

In memorium: H. Edward (Ted) Tibbs Enriched the Lives of Students, Arts Patrons

By Michael Huebner

H. Edward (Ted) Tibbs, 1933 – 2010, left a musical legacy and sphere of influence in Birmingham few can match. He died on Friday at age 77, and will be remembered for his relentless support of the arts, unlimited creativity and kind, gentle manner.

A professor, church organist, concert promoter and pipe organ designer, Mr. Tibbs taught at Samford University for 42 years before retiring in 2002, though he continued to teach and perform after retirement.

His last performance was at the 2010 Convocation of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School on Aug. 31 when he performed J. G. Walther's "Praise to the Lord" as an interlude during the convocation service. He was honored during the convocation by Samford's Dean of the Arts, Joseph Hopkins.

"He has influenced the lives of young musicians through his teaching and Christian character," Hopkins said at the event. "His students serve around the country and the world."

In 2009, Mr. Tibbs celebrated his 50th year as organist at Southside Baptist Church. Concerts were held in his honor in 1999 and 2009.

A mainstay at symphony concerts and organ recitals, Mr. Tibbs was active for many years in the Birmingham Chamber Music Society. As president of the Birmingham Music Club in the early 1980s, he rescued the organization from bankruptcy.

"He was like a bulldog with a bone and wouldn't let loose," recalled the late Penelope Cunningham in a 2002 interview.

Mr. Tibbs designed more than 50 organs, including instruments at Briarwood Presbyterian, Southside Baptist, BJCC Concert Hall and four

on the Samford campus. He also had a small pipe organ installed in his home, and owned two grand pianos.

Former Samford arts dean Milburn Price spoke about the legacy Mr. Tibbs' left at Samford and in the community.

"When you have a student from Samford getting a full scholarship at Yale for a graduate program in organ performance, it says a lot," Price said. "His students went to some of the better schools, as evidence of their preparation. But Ted's sphere of influence was not just focused on Samford. He was truly a community arts person."

A New Orleans native, Mr. Tibbs was educated at Furman University, the Eastman School of Music and the University of Michigan. In Paris in the 1950s, he was the first American student of organist and composer Jean Langlais. As a youth in the 1930s, he spent time with his parents in Ger-



many and caught a glimpse of Adolf Hitler.

"I had been hearing the Hitler youth march by my window every morning," he said in 2002. "My mother was distrustful of the Germans' propensity for being led."

Mr. Tibbs had keen musical observations and a quiet sense of humor. As Alabama Symphony organist, Mr. Tibbs recalled a concert by classical music comedian Peter Schickele.

"Schickele said he wanted me to chew bubble gum and blow a bubble every time I changed a chord," he said. "People were taken aback because I was so reserved, but that was the hit of the concert."

A service will be held Thursday at 11 a.m. at Southside Baptist Church, 1016 19th St. South, with friends gathering after the service.