

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
STEPHEN GERALD**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Ronald C. Buonous, associate professor, theatre and dance, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Hillary Hart, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

**IN MEMORIAM
STEPHEN GERALD**

In remembering Stephen Gerald, I, Coleman A. Jennings, often thought about his unassuming and modest, kind, presence, a man with enormous talents as an actor with a glorious, engaging theatrical voice. As departmental chair (1980-1992) and later as departmental colleague, I came to know him personally from the day I “found” and recommended hiring him as a faculty member.

He was devoted to his wife, Yoshi and their three children; and was also a supportive and encouraging teacher of acting and directing whose students remembered him fondly years after their graduation. He inspired them as he found good in each, nourished their talents and expected their best. He was a teacher who absolutely loved teaching and did so until several weeks before his death despite his declining energy and increasingly poor health. He simply could not stop.

Our ongoing bond was mutual and is evident from an email he wrote to Kay Puryear, long-time departmental Executive Assistant, and I, written during the later months of his illness.

“Dear Coleman & Kay,

You two changed my life almost thirty years ago. Not only did you bring me to Austin, you made my family and me feel genuinely welcomed and valued. How can I ever thank you enough? I thank you by remembering back over the years and valuing the opportunity to spend time with you both at one of the first restaurants I dined at when I interviewed for a one year position. I think I'm still on that one-year contract!”

This joint memorial, along with our affectionate memories of him will keep Stephen forever on that “one-year contract.”

Associate Professor Emeritus, Lee Abraham, writes:

It is quite moving to read ex-students’ remarks on Professor Gerald’s Facebook page. Certain themes are sounded again and again. He was a man comfortable in his own skin, which became a model for his students to be serene in their own. He was a gifted listener who was always available to talk; even after graduating, students would drop by and check in with

him, just to take his temperature on where they were in their lives and careers. He deeply and truly prized diversity, and he looked after students who felt different in some way. He encouraged them to embrace the differences that made them feel ‘less-than,’ because the uniqueness of their heritage, culture, and upbringing he saw as a lifelong source of strength and creativity. He believed the artist who avoids the personal is avoiding the art. The insecurity they spent their young lives trying to hide is probably what attracted them to theatre, where this old pain might be shared with the like-minded and then overcome and finally celebrated as a badge of honor. Actors are always negotiating the tricky emotional terrain where the personal encounters the art of acting, whose subject *and* object is the self, and the pain of this is felt all the more sharply among young people who are coming to terms with their identity. Many students remember most of all his voice, that sonorous and nonjudgmental bass-baritone, the very sound of which was calming; that voice pushed them past their self-imposed limitations, gently — or, if need be, not so gently if he knew the student needed that. In the end, under Professor Gerald, students happily became who they really were.

Professor Lee Abraham was a close colleague of Professor Gerald for over thirty-five years. “Stephen was the best friend I ever had, but I think there are many people who can honestly claim the same thing. We could talk about everything, for hours on end. His mind was wide-ranging and free from preconceptions; he would entertain almost any notion. Our conversations were punctuated by a lot of laughter; I treasured his earthy wit and irony, which he thought might have been influenced by the elderly and very funny Jewish men from the Bronx neighborhood of his boyhood. He was schooled early in life as a visual artist, and that eye never left him. It’s central to what attracted him to Peter Brook, Asian and African theatre, and the experimental aesthetic he found in graduate school at New York University. Stephen was a natural traveler who crossed a lot of borders in his life, both physical and cultural. He had an intuitive understanding of how to find common ground with anyone, language barriers be damned. Everyone could feel his presence to be welcoming, accepting, and curious. And he was an extraordinary family man. He and his wife Yoshiko were of the same mind about the important things in life, like kindness and compassion. They passed on these values to their three remarkable children. I am indebted to the whole family in one special way. The three times I was recovering from major surgery I was a guest in their home, and they made me feel like a member of the family. Stephen was my ‘brother from another mother,’ one student noted. I don’t think that qualifies as a figure of speech.”

Associate Professor, Lucien Douglas writes:

In nearly forty years of teaching, Stephen Gerald demonstrated a marked commitment to the exploration of opportunities that would broaden the perspectives with which students viewed their lives and their artistic interests. His teaching included a variety of acting and directing courses from beginning to advanced levels for both undergraduate and graduate students in the UT Austin Department of Theatre and Dance. In three decades at the University of Texas at Austin, Stephen used his particular research interests in performance, African-American studies, and international theatre to create topics courses that would challenge students to think outside of the proverbial box, pushing the bounds of linear text and guiding students in a process to devise their own work. He was especially dedicated to collaborative efforts as he sought to introduce students with an interest in performance to the skills of writing,

directing, and producing, thereby giving them an introduction to the very skills from which they might be inspired to create their own work. In short, Stephen encouraged and guided his students to see old things in new ways, not only looking at a text for simply what existed on the page, but also for envisioning how that text might live and breathe outside its linear boundaries. In this regard, he encouraged students to become visionaries, so to speak, examining a pre-existing idea and looking at the possibilities of what might be. This might be considered a large part of his creative process, his “mantra”—the possibilities of *what might be*. This attention to helping students define the educational needs to achieve their career goals was of particular value to students of color, frequently underrepresented in university theatre programs and in the professional world of theatre arts. Stephen Gerald created a home—a true home—for students of color in the Department of Theatre and Dance; at the same time he remained enthusiastically available to speaking and working with all students. He was a remarkable listener: he gave time to those who sought him out and he taught his students to ask themselves the critical questions that would help them find the direction they were seeking.

Stephen Gerald was additionally dedicated to a breadth of service work in the UT Austin Department of Theatre and Dance, which included his serving as Minority Liaison Officer (2002-2014), Associate Chair of Undergraduate Studies/Director of Undergraduate Studies Program (2005-2014), and Project Director for the Ghana to Texas Cultural Exchange Program (1992-98); other administrative duties included serving as Director of Undergraduate Studies and Head of International Relations (2010-2012), Acting Area Head (2008-09), Acting Associate Chair of the Performance Unit (Spring 2009), Assistant Graduate Advisor (2002-06), Undergraduate Program Coordinator (1996-2001), Artistic Director (1993-95). He served as Director of Off-Campus Initiatives for the College of Fine Arts (2012-14).

Stephen Gerald’s interest in international theatre relationships brought him to the National University of the Arts in Seoul, South Korea, a number of times. He created opportunities for UT Austin students to travel to Seoul, as well as for Korean students to work in the Department of Theatre and Dance at UT Austin.

Holding an MFA in Directing from Rutgers University, Stephen Gerald’s chief artistic interest lay in that discipline. He directed many productions and at UT Austin; he also directed full productions and/or staged readings of new scripts in the theatre programs at the National Theatre of Ghana, Henry Street Settlement Theatre (NYC), Double Image Theatre (NYC), St. Edward’s University (Austin), Texas State University (San Marcos), the Long Center for the Performing Arts (Austin), George Washington Craver Museum and Cultural Center (Austin), Austin’s ProArts Collective, Capitol City Playhouse (Austin), Bard College (NY), and Oberlin College (OH). As an actor, Stephen Gerald performed as voice-over and on-camera talent in numerous television commercials in Austin and Atlanta; he also appeared in the film *The Life of David Gayle* (Starring Kevin Spacey and Kate Winslett), as “Thurgood Marshall” in *La Carpa Garcia* at the State Theatre (Austin), as the “Narrator” for the dance piece *The End of Firpo in the World* at Merce Cunningham Dance Studio (NYC), the role of “Jake Henry Jefferson” in *Oklahoma Passage* for Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (PBS), and as “Gonzalo” in *The Tempest* (starring Patrick Stewart) at Oberlin

Summer Repertory Theatre Company, etc. The play *Malcolm's Time*, which Stephen co-authored, was produced at La Mama E.T.C. (NYC) in 1984.

Professor, Lyn C. Wiltshire, writes:

In remembering Stephen T. Gerald, I, Lyn C. Wiltshire can reflect on his quite unassuming presence, his door-always-open welcome, and his ability to only utter commentary when relevant. As a junior faculty member in 1995, he was patient and generous to fault in guiding, encouraging and demonstrating the ways one acclimates to the department, the university campus and Austin. Stephen Gerald, as a teacher, performing artist and a friend was interesting in tipping the world toward a place that was more than “just” and “generous,” but was inclusive, balancing unity against opposition.

It seems fitting to remember Stephen T. Gerald through this Native American farewell:

Do not stand by my grave and weep.
I am not there. I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds
that blow. I am a diamond glint on the snow.
I am sunlight on the ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain. When you awake
in the morning hush, I am the swift upflinging rush
of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starshine at night. Do not stand by my
grave and cry. I am not there. I did not die.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Coleman A. Jennings (chair), Lee Abraham, Lucien Douglas, and Lyn C. Wilshire.

Distributed to the dean of College of Fine Arts on May 27, 2016, and posted under “Memorial Resolutions” at <https://wikis.utexas.edu/display/facultycouncil/Wiki+Home>.