



Chuck Lundeen, 1943-2019, Teacher & Philanthropist

By Carol Crocca

Chuck Lundeen died at the beginning of the pandemic and those of us who knew him were denied the opportunity to formally grieve and acknowledge his contributions to the musical life of Rochester. We remember him as a warm and knowledgeable friend and patron of the arts. Chuck had long had health challenges although they rarely prevented “the bravest person I know” (John Williams) from active and joyful participation in his interests.

Chuck was born in northern Minnesota, the first of three children. According to John, his husband, he was the first up in his household and spent this morning time with a large book of stories and pictures of opera. His mother was a singer, a participant in the noted St. Olaf Choir, and also a music teacher, and Chuck himself always sang in school and church choirs. All kinds of music were part of his life, from classical to Elvis Presley, facilitated by the gift in his youth of a record player. He really developed his interest in opera because of a high school teacher who regularly took students to the Twin Cities to attend the touring Metropolitan Opera productions.

Chuck attended the University of Minnesota at Duluth, where he studied English and French, partly satisfying his interest in music by doing tech for college musical theater productions. He spent his career at the Canandaigua Junior Academy teaching middle schoolers English and occasionally French. In Rochester, he was a strong supporter and member of the Gay Men’s Chorus; it was there that he met John, his future partner of 32 years, who was a lawyer and editor at the then Lawyers Cooperative Publishing Company. During their time together, he and John traveled to many cities to enjoy opera –



San Francisco, Miami, Toronto, Sarasota, and of course, the NYC Met. In summer, they were regulars at the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown and Chuck also traveled on his own (his last trip was to the Met Ring Cycle in 2019), always bringing back stories of these sojourns to his friends and students.

Most importantly for the music community, Chuck was a teacher and philanthropist. For many years, he taught a course at Oasis (a continuing education organization for older adults) based on the Met Opera’s simulcasts in local theaters on Saturday afternoons. His class was always full, as Chuck’s enthusiasm and relaxed style appealed to aficionados and novice opera fans alike. His friend Deena Ambush describes it thus: “Chuck was a master teacher, who not only shared his love of opera with the class, but built a community of knowledgeable opera lovers.” Chuck was almost always at the Saturday Met operas and could be counted on to enliven the experience with his commentary.

As for philanthropy, it would be difficult to list all the ways Chuck and John have manifested their generosity. They have been contributors, board members, and/or fundraisers for the Rochester Gay Men’s Chorus, Friends of Eastman Opera, and Nazareth Arts Center, among others. In 2017 they were honored by the Rochester Area Community Foundation for their community philanthropy. Chuck and John also established the Williams-Lundeen LGBTQ Scholarship at Nazareth College and recently John created the John C. Williams Scholarship in memory of Chuck Lundeen, to be awarded annually to an Eastman School of Music voice student.