

# Remembering Susan Porter

## 1941-1993

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Susan Porter, one of the staunchest supporters of the American Music Research Center, died Sunday evening, October 3, at the home of her son, Mark, in Loveland, Colorado, after a four-year battle with cancer. She had returned to Colorado from her teaching position at The Ohio State University at Lima, Ohio, to be with her family during her final days. Shortly before her death, the Sonneck Society for American Music honored her with both the Irving Lowens Award for her *With an Air Debonair: Musical Theatre in America, 1785-1815*, as the best book on American music published in 1991, and the Distinguished Service Award for her nationally recognized work on behalf of American music.

As a Ph. D. candidate at the University of Colorado during the 1970s, she already displayed the leadership evident in her later professional life. She received an outstanding teaching award as a part-time instructor. She was not content to let her thesis, constructed around the ballad opera *Children in the Wood*, be simply a scholarly contribution, but she supervised a complete concert presentation by the musicology students and faculty and even talked the theatre department into mounting a full-scale production.

The fifteen years following the completion of her degree found her at the Lima campus of The Ohio State University. At first, her principal responsibility at this two-year school was teaching music fundamentals to aspiring grade-school teaching majors, a dubious assignment for a budding Americanist. Nevertheless the result of this experience was a textbook, *Basic Experiences in Music for the Elementary Teacher* (1985) and other works which made music education a continuing and important part of her professional activity. Susan soon enlarged the scope of her teaching to include courses in American and European music history. She also became the Americanist on call at the main OSU campus in Columbus, supervised graduate students, and, during the past few years, regularly taught courses in American music, music of Ohio, and folk music. Such was her growth in teaching stature that she received the first full professorship ever awarded to a woman on the OSU Lima campus, and this past year she was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame.

Susan immersed herself intensely in the music of her community—producing musicals such as *West Side Story* and *A Chorus Line*, appearing as a folk-singer and dulcimerist, serving on various arts committees and community concert programs, organizing performances of early music, reconstructing the history of the Lima Opera House, and, of course, directing the nationally known Black Swamp Dulcimer Festival (1979-93), which soon outgrew

the Lima campus. In 1990, it had to be limited to 1,000 participants from 26 states and Ontario, 7 concerts, 146 workshops, and 33 vendors and exhibitors!

Susan loved to visit the UK, whether as the leader of a musical tour or as a researcher retracing the careers of the 18th-century actor-singers who were to come to life again in her book. She also loved theatre, and rarely missed the opportunity to attend a Shakespeare or Sheridan performance. Throughout all of her intense teaching, community, and service activity, she maintained an unwavering dedication to her research in early American musical theatre, as her articles and papers culminating in *With An Air Debonair* show.

At her death, she was in the midst of a large bibliographical project for the American Music Research Center—the production of a computer-based catalog of all musical numbers in some two-hundred 19th-century Anglo-American operas in the AMRC collection. She had planned this as a model which could be extended to include holdings in other major libraries. In assisting her, I marveled not only at her grasp of the field but also her drive and good, even jocular, humor, with the imminence of death facing her. Her favorite comment, preceded with a chuckle, was: “Well, Bill, you’ll have to take care of this when I’m not around.” But she took care of *so very much* during the years allotted her!

Susan designated the American Music Research Center to be the repository of her professional library. It consists of numerous books and music, a substantial tune book collection, a large collection of folk music materials principally related to the dulcimer, and early Anglo-American theatre materials. She is survived by her parents, three sisters, her husband Harold of Longmont, Colorado from whom she was separated in 1972, her two sons and their wives, Mark and Betty of Loveland (together with their children, David and Kyle) and Lael and Amanda of Fargo, North Dakota. Contributions in her memory can be made to the American Music Research Center, College of Music, Campus Box 301, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309, or the Reed Music Scholarship Fund at The Ohio State University at Lima, 4240 Campus Drive, Lima, OH 45804.

—William Kearns  
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