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In Memoriam - Dr. Walter Kemp

Posted by **Fountain School of Performing Arts** on June 19, 2023 in [In Memoriam](#)

Dear Dalhousie and King's College faculty and staff

With heavy hearts, we write with sad news that Dr. Walter Kemp has passed away. A beloved member of our shared university community, Dr. Kemp made indelible contributions at both Dalhousie and King's, joining the Dalhousie Department of Music as chair and full professor in 1977 and later becoming a member of the Joint Faculty, University of King's College. During his lauded career, he guided the development of new degrees and curricula while expanding regional awareness and influence of our musicians and students.

As we send our heartfelt condolences to his beloved wife, Valda, and their community of family and friends, we are honoured to share reminiscences from a few of Dr. Kemp's university colleagues.

Dr. Jennifer Bain, from the Fountain School of Performing Arts writes:

"Dr. Walter Kemp was one of two musicologists at Dalhousie when I was hired in 2001. He was warm and welcoming to me and always generous, passing on books, journals, scores and articles that he thought would interest me. Students found him inspiring and greatly appreciated his encouragement, whatever musical discipline or career they pursued. He was a master of the pun and had encyclopedic knowledge and appreciation for many genres of music, which he drew on for decades on his weekend morning CKDU/FM radio program. He devoted much of his career to

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founding and running choral groups and most recently to running Opera Nova Scotia. In these roles, he promoted Dalhousie students and graduates, giving them countless professional soloist opportunities. My thoughts are with his family.”

Dalhousie Music Department’s retired professors Lynn Stodola and Philippe Djokic share:

“Our most memorable experiences working with Dr. Kemp were his large-scale productions involving members of Symphony Nova Scotia, Dalhousie Music faculty and students, community members and nationally acclaimed guest soloists in performances of some of the greatest masterpieces for choir and orchestra. There are so many musicians and music lovers in Nova Scotia whose lives and careers have been touched in a positive way by Dr. Kemp’s generosity and energy. He was an active and dynamic force behind several successful arts organizations. Few in our province have contributed so widely and for so long. A true visionary of music at Dalhousie University Dr. Walter H. Kemp will be sadly missed and forever in our hearts.”

Joint Faculty of King's and Dalhousie, Fountain School's Dr. Roberta Barker offers:

“I first met Dr. Kemp in the Fall of 1992 when I auditioned for a choral scholarship in the Chapel Choir at the University of King’s College, of which he was the director. I still remember the glow of confidence he gave me by expressing pleasure that he would now have another of his favourite “woody alto” voices in the choir. That moment would be the beginning of more than thirty years during which I would be Walter’s student, his chorister and soloist not only in the King’s Chapel Choir but also in the Walter Kemp Singers, his collaborator on numerous projects for Opera Nova Scotia, and—like so many other Halifax students over multiple generations--the beneficiary of his mentorship.

Dr. Kemp transformed the face of the performing arts in Nova Scotia through his vision, devotion, persistence, indomitable will, and unstoppable belief in our community. To the very last, he could make a successful concert or production happen when nobody else thought it was possible; performance miracles routinely happened when he was in the vicinity. Through it all, he always prioritized local artists, and especially young artists. He bent over backwards to create opportunities for emerging musicians and new designers, stage managers, costumers, directors, producers, and actors. He was vividly interested in all aspects of the performing arts; no one could illuminate the meaning of a score or a line of Shakespeare with a few loving words quite like he could. And he took such joy in the process. At the intermission of his last production with Opera Nova Scotia, *Così Fan Tutte*, just two weeks before his passing, he

declared that he was 'ecstatic.'

He was the truest friend that the performing arts in Nova Scotia ever had. May flights of angels sing him to his rest."

Dr. Kemp's obituary can be found [here](#).

Our condolences,

William Lahey

President and Vice-Chancellor

Professor of Law

University of King's College

Jennifer Andrews

Dean of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Dalhousie University

Jérôme Blais

Director, Fountain School of Performing Arts

Associate Professor Composition; Canadian Studies

Dalhousie University

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