

Music world mourns Ike Jenkins

By NORA K. WALLACE, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

December 3, 2018 7:47 AM

Isaac "Ike" Jenkins, a talented musician and revered music and choir teacher notable for inspiring performers like Katy Perry, Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and actor Eric Stoltz is being remembered not only for his own eclectic talents but for his motivating teaching style and mentoring influence.

Word of Mr. Jenkins' passing spread through the musical community, with tributes flowing across social media on Sunday. Former students and friends commented that they were devastated, heartbroken and in shock.

"I can't think of a musician/educator I've ever admired more — RIP and enjoy your well-deserved first chair in Heaven's band, choir and orchestra," wrote musician Robert Collins, in one post.

Mr. Jenkins' legacy includes leading the jazz bands and choirs at Dos Pueblos High School and Santa Barbara High School, teaching La Cumbre Junior High School and directing the jazz band and choir at Santa Barbara City College.

A master musician in his own right, he played the piano, flute and bass, sang and conducted both choirs and bands. He topped off his own professional playlist with acting stints and voice-over work for Disney and commercial advertising.

His musical influence touched thousands of students since beginning his Santa Barbara teaching career in 1971. As a band and vocal director, his jazz bands and choirs ranked highly at U.S. Jazz festivals, including those in Monterey and Reno — and in Europe at Montreux, France and Germany.

Yet he was understated in how he perceived himself as an educator.

"I don't think of myself necessarily as that good of a teacher," he said in an interview earlier this year. "But I think I have this ability to get students involved and excited over their music. I guess I try to teach them that determination, that stick-to-it-ness."

Showcasing his creative musical mind and desire to expand the repertoires of his students, his marching and concert bands played not the usual expected routines, but music by Pink Floyd, The Who, Stevie Wonder and Earth, Wind and Fire. He cited among his own influences Duke Ellington, Fats Domino and B.B. King.

His students — including some who achieved fame — kept in close contact with him, crediting him for being a lasting impact on their lives.

Santa Barbara City College Jazz Studies instructor Eric Heidner was a student of Mr. Jenkins' at Dos Pueblos in the 1980s and has been a friend and colleague for more than 30 years. In addition to himself, a number of Mr. Jenkins' former students became music educators, such as Dan Garske, the current band director at Dos Pueblos, he said.

Share Story

facebook

Tweet



Ike Jenkins at Santa Barbara City College, where he directs the Monday Madness Jazz Band in March of this year.
CARMEN SMYTH/NEWS-PRESS FILE

12/4/2018

Santa Barbara News-Press : Daily newspaper since 1855

Despite having retired more than a dozen years ago from teaching, Mr. Jenkins continued to be the part-time director at Santa Barbara City College, running the "Monday Madness" big band, Mr. Heidner noted. Mr. Jenkins also played string bass in the SBCC Concert Band, whose performance is next Sunday. Mr. Heidner said he plans to honor his mentor at the concert.

Mr. Heidner posted about the loss on Facebook.

"My friend. My mentor. My second father. No words can truly convey the extent of my love and admiration I had for this gentleman. He was my band director from my freshman year of high school until...well...just a few weeks ago, when he had to step away from directing the SBCC Monday Madness band to rest before his surgery. He taught me and so many others so much--not just about music, but about life itself. He inspired us all to be the best musicians--and the best human beings--we could be. It was an honor to have him serve as the SBCC Concert Band's string bass player for the last dozen or so years, and an empty string bass stool will be on stage during Sunday night's concert to honor his legacy."

Mr. Jenkins' influence was honored in memorable ways as well. In 1999, Dos Pueblos High School graduate Karl Hunter, who plays saxophone and clarinet with Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, presented Mr. Jenkins with a replica of the group's gold record at a school assembly. He said if it weren't for Mr. Jenkins, he wouldn't have become a musician.

"Our record recently went gold and one of the first things I thought to do would be to kinda stoke Ike out on something," Mr. Hunter noted at the time. "If you haven't met him, you should do that. He is seriously, in my opinion, one of the best teachers ever. He taught us a lot about music and life and everything."

Born near Selma, Ala., Mr. Jenkins was the son of the Rev. R.S. Jenkins, a Lutheran minister, and Beatrice Jenkins, and grew up in Omaha, Neb. He was a graduate of Dana College with a double major in vocal and instrumental music and completed graduate work at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Denver University and the Meadowbrook School of Music.

One of his proudest personal moments, he said years ago in an interview, was being a member of the All-American Chorus in his senior year of college. The group sang for all the major embassies in Europe, as well as Carnegie Hall.

Before moving to Santa Barbara, Mr. Jenkins taught in Nebraska, Iowa and Colorado.

In the mid-1970s, Mr. Jenkins conducted musicals for the Lobero Theatre and the California Youth Theatre. During his career, he was presented with the Crystal Apple Award, the 2004 HOPE Award for Education, and The 2005 Santa Barbara Educator of the Year.

He and his wife, Cynthia, have been Santa Maria residents since 2000.

email: news@newspress.com