

Celebrating JOHN MARCELLUS



A MAESTRO OF MUSIC,
COMMUNITY, AND JOY

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS

DECEMBER 31ST, 2024

John “Doc” Marcellus was a man of extraordinary talent, boundless humor, and a deep love for the arts and community. His legacy resonates far beyond Chautauqua Lake, New York, where he made an indelible mark with the Bemus Bay Pops, to the international music world where his accomplishments as a performer and mentor earned him enduring respect and admiration.

John was a man of immense talent and determination. Whether he was pursuing a project, lending a hand to someone in need or simply enjoying a quiet moment of reflection, John approached life with passion and intention. His ability to find beauty in the world, even in its simplest form, was a testament of his remarkable spirit.

John's vision and leadership shone brightly as the driving force behind the Bemus Bay Pops where he transformed the shores of Chautauqua Lake into a hub of artistic celebration. Under John's orchestral guidance along with Bruce Morton Wright and Steve Swanson, the Pops became a beloved institution offering unforgettable performances that united the community and celebrated the joy of music. John's love for the arts extended beyond the concert hall. He envisioned music as a unifying force, a belief that inspired him to join Dan Dalpra/Founder in the creation of the Bemus Bay Pops. This floating stage program became a summer tradition hosting performances that drew audiences together under the open sky and on the waters of Chautauqua Lake. The Pops reflected John's passion for making music accessible, meaningful and enjoyable for all. John's life was truly a symphony of dedication, talent, service and love. A masterpiece composed over decades!



As a trombonist, John achieved global acclaim performing with some of the most prestigious ensembles and earning recognition as one of the finest brass musicians of his generation. Marcellus was the conductor of the Eastman Trombone Choir, Eastman Bionic Bones (jazz trombone ensemble) and the trombonist with the Eastman Brass. While at the Eastman School of Music, John was named the Kilbourn Professor for 1982 to 1983. He succeeded the trombonist teacher, Emory Remington, who served as Professor of Trombone at Eastman close to 50 years. John retired in 2014 after 36 years at the Eastman School of Music. John also served as the Associate Principal Trombonist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and was the Principal Tuba with the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra at the young age of 16.

His tenure at the Eastman School of Music, where he served as Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Trombone and Chair of the Woodwinds, Brass and Percussion Department solidified his place as a luminary in the field of music education. Over many decades John mentored countless students from around the world, many of whom went on to become performers and educators perpetuating his influence in the art of music. Some of the universities included Yale, UCLA, Penn State, Texas A&M, Boston and Manhattan School of Music. Many of John's former students can be found playing in the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Miami Philharmonic, Toledo Symphony, Tulsa Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Naples Philharmonic, San Antonio Symphony, U.S. Marine Band, U.S. Air Force Band, U.S. Naval Academy Band, U.S. Army Field Band, the Glen Miller Orchestra and many others.





John was a man of integrity, kindness and quiet strength, born with a heart as vast as the sky and a soul that seemed to know no limits. He touched the lives of so many in ways both profound and personal. He was a loving son, a loyal friend and for many of us a source of unwavering inspiration. Throughout his life John carried himself with a grace making everyone feel seen and valued. He gave generously of his time, wisdom and energy to insure others felt supported and uplifted. John was given an extraordinary gift for music and a commitment to excellence. His journey began humbly, but his passion for the trombone and his relentless pursuit of artistry led him to some of the most significant stages of the world.

John's dedication to his family was unparalleled. To his loved ones, he was more than a presence, he was a pillar. His words were a source of comfort, his laughter a reminder of life's joy and his guidance a steady light in times of uncertainty. John was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and a source of wisdom, strength and unconditional love. His family was his greatest joy and he cherished every moment spent with them creating memories treasured forever.

A proud veteran, John served his country with honor in the United States Navy. During his time in the service he exemplified the values of discipline, courage and commitment defining every chapter of his life. John was internationally known for his performances and recordings as Principal Trombone of the National Symphony Orchestra (John F. Kennedy Center, Washington, DC) and was a soloist with the United States Navy Band from 1960 to 1964.

John received several notable awards and honors including: the International Trombone Association's highest award for Pedagogue Performance and Literature in 1999, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Trombone Association, of which he was president and founding member, the Neil Humfield Teaching Award in 2011 and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Eastern Trombone Workshop in 2011. He was honored for his outstanding career as a musician and educator in April 1997 by the New York Brass Conference for Scholarships at their Silver Jubilee Brass Conference in New York City. In 1997 John was given the Mu Phi Epsilon Musician of the Year Award.

John Marcellus was much more than a musician; he was a vibrant personality who brought joy and laughter to all who knew him. His sharp wit and lighthearted spirit made him not only a beloved teacher but also a cherished member of the world-renowned Chautauqua Institution community. Whether sharing a humorous anecdote during a rehearsal, steering his boat across Chautauqua Lake, or engaging with friends and neighbors, his zest for life was infectious.

His contributions weren't confined to Chautauqua or even the United States and Canada. Through his teachings, performances and outreach, John Marcellus left a worldwide legacy, influencing many lives and enriching the global music community. John's contributions to the community extended far beyond the stage. He was deeply involved in local initiatives, offering his time and talents to causes enriching the lives of others. Whether mentoring young musicians, organizing events or simply offering a helping hand, John's generosity knew no bounds.





As we honor John Marcellus we celebrate a man who was not only a master musician, but also a dedicated educator, a cherished community member and a joyful soul. His life reminds us of the power of music to connect and uplift, the importance of humor in our daily lives and the enduring impact one person can have on the world. His legacy will continue to resonate through the notes of his students, the laughter of his friends. John's life was a testament of passion, perseverance and service. He taught us true greatness is not measured by accolades or in the milestones achieved, but by the lives we touch and the legacy we leave behind. He taught us the importance of kindness, resilience and the courage to follow our dreams. John was a maestro not only of music, but of life. Your legacy will resonate in our hearts forever. May you rest in peace, knowing your life's work has enriched the world in ways words can scarcely capture.



“My dear friend John Marcellus was a rare soul—his music moved hearts, his humor lifted spirits, and his passion for life inspired everyone around him. He was a maestro not just in music, but in the art of living fully and generously. Rest easy my friend. You can now play your trombone for all eternity to enjoy forever!”

***Dan Dalpra,
Founder & CEO - Bemus Bay Pops***

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