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In Memoriam: George N. Heller

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In Memoriam

George N. Heller

JHRME Founding Editor

This journal's founding editor, George N. Heller, was born in Ypsilanti, Michigan, on December 19, 1941, and passed away on July 3, 2004, in Lawrence, Kansas. He attended public schools in Dexter, Michigan, and earned a bachelor's degree in music education (1963) at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he was a Ford Motor Company Fund Scholar and a recipient of a Presser Foundation Award. He taught public school music in the Michigan cities of Petersburg (1963–64), Haslett (1964–66), and Farmington (1969–73). From 1967 to 1969, he served as a tuba soloist, assistant conductor, and staff arranger while attached to U.S. Army Bands at Ft. Sheridan, Illinois, and in Heidelberg, Germany. He completed master's and Ph.D. degrees in music education at the University of Michigan in 1969 and 1973, respectively. While working on his doctorate, George was a teaching fellow at Michigan and an instructor of music at Eastern Michigan University. His doctoral dissertation focused on sixteenth-century Spanish music education in Mexico City.

George joined the faculty of the University of Kansas in 1973, rose to the rank of professor in 1985, and retired in May 2002. Along the way he directed six doctoral dissertations and twenty-two master's theses, and wrote more than one hundred articles, book chapters, and books on instrumental and secondary general music methods, world music, and the history of music education and music therapy. Among those publications are twenty-two articles on music education in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (1986) and a book entitled *Charles Leonhard: American Music Educator* (1995).

George served as the first national chair of the History Special Research Interest Group (SRIG) of the Music Educators National Conference, and in 1994 he received that group's first Distinguished Service and Scholarship Award. As an outgrowth of his chairmanship of the History SRIG, in 1980 he founded *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education*. He edited twenty volumes (forty-five issues) of that journal in as many years before passing it on to me at Arizona State University in 1999 (where it became the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*). George also served on the editorial committees of the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, *UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education*, and *The Quarterly Journal of Music Learning and Teaching*, journals in which he himself published prolifically. At the time of his death, he was a member of the editorial committee of the *Journal of Music Teacher Education* and editor emeritus of the *JHRME*.

George was a visiting professor at the University of Washington, the University of Miami (twice), and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (three times). He was a guest lecturer in music at Arizona State University, Ithaca College, State University of New York at Potsdam, Towson State University, and the universities of Cincinnati, Illinois, Maryland, and Rhode Island. He also served on the executive committees of the MENC Society for Research in Music Education and MENC Society for Music Teacher Education, and was a long-standing member of the MENC Hall of Fame Committee. In February 2003 the Kansas Music Educators Association inducted him into the KMEA Hall of Fame.

With experience as a private piano instructor, dance band pianist, church organist, choir director, arranger, tuba player/soloist, general music teacher, band director, professor of music education, and singer in various church choirs, George was a highly versatile musician and educator. He was perhaps best known for his work on the history of music education. Over the years, numerous scholars expressed to me their admiration for his work, and gratitude for his having encouraged and inspired them to achieve in that field—surely one of his most enduring legacies. His founding and editing of this journal and his indefatigable support for his editorial successors is another important contribution to our profession. His University of Michigan dissertation advisor and career-long mentor, Allen P. Britton (1918–2003), wrote in 1988 that George, together with James Scholten and Bruce Wilson, “... kept the torch of historical scholarship alive....”¹ Indeed, for more than three decades discussions on American music education history have invariably included the name George Heller.

As very close friends for over eighteen years, George and I typically corresponded several times each week, starting with “snail mail” and continuing into the electronic age. We discussed and debated many topics over the years, but one that stands out in my mind today concerned the relative importance in life of courage and awareness, with George coming down on the side of the former quality and me the latter. Not only did we never settle that issue, neither of us ever formally conceded the validity of the other’s position. However, during the last two years of his life, when he was battling hard to stay alive, George demonstrated a great deal of both courage and awareness. As his wife Judy wrote on the afternoon of his death, “He taught us all how to live, love, learn, and finally how to die.” The next day she wrote that George “knew

1. Allen P. Britton, “Research in Music Education, with Particular Reference to the Historic and Scientific,” in *Music in American Schools: 1838–1988. Proceedings of a Symposium at the University of Maryland, College Park, August 26–28, 1988, Celebrating the Sesquicentennial of Music in American Public Education*, ed. Marie McCarthy and Bruce D. Wilson (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1991), 126.

he was loved and will be missed, but he was also tired of ‘fighting the good fight’ and [was] ready to let go when there were no more options to try.”

George was a person of great integrity whose courage, awareness, and moral principles required him to do the right things in life, no matter how inconvenient or difficult those decisions and actions might have been (and sometimes were). That characteristic alone made him a rare human being—one who could and did contribute professionally at lofty levels and, at the same time, maintain the highest ethical standards and great cheerfulness, all while actively encouraging others to do the same.

Jere T. Humphreys
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