The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Morris J. Beachy, professor emeritus, music, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
MORRIS J. BEACHY

Dr. Morris J. Beachy was the head of all choral activities at The University of Texas at Austin’s School of Music from 1957 until his retirement in 1993. He served for a brief time as acting chairman of the music department when Professor Robert Bays left to become director of the School of Music at the University of Illinois; he also served as coordinator of the conducting faculty for many years. In his years of teaching, he profoundly influenced countless numbers of singers in various ensembles as well as singers from the community who joined students to form his two hundred-member Choral Union.

At his memorial service in February 2011, members of his last ensemble, the Morris Beachy Singers, under the direction of Dr. Leonard McCormick, performed several selections that they had originally sung under Dr. Beachy. The beautiful ensemble singing and the big, rich, warm sound were something that he would have cherished. At this service, a recording of Morris Beachy singing “The Lord’s Prayer” was also played.

His was truly a magnificent baritone voice, and his love of vocal music came from his singer’s soul. Indeed, all his degrees were in vocal music. As he said,

Music, singing, is something that comes from our inner being. To me, singing is a heightened enactment of communication, something that is supposed to magnify the text, the meaning of what’s being presented. In choral music, the texts are constantly dealing with themes that stimulate and demand growth philosophically, perhaps even spiritually. That’s a thing my students and I have shared together, so teaching has been an emotional experience for me.

Dr. Beachy inspired devotion and love in many singers and choral conductors—and his name is an important one in the annals of choral music. He was proud of the fact that when he arrived at UT Austin in 1957, there were only two ensembles, the A Cappella Choir and the University Chorus, and within four years, he had built it into nine groups with about six hundred people participating. His goal was to provide any student who wanted to sing with an opportunity to sing in a group he or she could enjoy. To that end, Dr. Beachy created the Longhorn Singers, the Madrigal Singers, the Women’s Chorus, the Men’s Glee Club, the University Chorus, and the Varsity Singers. In addition to his duties at UT Austin, Dr. Beachy founded the Choral Union and a smaller Austin Choral Union Chamber Ensemble.

He served as chorus master for the Austin Lyric Opera, when it was founded in 1986 and for the first six seasons. Dr. Beachy was founder and director of the Williamsburg (Virginia) Festival Chorus and also served as guest conductor of the Austin Symphony Orchestra.

Dr. Beachy’s reputation as an outstanding choral conductor grew as he received national recognition through his successful tours, performances at major conventions, and as a clinician and lecturer throughout the country. A well-known author, his articles appeared frequently in the professional choral journals. With degrees in performance from Colorado State University, the University of Oregon, and his D.M.A. from the University of Southern California, Dr. Beachy also had broad experience as a performer in opera, oratorio, and recitals.
In 1966, Dr. Beachy’s reputation spread to international borders through a United States State Department Tour with the Chamber Singers under the auspices of the Cultural Presentations Program. In 1969, he returned to Europe with the A Cappella Choir, one of five American university choirs to participate in the first annual Symposium in Choral Music sponsored by the Institute of European Studies. In 1971, he joined a faculty of European musicians offering a seminar in vocal/instrumental chamber music at Trinity College in Cambridge, England, and in 1972, he returned to England to serve as guest conductor of the National Welsh Chorale on a tour of the British Isles. He also held an appointment as honorary professorial fellow at the University of Cardiff, Wales.

The University of Texas at Austin Chamber Singers, under Dr. Morris Beachy, toured with a repertoire that included sacred and secular music from the sixteenth century to contemporary times. They gained attention over the years through that thirteen-country tour of Europe and the Middle East under the auspices of the U.S. State Department, and through participation in a Bach festival on the island of Madeira. In addition, they won the Villa-Lobos Festival’s First International Competition for Mixed Chorus in Brazil and appeared in Hawaii and at the John F. Kennedy for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Interestingly, Dr. Beachy’s association with other renowned conductors and choral composers/arrangers meant he was perhaps better known outside Austin and UT Austin than inside. For example, Robert Shaw (Robert Shaw Chorale, Atlanta Orchestra, Boston Lyric Opera), Mitch Miller, and Johannes Somary (English Chamber Orchestra, Madeira Festival Orchestra), along with his long-time association with Walter Ducloux (who also worked with Toscanini’s NBC Symphony and alongside Robert Shaw), led to a position in the web of the finest American conductors and interpreters of opera and choral works in the world, with connections into every corner of the globe—from Africa (David Fanshawe) to Austria and Wales (Alan Hoddinott) to the Middle East.

From 1984, Professor Beachy held the Marlene and Morton Meyerson Centennial Professorship of Music. When he retired from his full-time tenured position with the University on June 31, 1990, Dean Jon Whitmore recommended endowed professor emeritus status for Professor Beachy, saying,

...Professor Beachy built one of the finest choral programs in the country during his thirty-one years on the faculty here. He is considered one of the most accomplished conductors of choral activities in this country and beyond. His sustained effort on behalf of the students and faculty of the Department of Music, and his establishment of national recognition for himself and his choir programs support this recommendation for Endowed Professor Emeritus status.

Dr. Beachy continued work for the University for three more years (until 1993). In 2002, Dr. Beachy retired from his last big choir, Austin Choral Artists, but remained active as a guest conductor. In 2003, he was inducted into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame by the Austin Critics Table Awards.

The legacy of Dr. Morris J. Beachy is still alive and well at The University of Texas at Austin. There are still students from all over the University involved in choral music in many different groups. There are still people singing the masterworks in the large town-and-gown chorus, now renamed the Choral Arts Society. The standard for excellence that Dr. Beachy established has continued to grow and flourish and is a tribute to all his hard work and artistic leadership. What he built is still a gift of music that continues to give to all the young students and the community singers that regularly join their voices in beautiful song.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors James Morrow (chair), Elliott Antokoletz, and Rose Taylor.

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