



Richard D. Lapo

June 6, 1932 - March 29, 2018

Richard D. Lapo was born in Ithaca New York to Cecil and Beatrice Lapo. His family which included his sister Carol (Carol Lapo Smith) also lived in Cuyahoga Falls Ohio and Wichita Falls Texas. Richard graduated from Wichita Falls High School and trekked to Westminster Choir College in Princeton New Jersey. Following in their father Cecil's footsteps, both Richard and Carol graduated from Westminster Choir College. After he received his BA in Music, "Dick" completed his Master's degree also at Princeton in 1955. Westminster continued to be a lifelong theme and inspiration in his work and accomplishments.

While attending college, one of his favorite summer jobs was working at Yellowstone National Park where he hauled garbage by day and led sing-alongs and nightly entertainment for the tourists in the Old Faithful Lodge by night. This added a note of hilarity to his classical training that was woven into his life.

After graduating he was immediately recruited to Catalina United Methodist Church as the minister of music where he grew a multigenerational choir system of 11 choirs and 500 choristers. He also met a lovely young soprano in his adult choir, named Nancy. They made their life together for the next 61 years. They had two children Debra Lapo and Robert Lapo while living in Tucson. He also continued music ministry at churches in Florida and Phoenix until Dr. William E. Steward, also an alumnus of Westminster Choir College, recruited him to music faculty at Wenatchee Valley College.

He and Nancy packed up the family and arrived in Wenatchee hauling a U-Haul trailer on a dismal grey snowless winter day in January 1967. While Richard enjoyed his multiple roles as choral conductor, instructor of voice, music theory, music appreciation etc. at WVC, Nancy taught for Head Start. It was through this program that William (Andersen) Lapo became known to our family and was adopted into it.

It takes pages to write all of Richard's accomplishments, productions and performances in his years at Wenatchee College 1967-1994 and following into retirement. Highlights included performing the lead roles of Curly ("Oklahoma"-1969), Fagin ("Oliver"- 1971) and, his favorite of all time, Tevye ("Fiddler on the Roof" -1973 and 1988) with Wenatchee Music Theatre. He started a community chorus which later became Columbia Chorale, conducted the YMCA Boys' Choir, and, together with Keith Sexson produced and directed numerous WVC musicals including several productions of Menotti's "Amahl and The Night Visitors". In 2004 he was awarded the Stanley Lifetime Achievement Award and had previously been named Instructor of the year at Wenatchee Valley College in 1985.

He retired from Wenatchee Valley College in 1994 and even then continued his life in music serving as NW Liaison for the Community Concert Association along with his wife Nancy. Throughout his career of teaching, conducting and performing, his wife Nancy was by his side: He was the front man and she was his supporter and steadfast partner. Taking his final bow, Richard Lapo passed away, his family and wife Nancy at his bedside. He lived a rich and wonderful life. Well Done. Bravo!

(Final Curtain)

He is survived by his wife Nancy Lee Lapo; daughter Debra Lapo and her husband John Ballinger; Deb's two children Karl Lapo, of Bayreuth Germany, and Kristiana Lapo, of Bellingham; sons Robert Lapo and William Lapo; and sister Carol Lapo Smith and husband Leonard Smith of Raleigh NC.

Join the Lapo family for a Celebration Open House to remember Dick Lapo on Monday, June 4, from 5 to 7PM at the Wenatchee Valley College Music and

Art Center on Fifth Street. If you have ever sung under Richard's direction, join the Columbia Chorale at 6:15PM to gather in The Grove to sing the Lutkin Benediction.

Nancy, Debbie, Kristiana, Bob, Bill Lapo, & John Ballinger and
The Wenatchee Valley College Foundation

Throughout his career at Wenatchee Valley College, Richard watched out for those who were in need of money or scholarships in order to allow them to remain in school. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Wenatchee Valley College Foundation Knight's Fund in memory of Richard Lapo.

Tribute Wall



“ 2025: A random discussion with a friend reminded me of Dick Lapo, our choir director at Catalina Methodist Church in the 1960's. What an amazing, enchanting leader, able to corral hormonal teenagers into a pretty good choir with humor mixed with musical excellence. I still remember his trick of holding a note with his hand, showing up those of us who weren't paying attention. And some silly ditty about the peanut butter which taught us diction. He left a lasting legacy beyond what his loved ones could possibly imagine.

Feather Houstoun - October 24, 2025 at 07:53 PM



“ Wonderful memories of two giants of the Wenatchee musical community: Richard Lapo and Walter Hansen: "For You My Friend" vocal recital, with "Mr Hansen" on the keyboard...

Cici Asplund - May 12, 2018 at 02:23 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Cici Asplund - May 12, 2018 at 02:21 PM

JS

“ *Debbie - So sorry to hear of your father's passing. Our Dad passed almost 2 years ago. I know they were friends. Prayers and blessing to you and your family.*

Judy Brizee Seraphin

Judy Seraphin - May 03, 2018 at 12:23 PM

DS

“ *Thank you Lord for a wonderful friend an mentor an the joy of laughter in between songs We are gonna miss you sooo much cuz it's rare to find a choir director who said it like it was an could make and carve voices to sound like angels singing in the choir for the Lord*



Prayers hugs

Dave Sweet - April 20, 2018 at 01:52 AM



“ *1 file added to the album New Album Name*



Nancy Lapo - April 13, 2018 at 11:10 PM

KH

“ I owe so much to Dick Lapo for helping me become the singer I am.
He let me grow and come to love music and singing as only he
could.

*He gave me the opportunity to arrange and direct and gave me
encouragement all the way*

My prayers are with Debbie and Bob and the rest of the family.

He was a great guy !!!!

Kelly Hersel

Kelly Hersel - April 12, 2018 at 01:12 PM

CA

“ *Connie Adams lit a candle in memory of
Richard D. Lapo*



Connie Adams - April 11, 2018 at 11:46 AM

CA

*I didn't know Mr. Lapo but I do know his daughter, Dr. Debra Lapo. I am
sure he was an amazing man. RIP.*

Connie Adams - April 11, 2018 at 11:48 AM

LN

“ Oh my, where to begin.....Dick Lapo was my beloved teacher and "Music Man" in my life. He welcomed me into his wisdom back in 1970 when I attended WVC as a music major. I had started singing at a very young age but thru my High School years never had the chance to use my soprano voice. When I applied for a Morris Merit Scholarship Dick had the vision that, although I had spent 3yrs in high school as an Alto, I needed to develop my soprano voice. Thru his mentoring I attained the Morris Merit Scholarship and was able to complete my 2 yrs of music studies at WVC. Of course part of the stipulations of the scholarship included performing, writing music & music theory. I will always remember his encouragement, support and guidance. He was always worrying about me losing my voice since I was a Cheerleader for the WVC Knights also, so he taught me how to cheer with my diaphragm. Imagine that!

He shared his knowledge and time beyond the classroom. There is a phrase he taught me & to this day it has carried me thru various life challenges: "Poise is power!"

He will always hold a special place in my heart not only as a great man and beloved teacher. Thank you, Dick, for all the talks after class, words of wisdom and becoming a wonderful friend. My deepest sympathy goes out to Nancy and all of the Lapo family.

I still can hear him singing "If I were a Rich Man" from Fiddler on the Roof. You were a "rich" man indeed, Dick Lapo. Until we meet again.....sing with the angels.

Loni (Roy, McFadden) Nealy (WVC class of 1972)

Loni Nealy - April 03, 2018 at 12:55 PM

 Kelly Hankins

“ *Kelly Hankins lit a candle in memory of Richard D. Lapo*



Kelly Hankins - April 02, 2018 at 09:50 PM

 Kelly Hankins

Wonderful memories of Professor Lapo teaching me how to enjoy the gift of music in my life. Thanks Dick! Miss you much!!

Kelly Hankins - April 02, 2018 at 09:58 PM

CJ

“ So sorry to hear about Dick's passing. He gave so much to Wenatchee Valley College and the community over the years. I personally owe him a big debt of gratitude. Over 45 years ago, when I was still a teenager, I wanted desperately to attend college. On the first day of registration I went to WVC with all the money I could spare--- only \$76. As it turned out, Dick just happened to be my advisor. I told him I wanted to take as many classes as I could with \$76, which meant I could only afford maybe two classes. I told him how desperately I wanted to take a full load, but, alas, a full load at the time was \$86 dollars and I could barely afford food and rent, despite working full time. Without any hesitation, Dick pulled \$10 out of his pocket and said, "Now you can take a full load". Then he asked me if I liked to sing. I told him that I loved to sing. He then told me that if I enrolled in choir classes and voice lessons that he could help me get music scholarships in the future. Needless to say, I was ecstatic and so very thankful! Because of his act of kindness and his help, I was able to stay in college and graduated with my nursing degree three years later. At the time, Dick was also directing a community choir on an intermittent basis. He inspired me to go on to establish the Columbia Chorale (with Patsy Ford) which he directed for several years and that is still performing today. I honestly don't know what would have become of me if it weren't for Dick for helping me out during that very vulnerable time in my life. I will never forget him.----Chris Jeffris

Chris Jeffris - April 02, 2018 at 03:10 PM

AF

What a beautiful and such a Dick Lapo kind of story!!! Fantastic..

Allan Fuller - April 05, 2018 at 11:35 AM