



CSU MUSIC DEPARTMENT MOURNS THE LOSS OF ROBERT CAVARRA, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF MUSIC

From Dr. Michael Thaut, Co-Executive Director, School of the Arts & Department Chair:

It is with great sadness I have to announce that one of the beloved members of our departmental family, professor emeritus Robert Cavarra passed away last Friday, February 8, 2008. He was at peace and surrounded by family. Bob was a wonderful artist, a man of great vision, and until the very last an enthusiastic and passionate supporter of our path to excellence. He was instrumental in bringing the Casavant organ, built by Larry Phelps, to campus 40 years ago – the instrument is possibly the largest cultural treasure CSU possesses.

My wife, Corene, and I had the pleasure of a wonderful dinner 4 weeks ago with Bob, his wife Barbara, and Olav Oussoren who is one of the finest organ builders and voicers in the world. Bob was clearly pleased to see the organ move to the University Center for the Arts recital hall and restoration in good hands – his legacy to us which we will honor and continue to build on. Let us give our support to Barbara and the Cavarra family in these times of loss and mourning.

About Robert Cavarra

Robert N. Cavarra, professor of music and noted concert organist, who was a leading participant in the revival of the classical organ tradition in North America and brought international acclaim to Colorado State University as a center for organ scholarship and performance, died Friday, Feb. 8 in Denver, Colo. The cause was complications resulting from kidney failure.

Robert Cavarra was Professor Emeritus of Music at CSU, where he taught organ and harpsichord. During his distinguished tenure, he studied and worked beside the greatest of organists, including Marie-Claire Alain, E. Power Biggs, Anton Heiller, Lionel Rogg, and Gillian Weir, and performed extensively in Europe, Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Mr. Cavarra has been consultant for a number of distinguished organs, and has frequently lectured on the Classic Organ Movement, including at the First Congress of Latin American Organists, the 35th Congress of World Affairs, the VII and XXVII International Festival of Organists in Morelia, Mexico, and has lectured and performed for numerous conventions of the American Guild of Organists.

Cavarra helped transform the music program in the 1960s by bringing the Casavant to campus following several years of research, planning and study he did on organs in the United States and Europe. He decided on an organ that reflected the Orgelbewegung, or the classic building practices of Northern Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The late Lawrence Phelps, tonal director and president of Casavant Freres of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, was commissioned to construct what would become the first major mechanical-action organ at an American university. And true to the art of musical architecture, the organ was designed and built specifically for Room 203 in the Music Building, which formerly was the reading room of the Library Building. "The Casavant has a very intimate and articulate sound," said Cavarra.

But Cavarra, a musicologist, consultant, composer and performer from the time he was 12 years old, isn't known just for the Casavant. He also was responsible for the donation of a 1927 Wurlitzer theater organ for the Lory Student Center Theatre in 1983, "a wonderful old gem and remnant of the Silent Movie era." In addition, he has been consultant for several distinguished classical organs in the Fort Collins area, notably the Phelps organ at St. Luke's Episcopal Church and the Danish Marcussen and Son organ at First United Methodist Church. "Organ always has been my passion," he said.

Cavarra performed throughout the United States, Europe, Canada and Mexico and released many recordings on the Musical Heritage label. He also wrote and lectured on the Classic Organ Movement at the First Congress of Latin American Organists, the 35th Conference of World Affairs and the Festival of International Organists. Together with his wife, Barbara, he founded an international, non-profit foundation, Pro Organo Pleno XXI, dedicated to preservation of the art of the organ into the 21st century.

The dedication Cavarra brought to his artistry continued after his retirement from the university in 2000, including many guest appearances at organ recitals, always performed to a packed house. And in 2004, Cavarra assisted Music Department Chair, Dr. Michael Thaut in securing the 1.5 million endowment from Stewart and Sheron Golden in Longmont to fund a new professorship for organ and liturgical studies; the Stuart and Sheron Golden Chair of Organ and Liturgical Studies was the first endowed professorship in Music and the College of Liberal Arts at Colorado State University.

Additionally, Cavarra has been a great supporter of the University Center for the Arts (UCA) project, helping select Olav Oussoren, world-renowned organ builder and voicer, to supervise the moving and restoration of the Casavant organ to its new recital hall in the UCA. Cavarra was overjoyed at the prospect of a new School of the Arts at CSU. "When you pursue the arts in an environment where you're surrounded by beauty, you begin to relate to it. Great things in humanity have happened because artists were surrounded by beautiful things."

Cavarra is survived by his wife, Barbara; a daughter Karla of New Haven, Conn.; three sons, Christopher of Chicago, Ill., Stephan of Atlanta, Ga., and Matthew of Denver, Colo.; and five grandchildren. A memorial service will be held Friday, Feb. 15 at 11 a.m. at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 2000 Stover Street, Fort Collins. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Organ Program Support Fund c/o The CSU Foundation.

Quotes about Cavarra playing his beloved Casavant organ:

"Hauntingly lovely performance...Cavarra plays the Romantic organ with a keen sense of how various pipe colors blend into a pleasing whole, and how to give the music contrast and flexibility. -The Denver Post

"Cavarra made the music alive with splendidly upheld and characteristic tempos, an excellent rhythmic vitality and an impressive visibility which gave the compositions a combination of profile and beautifully modeled vigor..." -Berlingsketidende

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