



## James E. McCray

February 27, 1938 - March 3, 2024

James Elwin McCray passed away on March 3, 2024, at his home in Fort Collins, Colorado, following a period of declining health. He will be remembered as a loving and supportive father and husband, as well as an influential music professor, administrator of college departments of music, a passionate choral conductor, and a prolific composer. James was born February 27, 1938, in Kankakee, Illinois, to Elwin Lawrence and Grace Williams McCray. He received degrees from Illinois Wesleyan and Southern Illinois University and earned a Ph.D. in Music from the University of Iowa. Before he arrived in Fort Collins, he was a member of the music faculty of the University of South Florida in Tampa, and Chairman of the music departments at Longwood College, in Farmville, Virginia, and St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana. From 1978 until 1988 he was the Chairman of the Department of Music, Theatre, and Dance at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, and retired as Professor Emeritus of Music.

James was a well-known composer, having written and published over one hundred choral compositions that were nationally popular in vocal ensembles in public schools, churches, and universities—many of them commissioned by distinguished organizations. An outstanding teacher, he received the Professor of the Year Award from the honor societies of two different universities, was awarded the Mellon Prize for distinguished contributions to scholarship, and was recognized for excellence in teaching by the Colorado

State Alumni Board. An active church musician during his career, he served both Protestant and Catholic churches for decades, developing extensive, lauded programs. Additionally, he conducted Laudamus, a civic choral ensemble, and authored three books, numerous professional articles, and for forty-one years wrote a monthly column in the international organ journal, *The Diapason*.

As a university administrator, James was a dynamic and efficient leader who planned for the future and found innovative solutions to the changing climate of higher education. An eternal optimist, James was never stymied. He was a strong and vigorous advocate for his department and a fount of ideas for broadening his department's reputation. A particular asset of his leadership and community building was his continuing success at hosting distinguished musicians, scholars, and composers from around the country to interact with his students, and his frequent, and gracious, entertaining of the Fort Collins choral community at his home.

He is survived by his wife, Joanne Campbell, and his children by his previous wife, Chris: son Matthew McCray of Los Angeles and daughter Kelly McCray of Tampa; and step-children Emily Lefler of San Diego, Bradley Lefler of Los Angeles, and predeceased by his stepson, Scott Lefler. James enjoyed regular summer vacations with his family, which included the beaches of Sarasota, stops at Disney World, countries across Europe, and, in retirement, relaxing at the part-time home that he and Jo established in the Las Vegas area. He loved listening to jazz music, seeing theatre in Denver and London, having pizza and movie nights, sitting out on his patio with a scotch and soda—"cocktail time"—and giving gifts to those he loved. He will be missed by all who knew him.

A Celebration of Life for James McCray will be held on Saturday, April 6, 2024, from 1-4pm at CB and Potts in Fort Collins. Family, friends, colleagues,

and former students of James are invited to attend. Please RSVP through the Facebook event, "James McCray, a Celebration of Life." Additional information about the event can be found online or through family members.

In lieu of flowers, gifts in honor of James should be directed to the future James E. McCray Music Scholarship, which the family hopes to eventually endow, to support conducting students in the CSU Department of Music. Checks should be made payable to the Colorado State University Foundation, PO BOX 1870, Fort Collins, CO 80522 or made online at [advancing.colostate.edu/give](http://advancing.colostate.edu/give).

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

APR 6. 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (MT)

CB & Potts Restaurant and Taproom at Collindale Golf Course  
1441 E. Horsetooth Rd.  
Fort Collins, CO 80525

# Tribute Wall

RC

“ Dr. McCray was studying for his PhD at University of Iowa when I attended my Senior Year in High School at the University of Iowa Private High School. He was in his final year of study. What a blessing to have such a gifted choral conductor in my high school year.

*Richard Comly  
University of Iowa High School '69*

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**Richard Comly** - December 20, 2025 at 07:11 PM

GR

“ Dr McCray is one of only two people in my life that can be credited with my love and continued life in music. There are cherished people in my life now that I would have never known without him. I could listen to him talk or play the piano for hours. (see 'Three Blind Mice done in multiple musical stylings :)') He was instrumental in helping me gain a scholarship in choral music which helped me get through school. I will miss you always. God bless you!

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**Glenn Rice** - December 21, 2024 at 01:44 AM

DC

“ For10 years Jim and I shared weekly meetings of department chairs in the CSU College of Liberal Arts. I well remember his good natured sense of humor and also the many excellent programs he helped arrange in the Music Department. CSU was very lucky to have him. -David Clark

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**David Clark** - April 05, 2024 at 02:19 PM

JM

“ *Performing the Mass at Notre Dame with the Larimer Chorale Touring Group under Jim McCray's direction in 2001 is one of the highlights of my life. Thank you, Jim!! God bless you, Jo! John (and Susan) Miller*

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**John H Miller** - March 23, 2024 at 02:44 PM

JM

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



**John H Miller** - March 23, 2024 at 02:40 PM