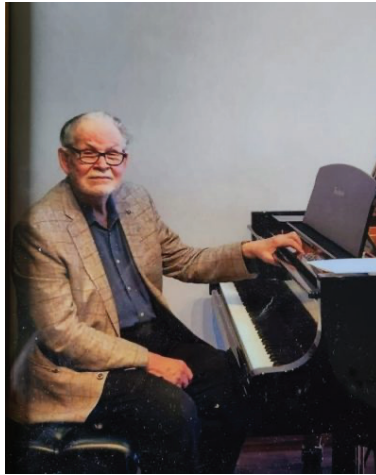


In Memoriam



ROBERT GAULDIN (1931–2025)

By Steven G. Laitz

Leading Up to The Eastman School of Music

Despite having a couple of degrees in hand, I wanted to learn more. I found the application process for the Ph.D. to be challenging, if not terrifying. I learned the unwelcome news that some of these schools required the dreaded GRE. I took the exam along with thousands of other students and received the news that I took a special place near the bottom of the pile for the general exam, though my specific music exam was slightly better. For better or worse, I was invited to visit a number of schools.

I began visiting schools and, at more than one institution, was asked why I did so poorly on the general GRE. At another music department, faculty were excited about their current large-scale project, one of which was a four-semester, highly detailed task of creating a new edition of an early Renaissance mass. At yet another school, I was taken to an elevator and plunged into a dark basement, three or four stories below ground, to the university's library. I was told that the next five years would be spent in this deep and frightful area. Instead, I longed for a rich musical environment—one that would allow me to continue performing, to take a variety of fulfilling courses, and to teach in the classroom. I wanted a different type of scholarship and learning.

The Eastman School of Music and Robert Gauldin

My head hung low. I had but one more interview, so I took an overnight bus upstate to Rochester, New York. Nine hours later, the bus turned into the closed Greyhound terminal. At my questionable hotel, I worried that this might again be a mistake. And yet, I was eager to visit the Eastman School, if only briefly. Upon entering the building at 9:00 a.m., I was told by the guard to sit and wait while he called the chair of the music theory department: Robert Gauldin.

Soon after, I spotted a tall, smiling fellow in curious garb—a combination of an orange checked shirt and a pinkish suit jacket. He walked over and introduced himself: “I’m Bob Gauldin, Chair of Theory; how are ya’? You must be Tim.” I responded that my name was not Tim. Even so, I immediately liked him. He was a real human being.

The Eastman School of Music impressed me immediately as a castle of creativity, spontaneity, study, performance, teaching, listening, and learning—largely thanks to my introduction to Professor Gauldin. He led me to the huge staircase at the end of the main hall and toward the bridge to the Annex, a beehive of working musicians. Every practice room spilled out Liszt’s *Sonata* or Schumann’s *Liederkreis*: conductors dealt with Bartók’s *Miraculous Mandarin*, four students wrestled with Beethoven’s “*Es muss sein*” quartet, composers wore out their No. 2 pencils, and next door an angry cellist broke a string. I even caught a glimpse of a class in session—a young professor filling the blackboard with hieroglyphics: beams, slurs, short and long stems, and the very occasional Roman numeral.

Professor Gauldin took me to his less-than-orderly office, filled with scores, volumes of periodicals, book proofs, and a beat-up piano hiding under countless excerpts and begging to be tuned. He waved his pipe, and it was clear: he was having a grand time. Within a few seconds, I realized I was in a room with a true musician, composer, scholar, and inspiring pedagogue.

He turned to me amid four-foot piles of scores. I had no idea what they were there for, but I soon learned. A river of open scores was aimed at me. “Now, what you need to do is take a quick look at this music and tell me all about it—not just about the composer. Got it?” The first example was easy: “Schubert!” From there, we proceeded to dig into music spanning over five centuries. I loved it, and it was worth being rejected.

After numerous wrong answers, I expected to be ejected into Eastman’s yellow snow. Instead, he asked me to sit at the piano. Bob proceeded to push me through at least thirty scores, from Couperin to Carter, Machaut to Messiaen—nonstop—and I loved it: singing, dictation, and the spontaneous creation of tonal answers in fugues. Then he whisked me off to the library—a powerful and magical city called the Sibley

Music Library. The special collections were astonishing. I held an eleventh-century copy of Guido's *Micrologus*, curiously bound with knotted sheep intestines and covered with some form of worm-laden leather, in my trembling hands.

Finally, Professor Gauldin led me into a huge concert hall. We walked along the first balcony and stopped midway. The Rochester Philharmonic was at that moment playing *The Augurs of Spring*, and in the empty hall it was very loud. That very day, I accepted the invitation to begin a Ph.D. degree in music theory at the Eastman School, and I did so because of the stimulating time spent with Professor Gauldin. Ultimately, I enrolled in every one of his courses and spoke with him at length when it came time to choose a dissertation topic.

In the summer after that remarkable day, I moved to Rochester and spoke with Professor Gauldin about registering for classes. They were noteworthy: Schenker (who?), history of theory (what?), sixteenth-century counterpoint, and electives (piano studies with Rebecca Penneys). As I was leaving his office, he turned and said, "Oh, I forgot—you'll be teaching freshmen at 9:00 a.m. twice a week."

My cohorts included such spectacular folks as Betsy Marvin, Rick Cohn, and Peter Kaminsky. Professor Gauldin brought us all up to speed each week, always from a pedagogical perspective supported by dozens of musical examples. Being entrusted with our own theory sections was an extraordinary opportunity, and success was made possible through Robert Gauldin's support. This trust and encouragement continued until we finished dissertations, earned degrees, and secured jobs. In 1987, Eastman's theory students created a journal (*Integral: The Journal of Applied Musical Thought*), with the support of our entire faculty. Professor Gauldin was especially excited.

Bob offered many gifts, including pedagogical gems—from articles and presentations worldwide to influential textbooks that presented new ideas in teaching sixteenth-century counterpoint and common-practice harmony, to award-winning compositions. Often, there was also a surprise, such as his pop-up lectures in various classes, including the one on *Abbey Road*'s remarkable "second side."

My years at Eastman provided all I had hoped for and more, and much of this was because of Professor Gauldin. I learned that every topic deserves intensive study, that a theorist must, to some extent, be an active musician—whether composer, teacher, or scholar—and that total dedication to one's art goes without saying.

Gauldin's unflagging support, musicality, teaching, publications, and curious sense of humor made him a unique influence. Under his guidance, undergraduates and graduate students alike were encouraged to create, read, write, perform, learn, listen, compose, and teach. Robert Gauldin was central to preparing each of us for a life in music at the highest level—and then to keep striving.

