

In Memoriam

MICHAEL R. ROGERS

May 29, 1942-September 3, 2025

We remember with deep gratitude Michael R. Rogers and his contributions to music theory, especially in the area of music theory pedagogy. Michael's enthusiasm, dedication and insights increased the recognition of music theory pedagogy as a serious area of study and research. His foundational book *Teaching Approaches in Music Theory: An Overview of Pedagogical Philosophies* (Southern Illinois University Press 1984, second edition 2004) is still an important source for anyone teaching theory at any level, and for those leading courses in music theory pedagogy.

Michael's book summarizes various trends and philosophical orientations before the 1980s, a time when music theory was establishing itself as an important area separate from other parts of music study. *Teaching Approaches* analyzes the pros and cons of several different strategies. Michael outlines a process for teachers to determine the goals of each class by chapters on mind training, musical analysis and ear training, emphasizing the importance of both thinking and listening creating an "inseparable bond between these two principal aspects of all theory programs" (p. 8). A curriculum design is then a product of thoughtful consideration of long-term goals: order, pacing and emphasis of materials are informed by these goals as they are appropriate for different teaching situations. Music theory is thus not a group of required rule-bound dull courses, often used to fill up faculty teaching loads, but a vibrant activity which includes both the acquisition of musical knowledge and active participation in perception and performance.

After receiving graduate degrees from the University of Illinois and the University of Iowa and teaching at other universities, Michael began as a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma in June 1985. Gail Boyd deStwolinski had just retired there in 1984 after a 38-year teaching career, and her family, students, colleagues and friends combined to provide gifts for a long-term endowment for a center. This center would collect and disseminate information about the teaching and learning of music theory, especially emphasizing excellence in teaching (as Gail had demonstrated so well) and would publicize the contributions of outstanding teachers around the country. The center named after her was established at the University of Oklahoma in 1985 and its first big project was to launch a new journal, the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*. Michael Rogers was key to this project with the help of Oklahoma colleagues Alice M.

Lanning (who became the managing editor) and James H. Faulconer (the first director of the new center). Michael's dynamic leadership resulted in the publication in 1987 of Volume 1 of the journal. Two parts appearing in spring and fall contained articles and reviews on a wide range of topics. The Oklahoma team of editors was supported by several staff members and had input on content from fourteen of us on the first editorial review board.

The Gail Boyd deStwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy still supports the journal. It expanded activities to award a prize for lifetime achievement in music theory teaching and scholarship (first awarded in 2000) and more recently to support Pedagogy into Practice conferences, peer tutoring, a website for all things related to music theory pedagogy, graduate student workshops, and other initiatives.

Michael Rogers retired from the University of Oklahoma in May 2003 as the Kenneth and Bernadine Russell Endowed Professor of Music Theory. He moved to Eugene, Oregon and taught part-time at the University of Oregon. In 2018 he moved to Raleigh, North Carolina where he died in September 2025. His obituary describes Michael's teaching eloquently: "Known for his insight, analytical brilliance, and deep thinking, he brought both clarity and creativity to his teaching of music theory. His intelligence was matched by a gift for making complex ideas come alive in the classroom in ways that inspired students and colleagues." We are all the beneficiaries of the accomplishments of his life.

The *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* marks its 40th anniversary in 2027. Everyone interested in music theory pedagogy is indebted to the dedication of Michael Rogers at the beginning of this daunting project. At the end of his editorial in the first issue in Volume One, Number One, Spring 1987 (p. 4) Michael summarizes his hopes:

"High achievement in *doing* music theory—creating stimulating ideas, concepts and interpretations; seeking explanations; and seeing relationships—is, of course, something to be proud of. We hope, in a modest, yet tangible, way that this new journal will promote the notion that accomplishment in *teaching* theory well—reaching students' ears, minds, and hearts; intensifying a love for and aesthetic response to music; sharing knowledge in a way that helps to communicate what it means to be human; and making a positive artistic difference in someone's life—ought to be important, too. Because it is."

Mary H. Wennerstrom
Emerita Professor of Music Theory
Jacobs School of Music
Indiana University-Bloomington