

Renowned percussionist, retired IU professor George Gaber dies

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George J. Gaber, 91, professor emeritus in IU's Jacobs School of Music and the man who brought "a collection of instruments and a perspective ahead of its time" to Bloomington from New York, died Wednesday at the Meadowood Health Pavilion.

Gaber had been one of the last living members of a group of top musicians brought personally to Indiana University by then-music school Dean Wilfred Bain, and one of the handful Bain hand-picked to transform the music school into what it is today — the Jacobs School of Music, known internationally as an institution that turns out some of the brightest stars in music.

His professional career as a percussionist, which saw him playing under renowned conductors Stokowski, Reiner, Dorati and Mehta, and his wide range of musical styles — from classical to jazz to Latin to Dixieland — endeared him to the hundreds of students who came to study with the man who once said the Juilliard School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music had "hardening of the cultural arteries." Those schools' refusal of Gaber's offer to build a full-scale percussion department is partially why he ended up in Bloomington in 1960.

"He came from an incredible professional career. He brought a wealth of experience in all kinds of musical settings," said Gwyn Richards, current dean of the Jacobs School of Music at IU. "He had instruments people had never seen before. His eclectic collection was typical of his nature. He was very curious, about everything, and he pursued something until he got to the bottom of it, and that's one of the reasons he was so compelling as a person."

Richards said when Gaber celebrated a birthday ending in "5" or "0," there was a large party.

"It's remarkable, the effect he had on his students. The indebtedness they feel toward him and the outpouring of love from his alumni was unending."

Gaber officially retired from IU in 1986, though Richards said he often visited the music school and "much of the current faculty knew him quite well and we talked with him about the recent changes in the department." Gaber moved into the Meadowood facility in July 2006.

In a 2001 interview with The Herald-Times, Gaber said, looking back on his career, "I wouldn't change a thing. I was very lucky."

Services will be at Beth Shalom Temple at 1:30 p.m. Sunday. Graveside services will follow at Valhalla Memory Gardens. Allen Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Previous stories by H-T reporters Nicole Kauffman and J.J. Perry contributed to this report.

George Gaber's career

- Performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra; the NBC, ABC and CBS orchestras; the Ballet Russe Orchestra; the Israel Philharmonic; the Los Angeles Philharmonic; the Minnesota Orchestra; and the Baltimore Symphony.
- Worked with and premiered works by composers Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Lukas Foss and more.
- Played under conductors Antal Dorati, Fritz Reiner, Walter Susskind, Leonard Bernstein, Otto Klemperer, Isler Solomon and others.
- Worked with Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington and Henry Mancini.
- Taught at Hofstra University N.Y. Philharmonic Scholarship Class and Columbia University Teacher's College.
- Came to Indiana University in 1960 to build the percussion department.
- L lectured throughout the United States, Europe, South America and Asia.
- Was a participant and adviser to the empress of Iran for the Percussion of the World Festival of the Arts in Persepolis/Shiraz.
- Research projects include visiting Mount Athos, Greece, to study the uses of percussion in the religious rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church.
- Artist in residence at Carnegie Mellon University; adjudicator for National Music Arts in Japan and for the Concours in Canada; and Hall of Fame recipient in Percussion Arts Society.
- Recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award Certificate and Gift from the Sabian Company at the Percussion Arts Society convention in Nashville, Tenn.

SOURCE: THE IU ALLIANCE OF DISTINGUISHED TITLED PROFESSORS

George Gaber in 2006.
Chris Howell | Herald-Times



George Gaber, 90, plays an Arabic drum while in his home office in Bloomington in June 2006. Chris Howell | Herald-Times



George Gaber. Courtesy photo

