children, and eight grandchildren.

Kenneth Edgeworth Hough '61, September 20, Brunswick, Maine. He was the headmaster of College Preparatory School in Charleston, S.C., from 1968 to 1981.

Fletcher Seaborn Stone, Jr. '61, September 9, Charlotte, N.C. He served two years in the U.S. Army. He was associated with Hoechst/Celanese for many years until retiring in 1996. He later founded FS Stone Application Technology, Inc.

Eula Lamont Vaughn '63, September 1, Greenville. He was retired from Norfolk/Southern Railroad.

Samuel Ludie Watkins '65, September 4, Laurens, S.C. He was a certified public accountant who was a member of the South Carolina Association of Certified Public Accountants and the National Association of Certified Public Accountants. He was also an active member of Sons of Confederate Veterans and was a Civil War re-enactor. He spent 48 years as organist at New Prospect Baptist Church.

John Tyler Hill, Sr. '67, September 22, Fort Myers, Fla. An Allstate Insurance owner/agent for more than 25 years, he was also a Pop Warner football coach and a past chair of the Harry Chapin Food Bank. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club and was a Mason.

William Raymond Scott, M.A. '67, November 12, Spartanburg, S.C. He was founder and co-owner of Scott-Jackson Kitchens from 1953 until 1980. He also taught mathematics at Boiling Springs High School for two years and later gained recognition in several states for his work as an artist. He was a past member of the Civitan Club of Spartanburg and a founding member of the Palmetto Archery Club and the South Carolina Archery Association.