

David Stivender

Class of 1951

David Stivender devoted his life to music, and as the first American-born chorus master of the New York Metropolitan Opera, he brought the chorus to eminence in the years 1973 to 1990. David's music education began with piano lessons at the age of 12. He soon developed an interest in opera and spent many hours learning the opera scores he borrowed from the Milwaukee Public Library. While attending Wauwatosa High School, he participated in choruses and was a pianist in the orchestra. After graduating from high school in 1951, he enrolled at Northwestern University where he majored in music composition. Graduating in 1955, he spent two years in the U.S. Navy conducting the Bluejackets Choir at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, three years with the Opera Arts Workshop in Atlanta and 7 years as assistant conductor for the Chicago Lyric Opera. In 1963, he won a Fulbright Scholarship to study opera in Rome. It was a time when David said his life "really began." In 1965, he was appointed assistant chorus master of the Metropolitan Opera. With the retirement of chorus master Kurt Adler, David was appointed chorus master in 1973. In 1989, Maestro Levine said, "the chorus has become one of the best in the world." After David's untimely death in 1990, Paul Gruber stated in Opera News that, "His legacy...is the Metropolitan Opera Chorus and we are all his beneficiaries. He has left us a gift to be enjoyed at every performance. When we hear that remarkable group's ardor, its richness, the accuracy of each attack and cut-off, with eighty-two voices singing as one, we're hearing the work of David Stivender. The work will live on, even if we must be without the man."

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