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David A. Gibson, 1928-2004

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David A. Gibson, 1928-2004

On Tuesday, November 30, 2004, Furman lost a treasure when David Gibson, professor emeritus of music, died in Atlanta at the age of 76.

David left Furman a legacy of excellence in teaching, performing and collegiality. He lived life with great zeal and humor.

John Beckford of the music faculty recalls playing percussion at a church service where David was organist. "I was positioned close to him and he was offering some verbal commentary to me throughout the service, even while he was playing," says Beckford.

"At one point in time when he had to play some 'transitional' music between events in the service, he leaned over to me and said, 'Now here's 'Happy Birthday' in retrograde.' He then proceeded to do this lovely improvisation all built on the familiar melody, but played backwards.

"To my amazement, this improvisation went on for quite some time, with no one suspecting that this meditative moment was being driven by this little secular tune. Of course, all the while he's casting a knowing smile at me throughout the interlude."

The Furman community gathered in Daniel Chapel on December 6 to celebrate David's life. His career at Furman spanned 33 years, from 1961 to 1994. During that time, he served as director of the Fine Arts Division, president of Furman's chapter of Pi Kappa Lambda National Honorary Music Fraternity, and as faculty advisor for Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia music fraternity. In addition to piano and harpsichord, he taught piano pedagogy, music appreciation and the popular interdisciplinary "Ideas in the Arts" course. He was beloved by his colleagues and his students, many of whom have attained significant careers in music.

Randy Hawkins '78 remembers a car ride with David:

"It was a cold, lusterless, rainy afternoon and David, his son Brooks and I were in transit somewhere in downtown Greenville. On this occasion the goal was to take me to a performance event, and there was not time for a leisurely pace. Brooks had somehow been accorded the drivership on this trip, and I believe that his driving experience may have been in a nascent stage.

"I still remember numerous sharp turns, screeching tires, head-on collisions with lake-like puddles and brushes alongside various curbs. David and I were in the back seat, jostled every which way by the careening vehicle, unable to maintain any sense of physical composure. Then, with a rich and measured utterance and that priceless Gibsonian quasi-drawl, we heard the words: 'Brooks, please. I still have a few more Chopin etudes to learn.'"

David performed more than 400 recitals during his career, including New York Town Hall recitals and concerts at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. He also accompanied such acclaimed performers as Nell Rankin, Beverly Wolff and William Warfield. He played for presidents George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan and was a Fulbright Scholar in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1953-54.

David had enough personality for a dozen people. He was jolly. He was witty. He was a nurturing soul who encouraged other musicians to perform their best on stage and in the classroom.

He could recall instantaneously dates, personages and anecdotes of music history, music bibliography and music biography, both the significant and the trivial, the serious and the humorous, enough to fill multiple tomes. He was quick to laugh. He loved music with a passion equaled only by the love he held



for his dear wife, Sarah, and his children, Brooks and Gloria.

He was extraordinary. He was a jolly old soul, an artist, and the dearest friend. He never let life become somber or weighty, but walked in the company of angels. He was young at heart. He was easy to talk to, a generous friend, and he loved a good joke.

We will miss David's performing expertise, his informed lecturing, his wit, his good will and his generosity of spirit.

— **Bruce Schoonmaker '73**
Professor of Music

Memorials: The David Gibson Recital Series, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Hwy., Greenville, S.C. 29613.