

Pentecostal Musician Larry Dalton Remembered For Talent, Faith

✖ A memorial service will be held Wednesday for Larry Dalton, a world- renowned pianist, conductor and composer who once served as music director for evangelist Oral Roberts' television broadcasts. Dalton died in Tulsa, Okla., on May 30 of a heart attack. He was 63.

"I was shocked to bury Larry at 63," said evangelist Terry Law, who formed Living Sound musical ministry with Dalton in 1969. "It was Larry's musical brilliance that made Living Sound a special team. He could take mediocre-quality musicians and make them sound like angels from heaven."

Known for putting hymns and praise and worship standards into classical arrangements, Dalton was born and raised in Big Stone Gap, Va., the eighth of nine children. He began playing piano at age 3 and became the pianist at his father's Pentecostal church while still in elementary school.

"His mother made sure her kids knew there was a world out there besides just Virginia," said Gwen Alley, Dalton's longtime assistant. "Because she sang opera and loved opera, she would teach them about operas and about art and about Europe. She never got to travel to those places, but she read books and she was just thrilled with all those things and she would instill them in all the kids."

After graduating from high school, Dalton traveled with a Southern gospel quartet called The Songsmen before attending Oral Roberts University (ORU). As a student he became an organist for Oral Roberts' crusades. He met Law while performing at a crusade in Canada 1967 and encouraged him to attend ORU.

Dalton spent several years traveling with Living Sound. In 1972 the group, which included Don Moen, was invited to perform at a university in Kraków, Poland. When they arrived, the team learned the invitation had come from the Youth Communist Party and that they would be singing at the organization's headquarters.

"Larry and I didn't know what to do," Law said. "I broke the ice, and I got up and started to preach. I said: 'Marx and Lenin did not have the way. There was only one way, and His name is Jesus.' It took me 12 minutes to give the gospel message."

After the gospel presentation, Law was interrogated and ordered not to speak, but the communist leaders refused to cancel the concert because thousands were waiting to see the performance.

"As Larry led the band, the anointing of the Holy Spirit came and our singers began to weep and to sing the music with their hands raised in the air in praise to God," Law said. "It was one of the most electric moments of my life to watch that. ... These young people were told there was no God, and here were these American young people praising the God that they didn't believe existed."

After the concert, the group mingled with the crowd. "Larry and I said, 'Go out there and tell everyone you can about the Lord,'" Law said. "And we led people to Jesus until 3 o'clock in the morning."

During that trip to Poland, Dalton and Law befriended Catholic Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, who invited the group into his home. "We taught him charismatic choruses," Law said.

In 1978 Wojtyla became Pope John Paul II, and in 1980 he invited Living Sound to perform at the Vatican before 65,000 people.

After touring with Living Sound, Dalton worked as music director for ORU and played for Oral Roberts' television broadcasts.

Dalton, who was a Mensa member, also recorded with the National Philharmonic of London, the Sinfonia of London and the Nashville String Machine.

As a soloist, Dalton was best known for his projects *Praise Magnificat*, *Glorious Magnificat* and *Instruments of Peace*. He also arranged music for Christian and secular artists, including Carol Lawrence, Donald O'Connor, Larry Gatlin and Ellis Marsalis and albums for Steve Perry, Mel Torme, Paula Abdul, Al Green, Vicki Winans and Maurice Sklar, among others.

Dalton was a Steinway artist, a distinction given to pianists who are approved by a Steinway board. But he remained committed to ministry, serving as president of the nonprofit music ministry Ars Musica Christiana Inc., at the time of his death.

"Really, Larry's heart was missions and ministry," Alley said. "He played for presidents, he played for colleges, he did patriot events, but his heart was souls," Alley said. "He played with all kinds of symphonies all over the world, but he loved going into little churches and he loved to just sit down with their choir and their music people and mentor them."

In Tulsa, Dalton was the orchestral pianist and arranger for the Signature Symphony, whose popular annual Christmas concerts featured Dalton on piano. "Christmas at Signature Symphony literally became Larry Dalton," said Steve Alley, Dalton's former college roommate and longtime friend. "Many patrons bought their season tickets so they could go to the Christmas show. That was a big, big deal."

The Signature Symphony will perform a tribute concert before the 3 p.m. memorial service Wednesday at Tulsa Community College. The service will be broadcast live at .

A funeral service was held Thursday in Virginia, and Dalton was buried on Friday.