

IN MEMORIAM: WILLIAM MEIGS EDDY AUGUST 31, 1910-JULY 7, 2008

Memorial Celebration to be held August 31, 2008 at 2:00 P.M. at Kilworth Chapel in Tacoma, Washington



William Meigs Eddy

It is with great sadness that we announce that former USC Thornton faculty member William M. Eddy passed away at his Tacoma, Washington home on July 7, 2008.

Bill Eddy was born in Santa Barbara, California on August 31, 1910. At an early age he showed a keen interest in what would become his lifelong passion: beautiful singing. At age 19 his parents agreed to allow him to study singing in Europe—if he could raise the money for the trip. He promptly sold his Model T, and not long after, set sail for London on a freighter out of San Francisco which could accommodate a few passengers.

For the next ten years Bill made his home in London, studying and performing in England and other parts of Western Europe, returning to the United States only when the British government let it be known that in order to continue working there he must become a British subject. Not long after his return to California he met his future wife, Margrete Anderson, at the home of their singing teacher in Los Angeles (they were married in 1942).

After the U.S. became involved in WWII and much to Margrete's consternation, 31 year-old Bill volunteered to enlist in the Army, declining an offer to serve as an entertainer in favor of service in the infantry! His personal sense of duty and outrage against Hitler required no less. He was accepted to Officer's Candidate School, and, as First Lieutenant, served as Platoon Leader with the Tank Destroyers in General Patton's Army. He landed on Normandy Beach in 1944, proceeding to St Lo, the liberation of Paris, the Battle of the Bulge, through Germany to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia and participated in the liberation of a concentration camp at the end of the war.

After being reunited with Margrete and their new baby daughter in Tacoma, Washington, Bill relocated his family first to Los Angeles, where his first son was born, and then to Connecticut, where he endeavored to resume his interrupted singing career.

While living in Stamford, two more sons were born. A job at Tiffany and Company in New York helped make ends meet as he began singing with opera companies in Boston, New York and Philadelphia under the stage name of William Van Zandt (to avoid confusion with pop singer Nelson Eddy). Enthusiastic reviews praised Bill's "radiant personality," "miraculous control of voice production," "beauty of tone," and "well-nigh perfect enunciation." He received accolades for his dramatic as well as comedic roles and he performed with many of the legendary singers of the day, becoming friends with some of the icons of the operatic world.

At this time an important, life-shaping development occurred: his good friend and colleague, pianist Carl Friedberg (who had been a student of Clara Schumann) suggested that Bill teach singing. When he protested to Margrete, “But I wouldn’t know what to say!” she retorted, “Of course you would—every time I open my mouth, you have PLENTY to say!” And thus another facet of his talent came to light, much to the benefit of the art that he so loved.

In the early 1950s, Bill and Margrete and their four children moved to Bill’s hometown of Santa Barbara. There he built a thriving teaching studio—expanding to a second studio in Hollywood and summer classes at the Music Academy of the West (in Santa Barbara), where legendary soprano Lotte Lehmann had invited him to teach with her and a distinguished faculty of musical artists.

Ever increasing demand for his teaching gifts resulted in positions on the faculties of several Southern California universities, culminating at the USC Thornton School of Music. He taught singing there for 12 years (in the 1960s and 1970s) and enjoyed friendships with such distinguished colleagues as Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Piatagorsky, Gabor Rejto, and many others.

In 1977, Bill and Margrete realized a long time dream of settling in the Pacific Northwest at Margrete’s family home. Both taught singing in their Tacoma studio for many years, and Bill joined the music faculty at the University of Puget Sound. After Margrete passed away in 1999, Bill continued to teach singing until he reached the age of 94. Throughout the years an increasing number of talented students enjoyed successful singing careers, and expressions of gratitude flowed into Bill’s mailbox with exciting reports of successes that they attributed to the skillful vocal training they had received from their inimitable teacher and friend, Bill Eddy. Both Bill and Margrete were devoted supporters of their students, frequently attending their performances regionally and even in Europe. They were often seen attending Seattle and Tacoma Opera and philharmonic performances, and many will remember Bill’s voluminous “BRAVO!” at sublime moments of beautiful musical expression.

His dedication to his family, his students and his art form was a source of inspiration to all whose lives he touched. His generosity of spirit, his larger than life personality, his booming voice greeting all those he encountered with, “Helloooo! How Are youuuu?” along with his warm embrace will be greatly missed by his adoring family, students, and many friends, and acquaintances, and will echo forever in our memories.

All family and friends are cordially invited to attend a Memorial Celebration of his life on August 31, 2008 at 2:00 PM at the University of Puget Sound’s Kilworth Chapel (at the corner of N. 18th and Warner) in Tacoma, Washington. Reception to follow on campus.