

*In memoriam***George Vassos: a tribute to
a teacher, mentor, and friend**

by Joanne Uniatowski



At the crossroads of music and words, one finds inspiration in song. Meeting George Vassos in 1992 at the Cleveland Institute of Music was for me the beginning of an incredible journey into a life filled with song. As I began my doctoral studies at CIM, George not only became my teacher, but also my mentor, and most significantly, my friend.

George's number one gift to his students was an infectious love for words and music, whether in art song, opera, or oratorio. He continually encouraged us to honor the words, infuse them with meaning, and share them with our audience. He encouraged us to soar. He allowed us to fail. And in all things he opened his heart to each one of us.

Over the years, I know that George saw in me far more than I saw in myself. He provided opportunities for me to teach his younger students, to teach young artists in the Lyric Opera Cleveland summer season, and eventually to serve as executive director of the Art Song Festival from 2001-2016.

When George asked me to consider serving as executive director of ASF, I remember responding, "Are you kidding? You know what I do. I teach and I sing." But he assured me that together we could do this, and sure enough, we did.

George gifted the world with a festival that showcased his love of the collaborative art form that is art song. Countless singers and pianists were inspired and molded by the weeklong festival dedicated to words and music. Sharing their love of the genre, international artists graced the stages of the Cleveland Institute of Music and Baldwin

Wallace University for over 30 years.

George's legacy will live on in the hundreds of students whose lives he touched in his 50 years at the helm of the CIM Voice department, and in the thousands of patrons who enjoyed his festival. We, the students of George Vassos, continue to sing and teach his joy around the world. My dearest friend and teacher, I will miss you more than I can say, but I will hear your guiding voice in every note I sing.

George Vassos passed away on February 12 at the age of 93, preceded in death by his partner of 56 years, Henry Houston Hawley III. Read an obituary [here](#). A funeral liturgy will be held at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church on Friday, February 21 at 4:00 pm, reception following at Westwood Country Club. A graveside service with military honors will take place at Lake View Cemetery on Saturday, February 22 at 11:30 am.



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