



Martin Zielinski Jr.

May 30, 1930 - December 24, 2022

Martin (Marty) Zielinski, Jr. passed away peacefully on Christmas Eve surrounded by family, from complications of a stroke. He was 92 years old. For most of his life, he would have been playing a church concert that night. For nearly all his years, he was a trumpeter of great achievement and unusual versatility, whose career exemplified both the joy of music and the rigor of sustained excellence.

As a classical musician, performing with orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, under music director George Szell, he had the pure, rounded tone most horn players spend a lifetime trying to attain. Playing popular music and jazz, his sweet, warm sound was reminiscent of Harry James, one of the swing-era players Martin grew up admiring.

Martin played it all, with equal skill and passion—from orchestral and chamber music to opera, Broadway tours and church services to jazz, and including popular music from throughout the past century and around the world. His first love was classical music; through the years, in addition to Szell, he played under the batons of Lorin Maazel and Pierre Boulez, among other notable conductors. In Cleveland, where he raised his family, he was a first-call musician to visiting stars, including Joan Sutherland, Dave Brubeck, Shirley MacLaine, Maureen McGovern, Glen Campbell, Isaac Hayes and Liberace. Drawing upon his Polish roots, he had a special expertise in polka music,

earning two Grammy nominations in that category.

Martin mentored young musicians on nearly every instrument and at all levels, from beginners to conservatory students, through his work as a private teacher and as an orchestra and band director. Many of his students went on to distinguished careers, always returning to pay him tribute. He and his wife of 65 years, Shirley (nee Grove)—who was also his frequent bandmate—formed a team-teaching partnership that spanned five decades; their work together starting in the 1960s served as a template for many other schools.

Martin was, above all else, a family man. The home he and Shirley established was filled with music and culture, and it rubbed off. His son, Robert (TR) Zielinski, a professional violinist in St. Augustine, Florida, plays in a wide range of ensembles with the same talent and versatility as his father; his daughter, Erica Zielinski, works in New York City as an arts manager and creative producer, having held positions at arts organizations including Lincoln Center and the New York Philharmonic. Martin brought the same high-spirited energy that he applied to music to the many family adventures he led—backpacking and camping in his pop-top Volkswagen van—and to all manner of physical activity, from biking to hiking, golf to skiing and skating .

Martin was born on May 30, 1930 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to Anna and Martin Zielinski Sr. His father, who emigrated from Poland at age 11 with his parents and seven siblings, worked first as a coal miner during the Depression, and then as a machinist during WWII, having moved the family to Cleveland, Ohio when Martin was 11. His mother worked at the fastener company Lamson and Sessions. As a young boy, Martin would visit the showroom of the H.N. White company, an instrument manufacturer (later, the King instrument company) just blocks from his home, to marvel at the shiny brass horns. A newspaper advertisement inspired his 13th birthday present—a trumpet, packaged with a year of lessons. Martin never looked back. Always

striving, he posed as a 16-year-old to secure an after-school job setting up pins at the local bowling alley. Those paychecks funded his further musical studies.

He had a keen ear for popular jazz of the day. Yet as a member of the East High School concert band and orchestra, in Cleveland, classical music became his primary focus. He and a fellow trumpeter spent many evenings in the upper balcony of Severance Hall listening to Artur Rodzinsky and the Cleveland Orchestra, following along with orchestra scores. He interrupted his studies at Kent State University to enlist in the army during the Korean War, serving from 1952-55. He played trumpet and bugle as a special bandsman in the West Point Military Academy Band, receiving commendations including a National Defense Service Medal. While at West Point, he furthered his musical studies at Juilliard School of Music.

Upon his discharge, he returned to Ohio to attend Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory of Music, where he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music Education in 1956 and first met his future wife, Shirley Ann Grove, a fellow music student studying clarinet. Following graduation, his life in Cleveland as a musician and educator was busy and diverse. He began teaching at Educator's Music, in Lakewood, Ohio, an influential instrument showroom and music studio that is still in business. He was an auxiliary trumpeter for the Cleveland Orchestra and principal trumpet with both the Akron and Canton Symphonies. He played in the Blossom Music Center Festival Band and Lakewood summer band, and was a first-call hire for top venues of the day including the Hanna Theater, Front Row Theater and Music Hall. When the Metropolitan Opera toured to Cleveland, Martin was hired as a walk-on extra in operas such as *La Bohème*. In addition to the pilot programs he and Shirley created for Catholic schools in Cleveland, he served as adjunct professor at the University of Akron and Malone College. Martin continued to further his

own studies, taking advanced studies at Case-Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Music. Throughout his career, he credited his own influential teachers, including Louis Davidson, Frank Hruby, Bill Vacchiano, and Mary Squires.

In 1987, Martin moved to Jacksonville, Fla., to join the St. Johns River City Band at the invitation of his former student, Paul Chiaravalle, the brass band's director at the time. There, as both trumpeter and librarian, he helped establish the ensemble as an important fixture of the city's cultural life and identity (the group also performed at Carnegie Hall, and worked with guest artists including guitarist Chet Atkins). In Jacksonville, Martin continued his work as an educator, working in the Bolles and Bartram Schools, Duval County public schools, Hendricks Day School, and the Suzuki Talent Education Studio. He recorded and toured with leading polka bands, led by Hank Haller, Joe Oberaitis, and others. He formed The Continentals, including his wife and son, along with accordionist Dennis Hunsicker and tuba player Landon Walker, to perform repertoire from many traditions, including German, French, Irish, Mexican and Italian. He played this music with the same passion and precision as a symphony, occasionally singing a tune here and there. He loved gathering new repertoire wherever he went, and learning the history connected to each one.

At home, he was an avid reader, especially of biographies, and he loved to watch historical documentaries. Like most great teachers, he was a lifelong student. His own resilience, right up until the end, was connected to the music he loved. Even after retirement from the schools, he continued teaching in his home studio. In St. Augustine, where he lived his final year, during the pandemic, he offered music as a salve, playing trumpet from his wheelchair on his front porch as his grandson Ian accompanied him on a field drum.

Spirituality was always important to Martin. He received his First Communion

in the Catholic church, and was married in an Episcopal church. He raised his family as Unitarian Universalists. Throughout his life, he drew spiritual sustenance and inspiration from music, culture and nature. In 2015, he was baptized in the Church of Latter Day Saints.

Martin is survived by his wife, Shirley; his daughter, Erica, and son-in-law, Larry; his son, Robert and daughter-in-law, Kimberly; and two grandsons, Ian and Sam.

Martin will be laid to rest with military funeral honors at the Jacksonville National Cemetery, one of 155 cemeteries dedicated to those who served honorably in the U.S. military, at a future date to be announced.

His family is planning a celebration of Martin's life with musical performances and spoken tributes in spring/summer 2023.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to Baldwin-Wallace University Conservatory of Music in memory of Martin Zielinski to provide scholarship funds for deserving students who strive to become the next generation of citizen artists. Donations can be made online at <https://www.b-wcommunity.net/give> or mailed to: Baldwin Wallace University Center for Philanthropy, 275 Eastland Rd, Berea, OH 44017.