

FRANCIS JAMES FORTIER, III

1937-2024

Violinist, conductor, artistic director, fly fisherman, brother, and husband, father, grandfather, Francis J. Fortier, III passed away early Saturday morning at the age of 86. His wife of 40 years, Deborah, and his dear friend Allison were by his side.

Born in Yonkers to Virginia and Frank Fortier, Francis was the eldest of four children. At a young age, he walked past a music store, fell in love with a fiddle in the window, and was off to the races.

He graduated from Columbia College where he majored in music and minored in history, then spent a year of special study at Yale under Joseph Fuchs before attending The Juilliard School for four more years. There, he worked under Ivan Galamian and Dorothy Delay. In 1966, he won the Bath Festival Award, allowing him to apprentice with Yehudi Menuhin at the Bath Festival in England.

In 1967, inspired by Menuhin's belief in the concept of "beautiful music in beautiful places," Francis founded the Bar Harbor Music Festival, a series of classical music concerts held in Bar Harbor, Maine every summer. For 57 years, he served as the Festival's Artistic Director. It became a fixture of summers in Acadia and a launchpad for countless up-and-coming artists. On July 30th, 2023, Francis conducted the Bar Harbor Festival String Orchestra in what would become his final performance. As always, it was met with a standing ovation.

Francis believed that everybody deserved to have music in their lives. He created a free string orchestra concert in Blackwoods Campground, Acadia National Park and became artist-in-residence at more than 2,000 colleges, universities, community arts councils, and elementary schools. Going from classroom to classroom, he wove music into every discipline, from the mindblowing *physics* of the vibrations of the bow on the strings to music's prominent place in history in the humanities. Himself an athlete, Francis galvanized students by speaking about music using the bold, confident language usually reserved for sports stars.

He kept a tireless, regimented schedule but made deep, sincere friendships along his daily circuit: postal workers, bank tellers, and grocery store clerks knew Francis and he knew them. In the 60s and 70s in Bar Harbor, if you wanted to hear a touch of violin in the morning, all you had to do was walk by Francis' summer cottage and like clockwork, you would be treated to the routine of a world-class violinist.

He had a flair for the dramatic; his children met his stories with a reasonable dose of incredulity, but in his passing those stories instantly became the stuff of legend.

Maris' 61st home run went right over Francis' head— he refrained from trying to catch it lest the screaming liner take off his hand and with it, his livelihood. He had healthy rivalries with brook trout up and down the Esopus, Beaverkill, Willowemoc, Bouquet and Saranac Rivers.

When a wealthy violin collector approached Francis, then a student at Juilliard, seeking someone who would teach him to play his favorite piece *without* inflicting on him the drudgery of arpeggios and scales, Francis promptly turned him down – the fundamentals were non-negotiable. After meeting with several more prospective instructors, the Collector circled back to hire Francis, the lone student who dared tell him *no*. The man learned his scales, mastered the piece, received a standing ovation, and then gifted Francis a precious violin from his collection.

He is survived by his wife, Deborah, his eldest son, Matthew, his favorite daughter, Clarissa, his other favorite son, Gregory, and his newborn granddaughter, Ava Lynn Fortier.

Before his passing, Francis passed the torch of the directorship of the Bar Harbor Music Festival to his protégé, Allison Kiger. Memorial Services will be in New York City on June 2 at the Liederkrantz Club and on July 25 at the Kebo Valley Golf Club in Bar Harbor, Maine.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating in Francis' honor to the Bar Harbor Music Festivals at barharbormusicfestival.org.