

# Obituary: Charles McDonald (1939-2012)

Charles McDonald was born in Arizona in 1939. His early musical training was on the clarinet and he was invited to audition for the Phoenix Symphony while still in high school. In June 1957, following graduation, he joined the US Army, playing clarinet in the 7th Army Band in Europe. While in the Army, he switched to horn, taking lessons with Al Guse, and by October of 1959 he was a member of the horn section of the 7th Army Symphony.

After his discharge in the spring of 1960, he enrolled at Arizona State University and played fourth horn in the Phoenix Symphony. In 1961 he was one of two horn students accepted at Juilliard, where he studied with his idol, James Chambers, for a year.

He played fourth horn in the Buffalo Philharmonic from 1962-64, second horn in the Pittsburgh Symphony 1964-67, third and Wagner tuba in the Cleveland Orchestra 1967-71, and completed his career as third and associate principal in the Minnesota Orchestra 1972-2000. He appeared with the Minnesota Orchestra as soloist, performing Strauss's Second Horn Concerto on several subscription concerts in March 1974.

The fact that he won auditions with four orchestras shows his ability to impress people with his musicianship and his horn playing. He was a firm believer in the Conn 8D, and his warm sound and innate musicality were always obvious in his playing.

He frequently demonstrated on the horn for his students at Akron University and the University of Minnesota, and several of his students went on to hold positions in leading orchestras.

Charles was also a firm believer in the teaching benefits of ensemble playing and was active in horn clubs in each of the cities where he played. He was one of four partners who started The Hornists' Nest in 1964, and was involved in playing and producing two LP's of the HN publications. He was also the conductor of the Twin Cities Horn Club for many years.

Charles was a competitive and direct sort of person. He could be a good friend or a burr under one's saddle. There was little doubt where he stood in any relationship. He loved sports, winning awards in golf, bowling, and tennis, and many trophies in auto racing. He also coached his sons' football teams.

In music and sports, he strived for excellence. He died May 21, 2012.

*Lowell Shaw*

The following tribute was written by three of his students, to be read at his memorial service:

As young musicians and aspiring hornists in the early 1970's, we were in desperate need of someone who could both teach us the techniques of playing the horn and, more



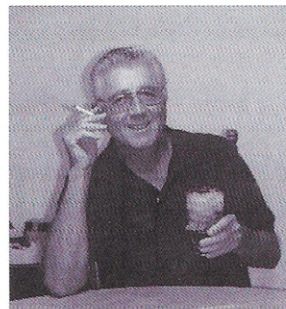
*Charles McDonald  
(1939-2012)*

importantly, a leader who could instill and motivate in us the passion to become excellent "musicians." Charles McDonald (or as he told us to call him, "Charlie"), guided us in directions we never thought possible. Every time we play as hornists we still feel the "soul" that Charlie McDonald transferred to us through the symbiosis of student and teacher.

Charlie gathered together a bunch of rag-tag, horn-player, wanna-bes, and crafted an ensemble of musician hornists. And, most impressively, Charlie was right there playing along with us and treating us as equals in every sense of the word. We thought of him as a friend as well as teacher. There is no

higher honor that we could bestow on him than to say Charlie McDonald lived and loved the horn – the proof was in his incredible horn playing and performances, which often seemed to be too perfect for this world...and now he serenades the stars while all of Heaven welcomes one of the greatest musicians of Earth.

*Ralph D. Wagnitz, former second horn, Cleveland Orchestra  
Charles W. Powell, former third horn, Hamilton Philharmonic  
Robert B. Green, fourth horn, Missoula Symphony*



*Charles relaxing  
during his retirement*



*The Minnesota Orchestra  
horn section in the late  
1970's: (l-r) Phil Meyers,  
David Kamminga, Charles  
McDonald, Neville  
Marriner, Bruce Rardin, and  
Frank Windsor*



*Charles playing Wagner tuba while  
reading about cars (true multi-tasking!)*