



Dr. James Ritter Werner

May 3, 1944 - January 5, 2014

Dr. James Ritter Werner of Dayton's Five Oaks neighborhood and Yellow Springs, Ohio, died on Sunday from complications due to chronic leukemia. He is preceded in death by his father James Frederick Werner and mother Mary Louise (nee Neiheisel) Werner of Cincinnati, Ohio. Ritter was raised in Cincinnati, attending the Archbishop Choir School and graduating from Purcell High School. In 1972, he completed his doctorate in organ performance at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music where his father and grandfather, both violinists in the Cincinnati Symphony, had studied and taught violin performance and where he met his lovely bride Bonnie Sahadi Werner. They married in 1971. He was third organist at Canterbury Cathedral, England, soon thereafter. He later accepted multiple organist positions in Dayton, playing longest at Immaculate Conception, Holy Angels, and Corpus Christi churches and Beth Abraham and Temple Israel synagogues. He graced virtually every organ bench in Dayton, touching the lives of many choir members, students, and anyone who heard his voice. He also obtained a Masters in Theological Studies from United Theological Seminary and loved his work with the award-winning multi-media translations team for the American Bible Society. He was fulfilled to the end by teaching children and adults music, organ, and religious studies at local schools and colleges, completing his last course emphasizing students' spiritual evolution at UD in December. Recognizable for his unruly beard, bow ties, and jaunty beret (occasionally covered by a bicycle helmet), he was known for his intense love

of people, his witty conversation, and many stories. His greatest joy was being a husband to Bonnie, papa to Martha, Sarah, Leah, and Joshua, and grandfather to Naomi, Mina, Liliane, Rowen and Dorothea. He shared a special musical bond with his eldest granddaughter Naomi, a talented young cellist. He was saddened to miss the birth of his son Joshua's first child. He is survived by his sister Elaine Dumont (née Werner) and her husband Jamie Hutchison of Calgary, Canada; his wife of 42 years, Bonnie; his children Martha Werner Brown, her husband Eric Brown and children Naomi Guth, Mina and Rowen Brown of Yellow Springs; Sarah Werner Kiewitz, her husband Christian Kiewitz and daughters Liliane and Dorothea Kiewitz of Oakwood; Leah Werner of Dayton; and Joshua Werner and his wife Mary Lange Werner of Dayton. In lieu of flowers, please give to East End Community Services to support their partnership with DPO's Q the Music, which teaches Ruskin School students to play string instruments and love music. Viewing will be held on Sunday, January 12, 2014 from 2-6 p.m. at JACKSON LYTTLE & LEWIS FUNERAL HOME- 322 Xenia Ave., Yellow Springs, Ohio. Funeral service will be on Monday, January 13, 2014 at 10:30 a.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 63 E. Church St. Xenia, Ohio 45385 with Pastor Lynn Sinnott officiating. Burial to follow at Glen Forest Cemetery, Yellow Springs. Condolences may be expressed to the family at www.jacksonlyttle.com.

Cemetery Details

Glen Forest

Yellow Springs, OH

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 12. 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Jackson Lytle & Lewis Funeral Homes
322 Xenia Ave.
Yellowsprings, OH 45387
(937) 399-2811

Service

JAN 13. 10:30 AM (ET)

Christ Episcopal Church
63 E. Church St.
Xenia, OH

Tribute Wall



“ *Organic Sparkler was purchased for the family of Dr. James Ritter Werner.*



May 16, 2014 at 03:42 PM



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May 16, 2014 at 03:42 PM



“ *Dear Bonnie,*

Lynn McCaw sent me Ritter's obit.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory!

Please accept my deepest condolences and prayers.

In the Risen Christ,

*Bud Clark
(Father Cyril, CR)
Cathedral City, CA USA*

Bud Clark - January 28, 2014 at 07:32 PM

RR

“ I have never met anyone that even began to remind me of Ritter. He was truly one-of-a-kind! We spent 5 years together at United Theological, making music, sharing great theological debates and conversations, praying together and encouraging one another. His organ and piano playing were BOTH above and beyond that of anyone I knew,..and his passionate love for Jesus Christ - AND his beloved Bonnie - both stirred and encouraged my heart. Thanks for sharing him with us. He holds a very deep, cherished space in my heart. I am so sorry I did not know when his funeral service was. I will ask God to pass along my farewell message of love and appreciation for this special friend.

*In Christ,
Rev. Julia Ronngren
West Unity, OH*

Rev. Julia Ronngren - January 27, 2014 at 09:39 PM

PV

“ Dear Bonnie, Martha, Leah, and Sarah: So many countless memories come flooding back, thinking of all of you, Five Oaks, Corpus Christi, CJ, my own sons You are all in my thoughts with much love. Hans' brother, Jonathan, died from colon cancer in his home in Chicago in February of last year. I am living in Chicago now close to my daughter-in-law and my 2 grandchildren, Ruby, age 6 and Jon Jon, age 4, keeping close to them. Please know I hold all of you (and such fond memories) very close. I will be in touch with Hans. He will want to know. With love, Paula (Vasquez)

Paula Vasquez - January 16, 2014 at 01:35 PM

JH

“ Dear Bonnie,

I was shocked at the news of Ritter's death. I have many good memories of the Werners' tenure at Bellarmine Chapel with their first home as a married couple just down the street. In just a short year and a half Ritter literally turned around the congregational singing for the parish. Parishioner Alice Berkman exclaimed, "He has made us a singing people!"

May God bless you and your family in these days of missing Ritter but supported by many memories. I'm sure the organ accompaniment for the heavenly choirs has now met considerable improvement.

Leo Klein, S.J.

Jackson Lytle & Lewis Funeral Home - January 15, 2014 at 09:31 AM

DJ

“ To the family of Ritter Werner:

I feel so sorry for the loss of Ritter: your husband, father, grandfather, and friend. He was extremely talented and contributed greatly to the music culture of our community.

In May of 1959 my mother and I brought two Beaver Creek High School students (one of which was Ted Gustin) to an organ recital at the Odeon in the College of Music building in Cincinnati. The organ teacher was Wayne Fisher, the brother of my music teacher at Beaver Creek High School, Wallace Fisher. The performers were Ritter, Bob Gene Anderson, Bill Catherwood, Pat Partridge and another student. John Wiseroch was there, also, that evening.

I extend to you my heartfelt condolences.

Donna Jackson

Donna Jackson - January 13, 2014 at 12:36 PM

PW

“ So sad to read of Dr. Werner's death. We were friends from our teen years although I saw him only twice in recent times, the most recent around 2007 when he did a workshop for the Cincinnati Chapter of the A.G.O. He was truly an outstanding organist with performance abilities that boggled the mind, and one of the finest all-around musicians I have ever known. Whenever I talked with him I learned something. He has left us a happier world for his beautiful music and spirit.

*Paul Welch,
Cincinnati OH*

Paul Welch - January 13, 2014 at 09:09 AM

SS

“ Dear Martha, Josh and Leah,

I'm very, very sorry about the loss of your dad. I had a great time talking to him every time I saw him at the seminary. I loved meeting him and putting two and two together (I had never met him when we were all in school together), and getting the occasional update on the three of you. I will miss him very much.

*Blessings and prayers to all of you!
Shannon (Hadley) Sellars*

Shannon Sellars - January 13, 2014 at 09:05 AM

AV

“Ritter was my organ teacher at Wright State and accompanied the Madrigal Singers with whom I sang. He traveled with us to New York. I so enjoyed being in his company. I probably learned the most from him when I directed the choir at UTS where he was the organist and accompanist. We made some beautiful music with that group, and I remember how much he loved the little pipe organ in the chapel there. I haven't seen him for many years, but have often thought of him and spoken of him with others who knew and learned from him. Everyone agreed what a special man he was. I was so saddened to hear of his death. My condolences to his family in your time of loss.

Amy Vaubel

Amy Vaubel - January 13, 2014 at 08:27 AM

MA

“Dr. Werner was a wonderful professor. I had the honor of being in his religion class at U.D. just this past semester. He truly cared about his students, and I know this from the concern and insights he had when we spoke. He never even gave us a hint that he was ill. He conducted his classes with grace and because of his class I am a better person. I will never forget him. I am so sorry for your loss.

Mariana - January 12, 2014 at 09:48 PM

RK

“Dear Martha (and family),
I'm so sorry to hear of Ritter's passing, and I hope that as you grieve, you are surrounded by peace and love, amongst the beautiful memories of your time with him. Sending love,
Rebecca

Rebecca Kuder - January 11, 2014 at 07:03 PM

MS

“Ritter was the first "grown up" I was allowed to call by name, rather than Mr. Werner. I loved singing for him in the I.C. choir and was honored when he invited me to play the flute for Christmas and Easter services. My husband and I were blessed when he agreed to play at our wedding. An awesome person, who knew so much about so many things. I always was mesmerized by how he would twirl his mustache between his finger and thumb, when he was pondering what to say.

Bonnie and kids and grandkids, may you all know the comfort of God's love during this time of grief.

Marie Schleppi-Gaeke - January 10, 2014 at 03:25 PM

MA

“ I met you for the first time at a family picnic in your back yard, on a warm summer day, when I was 16 and dating your son. It was the first time I had experienced a homemade Lebanese feast- of- a lunch where I had my first taste of fresh garlic. (Those Werner’s do love their garlic, by the way.) You introduced me to yoga and its healing ways as you practiced it each day. Your plethora of knowledge on any given topic was your way of comforting others each and every time you stated, “Well, you know...”. I still remember you telling me how my sympathetic system was actually playing a huge part in my nervousness right before our wedding day, and that was not the last time you would grace me with knowledge. Your beautifully crafted calligraphy handwritten notes inside of books given away as gifts are still a treasure to find. Your love of jokes and that boisterous laugh that lingered long after everyone else’s-what a gift to hear. The sparkle in your bright, blue eyes when you talked about your passion-music, religion and any other topic as you commanded, “Ah, its good stuff!”

You distinctly made me the person I am today by silently teaching me compassion, heartfelt sincerity, and a deep weakness for being with family that remained constant. You wrapped me into your family during a time when I needed it the most and all because you had been that teenager once that needed the same love and affection. You were able to recognize that this is what we all needed, and that is how your heart shone through to everyone you met!

Your free spirit will continue to live on in all of us especially me, Joshua, and baby Werner, whom I hope, and am pretty confident will receive all the music prodigy genius-ness you possessed.

Until we meet again, love overflowing,
Mary, Joshua and baby Werner

Mary - January 10, 2014 at 01:21 PM

MA

“ I met you for the first time at a family picnic in your back yard, on a warm summer day, when I was 16 and dating your son. It was the first time I had experienced a homemade Lebanese feast- of- a lunch where I had my first taste of fresh garlic. (Those Werner’s do love their garlic, by the way.) You introduced me to yoga and its healing ways as you practiced it each day. Your plethora of knowledge on any given topic was your way of comforting others each and every time you stated, “Well, you know...”. I still remember you telling me how my sympathetic system was actually playing a huge part in my nervousness right before our wedding day, and that was not the last time you would grace me with knowledge. Your beautifully crafted calligraphy handwritten notes inside of books given away as gifts are still a treasure to find. Your love of jokes and that boisterous laugh that lingered long after everyone else’s-what a gift to hear. The sparkle in your bright, blue eyes when you talked about your passion-music, religion and any other topic as you commanded, “Ah, its good stuff!”

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Your free spirit will continue to live on in all of us especially me, Joshua, and baby Werner, whom I hope, and am pretty confident will receive all the music prodigy genius-ness you possessed.

Until we meet again, love overflowing,
Mary, Joshua and baby Werner

Mary - January 10, 2014 at 12:42 PM

CH

“ To the family of Ritter, We would like to offer our prayers for you. Rltter was such an inspiration to us while we were at Immaculate Conception - he taught me while I was a student along with my daughters when they were students. Please know we will hold you in our thoughts and lift him up to the Lord in our prayers.
Chris Ginger Katy and Lauren Dahm

Chris - January 10, 2014 at 12:19 PM

SS

“ I would like to thank the Werner family for sharing Ritter with so many of the Religious Studies students of all levels at U.D. He was definitely one of the lights on campus! Such gentle, humble and giving souls are hard to find...much less one who is willing, as was Ritter, to sit and listen and dry tears and encourage (and kick you in the rear when necessary!) time and again. He helped me to understand that a certain degree does not a life make nor a particular path determine, but that God leads each of us as God will. Even in these last few difficult years he lived and was a shining example of that truth. I am so very grateful that God led me to Ritter!

Sue S - January 09, 2014 at 09:03 PM

BW

“ The last year of Ritter's life, when the complications of leukemia were placing upon us both unbearable burdens, it was Ritter who kept reassuring me that his sufferings were all part of the Divine Plan, that his life and eventual death were fresh from the merciful hands of God. I have been his wife for 42 years and have known him for nearly 50. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, I have never witnessed such a powerful confession of faith as the final months of his life. Remembering each scene of his reassuring me will sustain me in the grief of the coming months. Godspeed, my dearest friend. May flights of angels greet thee. Bonnie Werner

bonnie werner - January 09, 2014 at 07:39 PM

PC

*Bonnie, was so sorry to hear of Ritter's passing in January. We last saw each other when the girls were very little. I got a glimpse of your life since then when reading the many remembrances from others. You and Ritter and family have had a unique and wonderful life. For you, I know the grieving goes on and on..... Perhaps some day, we can meet up again.
I am living back in Vermilion now.*

Pat Creel - June 03, 2014 at 01:11 PM

PH

*Bonnie,
I am saddened to hear about the passing of your dear husband. Life is too short for good people. My prayers are for you and your family.
Peter Franklin Hess
Corte Madera CA*

Peter Franklin Hess - June 13, 2014 at 05:35 PM

JL

“ *My deepest condolences to the Werner family. Ritter was always very kind to me and we shared a deep love for music. I always admired his passion and dedication to his craft. His life affected many people, even those he knew many years ago.*

Jaime Legato - January 09, 2014 at 07:33 PM

JE

“ *Ritter,
You know.
Jerry
P.S. Thank you*

jerry - January 09, 2014 at 06:33 PM

LS

“ *My deepest sympathies.*

Lathe Snyder

Lathe Snyder - January 09, 2014 at 05:51 PM

KB

“ *Norma and I met Ritter when we joined the Holy Angles Catholic Church choir in Dayton. We sang in the choir for perhaps 10- 12 years. He was so much fun to sing for as his love for good traditional or classical catholic music was infectious to whomever he came in contact with. The music we shared with him was simply beautiful. He was an unbelievable organist whose hands, as well as his feet, rippled the organs keys and foot pedals. My favorite piece of music he played was Toccata from the Fifth Organ Symphony in F, Op 42 #1, by Charles-Marie Widor. I nearly wept every time he played this fantastic piece of music. I know that God Almighty has a special place for Ritter, a man who praised GOD using all the musical talent that he had been given while on earth. I'm sure he is now playing some beautiful music in heaven for GOD, music that he had practiced and perfected during his journey here on earth into the loving arms of his creator.*

Ken & Norma Breakall

Ken & Norma Breakall - January 09, 2014 at 03:08 PM

MB

We would often meet him walking through Five Oaks. He was always joyful and had an uplifting word. Our deepest sympathies. Mary Ellen Batiuk and Joyce Dean

Mary Ellen Batiuk - January 11, 2014 at 01:28 PM

AC

“ We look forward to the time we will be united with our loved ones again. The Bible tell us at John 5:28-29, that this could be possible. It read as following: (John 5:28, 29) (28)?Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice (29)?and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.

Alvera Conyers - January 09, 2014 at 11:41 AM

RS

“ Ritter was a wonderful friend. His music and his generally positive and hopeful perspectives on life were truly inspiring. He enriched our worship and spiritual experiences at Temple Israel immeasurably. We honor his life and are thankful to have known him. May his memory be for a blessing.

Richard and Pat Sapphire

Richard Sapphire - January 09, 2014 at 09:42 AM

SK

“ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO35YpTKr1Y#t=11>

This video, a documentary about Calvary cemetery, is really a beautiful gift. Ritter has several moments discussing grief, the power of music, and the mystery of the resurrection.

Sarah Kiewitz - January 09, 2014 at 09:41 AM

KW

“ I first met Ritter in 1982 when he became the director of music ministry at Holy Angels Church where I sang in the choir under his direction for 15 years. Ritter was not only a wonderful organist and choral director, but he was a master teacher. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of music which he shared with all he met. Choir rehearsals were a joy! His teaching and his enthusiasm for learning was infectious. He was a deeply spiritual person with strong convictions and an energy that just radiated from him. He was a Renaissance man who was always reading and learning. He cared deeply about people never failing to enquire about one's family, work and life. He was a consummate professional who had the highest of standards in everything he pursued, making all of us try that much harder to create what were for me the best musical moments of my life. He understood what music meant as a true ministry for people and God. It was a privilege to be a part of that experience. He loved making music and I was the lucky beneficiary of that gift.

You can count on one hand those you encounter along your way in life who made a difference. Ritter was that for me. The ripples from his life will go out beyond you and me forever.

Kathy Wittberg

Kathy Wittbert - January 08, 2014 at 09:17 PM

SB

“ Ritter, you were always an inspiration to me. A true friend and mentor. You made my heart soar with music. Always making me feel wonderful about my ability to sing to the Lord. Always finding the positive in life's challenges. Your courage and your faith made me a stronger person. I will always keep you close in my heart. Thanks for sharing with me what it means to be a great person. I will miss you. Prayers and condolences to the family.

Suzanne Bergman - January 08, 2014 at 04:40 PM

JB

“ I had the pleasure of getting to know Ritter while I was at Mary Queen of Peace School, Homewood Campus. He was so helpful to me and the children as we worked together to help the children understand Catholic liturgy and music. I learned a lot from him and knew I was in the presence of a Master of music when with him. He made a difference in the lives of many adults and children. Thoughts and prayers are with the family as you mourn his death. I am sure he has first chair in heaven to play for the Lord!
Jane Bensman

Jane Bensman - January 08, 2014 at 03:22 PM

AP

“ We loved when he came into the dental office. He was such a delightful person. He would always leave you with a smile, story and insight into life. We will miss seeing him. Garland & Johnson Dental

april - January 08, 2014 at 02:04 PM

CR

Dear Werner Family,

We are saddened to hear of Ritter's death. Our relationship with him goes back three decades when our three daughters had him as a music teacher at Holy Angels School. In addition, we were blessed by having him as an exceptional organist and choir director at Holy Angels Parish. Later on it was a privilege that Bill had him as a colleague in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Dayton.

Ritter was a marvelous conversationalist, brimming with broad knowledge, wisdom, and a passion for the betterment of humankind. He will, indeed, be sorely missed.

Be assured that he and all of you will be remembered in our heartfelt thoughts and prayers.

Peace, love, and sympathy,

Challon and Bill Roberts

Challon and William Roberts - January 09, 2014 at 07:09 PM

PD

I was, indeed, privileged to make music with Ritter at Holy Angels for many years. He was one of the most talented musicians that I have ever worked with. On top of that monumental talent he was a gifted conversationalist and knew so much about so many things that it was just great fun to talk with him. But he was also a very caring individual who seemed to know when folks were hurting or needed a boost. He did that for me during a most difficult time in my life and I know he did as much for many others. I learned so much from him - and not just beautiful classical and church music, but how to be a better person and to love God more. His own love for God radiated from him and so to others he was a bright light.

To all your family, my sincerest condolences. We will all be joyful when we meet him again!

Pat Detzel

Pat Detzel - January 11, 2014 at 08:29 AM