



Dr. Ralph Lee Mills

April 5, 1922 - March 8, 2016

Dr. Ralph Lee Mills

Ralph Lee Mills was born April 5, 1922 in Cleburne Texas to Roy Lee and Winelle Allen Mills. He was preceded in death by his parents, his first wife of 44 years, Rozella Myers Mills, his sister Anita Mills Miller and brother Bill Mills. He is survived by his wife Sue Walker Mills, daughters Patricia Ann Mills, Linda Sue Ruff, husband Steve Ruff, grandson Eric Ruff, sister-in-law June Mills. He is also survived by step daughters Dorothy Ann Martin and Donna Sue Oliver, step grandsons Austin Martin, wife Sara and Andrew Martin and great grandsons Max Austin Martin and Rex Wayne Martin.

Ralph Lee Mills began his clarinet career in the fourth grade under Dr. Raymond T. Bynum in the Abilene Texas Public Schools through elementary and high school where he played in both bands and orchestras and graduated in 1940. He continued his education at the University of Texas Arlington majoring in music and studying from Robert Ernst, clarinetist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra for two years before the United States Air Force required his service for the next thirty eight months as a bandsman, mostly in Utah and Colorado, where he also played with the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra. Following his discharge, he went directly to San Jose State University where he did most of his bachelor's degree work from 1945 to 1947 and studied with clarinet teacher, Thomas Eagen, who introduced him to

the French School of clarinet playing, while playing in both the Symphonic Band and Symphony Orchestra. In 1947 he became director of the Lamesa High School Band and remained there until 1949 while finishing his Bachelor of Arts degree in performance from McMurry University in Abilene. From 1949 to 1951 he was a band director with the Odessa Schools and member of the Odessa Symphony Orchestra. From 1951 to 1954 Mills was high school band director and coordinator of instrumental music in the Midland schools. In 1954 he became director and coordinator of music for the First Baptist Church, a position he held until 1959. During his eight years in Midland, he was a member of the Midland Orchestra. In 1960, Mills earned his master's degree at the University of Southern California and then his doctorate from the same university while studying clarinet from Mitchell Lurie and playing with USC's Symphony Orchestra, Opera Orchestra and Wind Orchestra. While still attending USC in 1961, he became director of instrumental music at the Garden Grove United High School District and was a member of the Anaheim Symphony Orchestra. In 1962 and 63, he was director of instrumental music at El Camino College in Torrance, California and also a member of the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra.

Dr. Mills returned to Texas in 1963 as Professor of Music, Director of Bands and Chairman of the Instrumental Division of Music at Sam Houston State University, a position he held for over twenty years while also serving as Director and clarinetist of the Faculty Woodwind Quintet and was also a member of the Houston Municipal Band. At SHSU he developed one of the finest band programs in the nation. The performances of SHSU bands include the Texas Music Educators Association (5times), College Band Directors National Association (4times), Music Educators National Conference in Anaheim, California and the combined American Bandmaster Association/Japanese Bandmasters Association in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In 1976 Mills was named Texas Bandmaster of the Year by the Texas

Bandmaster Association. His doctoral dissertation "Technical and Fundamental Problems in the Performance of Clarinet Solo Literature", includes an in depth study on basic fundamentals of clarinet playing and is one of the sources used in Frederick Westphal's "Guide to Teaching Woodwinds", editions 2 and 3. In May of 1988 the State of Texas Board of Regents, Texas State University System, passed a resolution designating Dr. Ralph L. Mills "Professor of Music and Director of Bands Emeritus at Sam Houston State University" to hold that title in perpetuity. The Resolution was signed by all board members and affixed with their seal. It was presented to him personally by the Board of Regents. Dr. Mills' professional affiliations include The American Bandmasters Association, College Band Directors National Association, Texas Bandmaster Association, Texas Music Educators Association, Music Educators National Conference, Houston Professional Musicians Union, Pi Kappa Lambda, Phi Beta Mu, Phi Mu Alpha, and Kappa Kappa Psi. In 1992, Dr. Mills was inducted into the Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame.

The family will receive friends from 5:30 PM till 7:30 PM on Thursday, March 10, 2016 at Sam Houston Memorial Funeral Home in Huntsville, Texas. A funeral service will be held at 1:00 PM on Friday, March 11, 2016 at Elkins Lake Baptist Church in Huntsville, Texas. Interment will follow the service at Brooke Cemetery in Huntsville, Texas.

Memorial donation may be made to the Building Fund at Elkins Lake Baptist Church in Huntsville, Texas.

Full obituary may be viewed and memorial condolences may be made to the family at www.shmfh.com.

Cemetery Details

Brooke Cemetery

672 FM 980
Huntsville, TX 77320

Previous Events

Visitation

MAR 10. 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM (CT)

Sam Houston Memorial Funeral Home - Huntsville
1700 Normal Park Dr.
Huntsville, TX 77340
(936) 291-7300
belinda@shmfh.com

Service

MAR 11. 1:00 PM (CT)

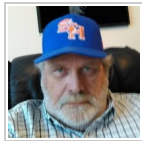
Elkins Lake Baptist Church
206 State Hwy 19
Huntsville, TX

Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. Ralph Lee Mills*

November 15, 2022 at 08:33 PM



“ *I forgot to add one memory... One summer in grad school... There were just two of us in the class.....we talked him into having our final exam at waterwood national golf course...it did NOT require a lot of arm pulling... Lol*

Ralph Trout - March 11, 2016 at 08:22 PM



“ *Patty and Linda...I was so sorry to hear of your Dad's passing. He was an integral part of every student's life who was fortunate enough to be in his classes....and it went beyond playing...he taught us all to be the best that we could be. His legacy lives on in all his students.*

Janice Van Derbur

Janice Van Derbur - March 11, 2016 at 07:49 PM



“ *Ralph was a dear friend, a wonderful teacher, director & conductor. A fierce competitor on the golf course. I will miss him, along with the wonderful times we spent together. Felis & I extend our condolences to Patty & Linda. May he rest in peace.*

LeRoy Melinder

LeRoy Melinder - March 11, 2016 at 07:29 PM

DA

“ I am so sorry to hear of Dr. Mills' passing. I have recently started playing in our community band here in Anchorage. Our director stopped us one evening during a piece in 6/8 time and explained to the band that 6/8 time must be played with a certain lilt. A picture of Dr. Mills popped into my head and made me smile. Forty years after being a member of his band, I still use all that he taught us. His impact was huge, and lives on.

Deb Abshier - March 11, 2016 at 11:06 AM

RC

“ Dear Patty and Linda,

I am unable to attend your dad's service today, but you will be in my thoughts. Dr. Mills was such a major influence in my life it is hard to express. It was a genuine pleasure and honor to have him as a teacher and mentor. The musical experiences I enjoyed in the Symphonic Band and Wind Ensemble are still vivid in my memory. I will always carry them with me. The last time I saw Dr. Mills was when he conducted the SHSU Wind Ensemble at TMEA. I can recall how frail he looked as he was helped across the stage to the podium to conduce Black Horse Troop. I remember thinking what a perfect choice that march was for him to conduct. Once he stepped onto the podium, it was like the years just rolled away. He stood up straight, gave the "ready" and there he was "lilting" away. What a wonderful moment for everyone in the audience who had played under his baton. I join everyone else who wanted to say "thank you" for sharing your dad with us.

God bless.

Robby Caston

Robby Caston - March 11, 2016 at 10:40 AM

PM

Thank you , all of you, for loving our dad. He loved all of you tremendously! Thank you, Robby♥

Patty Mills - March 12, 2016 at 10:08 PM

 Bryant Harris

“ *Rip Dr Mills. He was a big influence in everyone's life. His conducting class was one of the highlights of my college days. Even though I have been away from band directing for more then 30 years, I still find myself "air conducting" all the time. Dr. Mills was also generous with his time, I had no way back to SHSU from TMEA one year, he offered to bring me back. What great time we had driving back to school, just the two of us.*

Bryant Harris - March 11, 2016 at 10:07 AM

MC

“ *Patty and Linda,*

I am so very sorry about your father's passing. He was an inspiration to us all. He showed us how to set goals, and strive towards demanding nothing less than the very best from ourselves and our students. He has left a wonderful legacy of former students who have modeled their teaching careers after him. I love teaching clarinet because of taking lessons from him as I worked on my masters degree. I, thankfully, was able to tell him in person that I loved him at the TMEA convention where he conducted the march. May God bless you both during this time.

Mike and Mary Cudd

Mike Cudd - March 11, 2016 at 09:00 AM



“ I am keeping all of his family close in my thoughts. He touched the lives of thousands. You all have the prayers and love of so many in this difficult time.

*With all my love,
Sheryl Murphy-Manley*

Sheryl Murphy - March 11, 2016 at 08:58 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.*

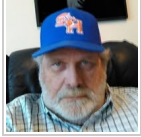


March 10, 2016 at 11:05 PM



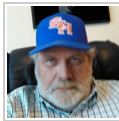
“ *Thanks Dr mills....usually I'd give the golfers goodbye and day "Hit'EM STRAIGHT"..... but then, ...you always did....rip...*

Ralph Trout - March 10, 2016 at 10:23 PM



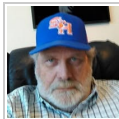
“ Sue...patty and linda....sorry I can't be there to pay my respect but I have two commitments with two band programs here in cy fair...I think he would understand....I'll never forget, Sue...when you two were among the first to arrive at Texas children's when we lost William and you both stayed until the nurses made you leave...after my two rehearsals I'm going to find a golf course and spend the rest of the day there....remembering the moments when it was just me and him on the course talking about golf and music....and of course hitting shots again if we wanted...lol...and ill smile on the podium and probably shed a tear as I line up behind the ball...tap the ground 3 times and try to swing in that 3-4 perfect tempo swing that I used to watch with awe.....

Ralph Trout - March 10, 2016 at 10:21 PM



I was do privileged to have been able to spend hours and hours of time with him that others would have liked to have....but I still think he played the wrong ball on number 10...)

Ralph Trout - March 10, 2016 at 10:48 PM



:)

Ralph Trout - March 10, 2016 at 10:49 PM

RM

“ So sorry to hear this news, and sincere condolences to Ralph's family and close friends.

I was startled to read that he had been at Sam Houston for "only" 20+ years, as, for me, the link between him and the SH Dept. of Music is timeless, and I would have guessed his tenure there to be much longer. He certainly maintained a standard of the highest order with the band program.

I joined the faculty in 1965, and, for years, addressed him as "Dr. Mills," out of respect. It was only at his insistence that, at some point, I started calling him "Ralph;" believe me, that took some practice!

*One reminiscence: In 1969, Mickey Tull asked me to take over (from him) conducting the orchestra for the school musical. The first one, "Sweet Charity" (I'll never forget!) was a combination of sheer fun and terror for this novice conductor. In the terror department (just kidding), I saw Ralph and Rozella walk in to Old Main one night, and *take the two seats immediately behind me,* the conductor. Well, it was at least mild terror to realize that this gifted, veteran conductor was looking over my shoulder, checking the score, checking my every move, etc. (at least, so I thought!) for 2-3 hours. He was very complimentary afterwards, which I'll also never forget.*

R. I. P., Dr. Mills.

Robert Morgan - March 10, 2016 at 05:41 PM



“ A sympathy card was purchased for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.



March 10, 2016 at 05:37 PM

WC

“ A time to remember and think about how much one person can other person. Dr Mills was more than a college professor, he was a wonderful person who took the time to work with many young people. He influences are seen everyday in high school band halls across Texas. I am a better person because not only was I in his band but also I worked for him for many years. My faith is strong because of his family. Patti and Linda you are in my prayers.

Wanda Crouch
4800 Paluxy #109
Tyler, Texas

wanda crouch - March 10, 2016 at 05:07 PM

LR

I miss you Wanda. Thank you.

Linda Mills Ruff - March 11, 2016 at 08:23 AM

PM

Thank you, Wanda. We love you.

Patty Mills - March 11, 2016 at 08:55 AM

MB

“ Much Love, Sandra & Dale Benke purchased the Gracious Lavender Basket for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.



Much Love, Sandra & Dale Benke - March 10, 2016 at 04:56 PM

RS

“ We honor the memory of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills and send sincere condolences to his family, friends, and former SHSU School of Music Colleagues.

*Ronald E. Shields
Dean
College of Fine Arts and Mass Communication
Sam Houston State University*

Ronald Shields - March 10, 2016 at 04:47 PM

WC

“ Wanda Crouch lit a candle in memory of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills



wanda crouch - March 10, 2016 at 04:36 PM

DP

“ My first contact with Dr. Mills was during my senior year, when he was the guest speaker at our band banquet. His love for band and music, as well as his immense knowledge inspired me to follow the path I had begun to explore and become a band director. During my time as SHSU, I never achieved membership to his wonderful symphonic band or wind ensemble, but I was privileged to be in his marching band the last two years he supervised it directly. Over the remainder of my time there, I had many experiences with Dr. Mills, including conducting class. He often confused my name with another student there at the same time, but he knew the difference between us. When we were practicing for halftime at the Astrodome in preparation for a game vs TSU and the following day at an Oiler's game, I was aware of him calling out a name of someone out of line, but I ignored it. He finally called out "Gary, Gary Powell, you are ahead of your line", and I realized it was me he was calling. Even though he often called me Gary, he knew who I was, though. My last meeting was the year of the release of the Ralph Mills collection cd's. I encountered him at Mi Tierra, with Patti and Linda, and when I spoke, he smiled, extended his hand and called me by name, "David, how are you." This after more than a almost two decades without contact. Like his musicianship and knowledge, his memory was also legendary. Rest in Peace, Dr. Mills. You touched my life and I am forever grateful.

David Powell - March 10, 2016 at 04:10 PM

GG

“ I remember my first conducting class in 1972 in Music 1. All the choral students were to take the basic conducting class with the instrumentalists. Frankly, some of us were a little miffed that a choral professor was not teaching us. Our teacher was, you guessed it, Dr. Mills. We **LEARNED** conducting that year! I am so grateful to this day when I demonstrate a technique to students that Dr. Mills was very patient and a great teacher. My next memories were at Elkins Lake Baptist and visiting with the Mills from time to time. He always remembered me from the old days and was so generous with his comments. Blessings to the family and thanks for sharing this wonderful man with us.

Greg Gathright - March 10, 2016 at 12:27 PM

DG

“ I transferred to SHSU from Del Mar Jr. College in Corpus Christi. I remember a Music Education Class taught by Dr. Mills. Each student was assigned an extensive written assignment on his/her major instrument, and this report was to be presented orally to the class. Since there was another clarinetist in the class, my report was on bassoon. On the class day prior to the due date of my report, Dr. Mills reminded me that I was scheduled for the following class day. I pleaded that I needed more time (although I didn't mention procrastination), and Dr. Mills emphatically stated that my report would be ready on time. And it was. Some lessons are never forgotten, and I have always appreciated Dr. Mills "no-nonsense" approach.

My wife, Patrissa, and I had the privilege to visit with Ralph and Sue Mills this past October, when we were travelling to Bryan to visit our daughter and her family. The family of Dr. Mills will be in our thoughts and prayers.

I pray that Dr. Mills might share his music in heaven, and I also hope that there is a golf course there for him to enjoy.

Thank you, Dr. Mills.

David Getz

David Getz - March 10, 2016 at 11:57 AM



“ Sacred Duty Spray was purchased for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.



March 10, 2016 at 09:28 AM

DL

“ To my Wonderful and unforgettable Dr. Mills and family. Oh, Dr, Mills, you made such a major difference in my life. You and your family became my second family when I attended Sam Houston. And Patti and Linda are still very much like sisters to me. You were inspiring, motivating...way beyond genius, and a tremendous leader to us all. I so very much enjoyed my time under your direction! I thank you for your time on earth and am so glad that my Daddy is now with you in Heaven. Thank you for being exactly the way you were here on earth. And if there is an orchestra in Heaven, you will surely take over and make sweet music. I love you and your family always. From Dana Rotondo Leva

Dana Rotondo leva - March 10, 2016 at 09:14 AM



“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.



March 09, 2016 at 11:12 PM

EC

“ *R.I.P. Dr. Mills. Dr. Mills was someone I knew before I met him thanks to my H.S. band director Allen Clark. I heard so many stories about this man and his amazing bands before I arrived at SHSU. He was no longer directing one of his legendary bands when I arrived in 1988 but I did get to take a senior level class with him and he shared so many wonderful insights on what we needed to do to a part of the band legacy that he was such an important part of. I hope that I have done him proud in my efforts to do my very best to continue his legacy.*

*Ernest Cantu
Manzano MS Band
Brownsville ISD*

Ernest Cantu - March 09, 2016 at 10:17 PM

JM

“ When I was a freshman, my clarinet developed a crack. I had to send it back to the factory to get it repaired. They said it would take about six week to get it back to me. I did not have another clarinet and I did not what I would do for an instrument. I told Dr. Mills. He knew my family did not have the money to rent me another instrument and without hesitation, he told me that would be no problem. He handed me his personal clarinet (Leblanc of course) and told me to use it until mine came back. What a kind gesture.

I also made the mistake of skipping conducting one day. He told me later that we chose new pieces and since I was not there he chose for me. He handed me Lincolnshire Posy (which was not in the conducting group)! Then for the last piece, I picked one out the final conducting group, and he came over to me and said "No James you don't want to that one. I have yours in my briefcase." (which he carried into every rehearsal). He pulled out the Hindemith Symphony! I learned my lesson, but I also got to work with Dr. Mills a lot individually to learn how to conduct those pieces. He obviously had a lot more faith in me than I had in myself. Dr. Mills will always one of the heroes in my life. Thank you for all you did for me and your other students. I owe you more than I could ever repay.

James Marioneaux - March 09, 2016 at 09:39 PM

JH

“ Been thinking about this big time today. I was working on my Masters degree and it was time for me to play a Baroque piece for Dr. Mills. My Trumpet teacher at the time was Jess Alexander. The performance of a piece and the interpretation of such is very important at the Masters Level. Jess Alexander was a very dedicated musician, however, the piece we were working on had a "turn" in it as most Baroque pieces do. In Trumpet literature the "turn" is very important. It starts from a note above the main note and ends below. My instructor advised me to start the turn below the note. Well when Dr. Mills heard me play this that way I could see the blood in his face. He said, "Excuse me, I will be right back " Jess did not work there very much longer, I did get my Masters Degree :)

Jerry Henry - March 09, 2016 at 08:30 PM

LR

You're funny, Jerry! LOL.

Linda Mills Ruff - March 10, 2016 at 09:52 AM



“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Ralph Lee Mills.



March 09, 2016 at 07:00 PM