BAILEY SCHOOL of MUSIC

Dr. Laurence Sherr Retires After 30 Years at KSU's Bailey School of Music

By Brooke Marier & Abram Miller

Renowned for his Holocaust remembrance music, Sherr leaves a legacy of mentorship and international acclaim.

Dr. Laurence Sherr, a distinguished faculty member at Kennesaw State University's Bailey School of Music (BSOM), has announced his retirement after three decades of mentoring young composers. Much of Sherr's work has centered on the Holocaust, earning him international acclaim for his education in this field. His 30-year legacy at KSU has seen the growth of the university and its music program alongside his extraordinary musical career.

Sherr began his tenure at KSU in the middle of the 1995-96 school year, initially teaching music appreciation, music theory, and history courses. He developed and taught a world music course to help with accreditation and introduced music technology classes.

By the fall of 1997, he became a full-time professor. Reflecting on his early days, Sherr noted, "The student body was around 12,000 when I arrived, and now we are nearly four times that. Tremendous development has occurred since then."

Throughout his career, Sherr has received numerous accolades, including the University Distinguished Professor Award in 2018, the Madhuri and Jagdish N. Sheth Faculty Award for Distinguished International Achievement, multiple Global Engagement grants, and the University Distinguished Research and Creative Activity Award. He is the only BSOM faculty member to have received the University Distinguished Professor Award.

Sherr's work in Holocaust remembrance music began with a commission from the Carter Presidential Center in 1993, leading to the creation of Elegy and Vision, a piece for solo cello in memory of his youngest brother and his aunt Edith, who perished at Auschwitz. It was then that he had an epiphany: "If this piece is going to be performed at Holocaust remembrance concerts, then I should write pieces that are intentionally created for that purpose," Sherr explained. Thus began his work in composing remembrance music. His compositions aim to weave together music and historical information, offering a means of healing by conveying the profound pain and loss of that dark period while simultaneously instilling hope for the future. Additionally, his work fosters a deeper understanding of the experiences of oppressed, marginalized, and persecuted groups from the past and extends this empathy to those facing similar challenges today.

Sherr's compositions have been performed on five continents and featured in album releases in Europe and the U.S. His album Fugitive Footsteps: Remembrance Music, released in 2023, won a gold medal in the Global Music Award competition. When asked if he had achieved his goals as a composer, Sherr replied, "I surpassed my initial expectations regarding the international reach of my work, but there's much more to do now."

His work as a composer, researcher, lecturer, author, and pedagogue has given him a unique international profile, combining concerts, in-concert lectures, and teaching.

In addition to his compositional work, Sherr has been instrumental in developing and designing the composition degree and classes for the BSOM. He has also hosted new music concerts and worked with living composers, modeling collaboration with colleagues and performers. "My advice to young and upcoming composers at KSU would be to work hard, pursue collaboration so that you can learn from performers, and keep in contact with those people who you collaborate with; networking is crucial to opportunities in the future," Sherr advised.

Kennesaw State University, the Robert S. Geer College of the Arts, and the Bailey School of Music thank Laurence Sherr for his unwavering support of our students and extraordinary contributions to the university. We wish him the very best in his future endeavors.

Left: Dr. Laurence Sherr.
Below: Dr. Laurence Sherr pictured with KSU President Kathy Schwaig.
Images by Lauren Liz Photography (L) and Matthew Yung (below).