



Marice W. Stith

June 29, 1926 – October 7, 2015

Marice Wilber Stith, Professor Emeritus of Music, died October 7, 2015 after a protracted illness. As Director of Bands, Professor Stith led Cornell's Wind Ensembles, Symphonic Band, and Brass Quintet as well as Cornell's Big Red Marching Band and Pep Band from 1966 to 1989. An accomplished trumpeter, Professor Stith recorded nine solo trumpet recordings; he also maintained a lively career as a concert and show musician and conductor outside his role at Cornell. He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Shirlee Longwell Stith; four children, twelve grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Born in Jamestown, Ohio, Professor Stith was educated, after a stint in the US Army, at Capital University (BA) and Ohio State University (MA). He took post-graduate instruction at the Eastman School of Music and at Syracuse University. He spent several years in Music Supervisor positions for public and parochial schools in Ohio and in Syracuse, and joined Syracuse's faculty in 1954, where he was Director of the Marching Band and the Men's Glee Club. Prior to joining the faculty of Cornell, he also served as Director of Music for the West Genesee Public Schools and Minister of Music at the University Methodist Church in Syracuse.

Under Professor Stith's leadership – from his first year in the position – Cornell's wind ensembles enthusiastically embraced new music

alongside canonical works. Over the years his ensembles premiered pieces by composers including Pulitzer Prize-winning Cornellians Christopher Rouse, MFA '77, DMA '77; the late Professor emeritus Steven Stucky, MFA '73, DMA '78, and the late Professor emeritus Karel Husa. Over the arc of his entire career, he commissioned or premiered approximately 200 works for wind ensemble, men's glee club, choir and trumpet. On May 24, 1989, Professor Stith gave his final concert conducting the Cornell University Wind Ensemble, the Marching Band, and the Alumni Band, at Carnegie Hall.

William Cowdery, supervisor at Cornell's Sidney Cox Library of Music and Dance and a long-time musical associate of Professor Stith, recalls that "with the Cornell Wind Ensemble he made annual recordings of cutting-edge repertoire that sold world-wide. These recordings served as benchmarks for school ensembles preparing those works for concert and contest. Cornell's bands thrived with this exposure, and their reputation soared. Marice was not a boaster, but it was easy to see how much he loved this work, and it was impossible to resist his infectious exuberance for everything he did."

Though not a composer, Professor Stith created a transcription for wind bands, "Three Dance Episodes from [Leonard Bernstein's] *On the Town*." The piece, published in 1971 by Warner Brothers, has become a staple in concert band and wind ensemble repertoires across the United States.

As Director of the Big Red Marching Band, Professor Stith saw the organization through significant changes. Previously affiliated with Cornell's ROTC program, the Big Red Band had become subsumed under the Department of Music prior to his arrival. Now released from the ROTC's strictures of gender separation, the once all-male band, under Professor Stith, became co-educational. In 1982, the Big Red Bands Alumni Association was established as a way to maintain the financial and long-term security of the Big Red Band and Pep Band.

A licensed recording engineer, he founded Marice Stith Recording Services, recording performances at Cornell as well as at regional colleges and universities; he acted as master-engineer under such labels

as Nonesuch, Golden Crest, Mark Recordings and the Organ Historical Society. Beyond conducting his ensembles, he engineered and edited over forty long-playing albums documenting Cornell's wind ensembles over two decades, which were sold worldwide; he also taught a popular recording arts course during his tenure at Cornell.

William Cowdery remembers Professor Stith's "ever-present smile and jovial demeanor, which belied the enormous amount of energy he poured into his two passions, band conducting and professional recording. He did both with boundless enthusiasm and attention to detail." Professor Stith's skill at recording added to his reputation overall, Cowdery continues. "He was much sought-after as an on-site concert recording engineer, and he lugged his equipment endlessly around upstate New York and neighboring areas. On the home front he produced countless Cornell-related LPs, including Malcolm Bilson's first commercial recordings."

Malcolm Bilson, the Frederick J. Whiton Professor of Music Emeritus, agrees. "Marice Stith was a first-class trumpeter and in 1969 he invited me to make a recording with him of trumpet-piano sonatas," he recalls. "This was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship producing professional recordings; I owe a great deal to him for teaching me virtually everything about recording and editing. Marice was a gentle and friendly man with a winning smile and a penchant towards humor; I miss him very much."

Even after retiring from Cornell, he continued to be active musically, playing trumpet in the Ithaca Concert Band, the Syracuse Brass Ensemble, and the Virginia Grand Military Band. He also served as conductor and music director of the Skaneateles Community Band.

Marice Stith will be remembered as a vibrant musician and pedagogue. He was an exciting, adventurous conductor, and a warm and encouraging mentor. He was devoted to his wife Shirlee, to his children, and to his grandchildren. Finally, he was a warm and supportive colleague, who left his mark on Lincoln Hall.

Steven Pond, chair; Malcolm Bilson and William Cowdery

