

TIMES COLONIST

Victoria's tuba king succumbs to cancer

[Amy Smart](#) / Times Colonist

July 2, 2015 06:00 AM

Updated: July 2, 2015 09:55 AM



Eugene Dowling practises for his 50th anniversary recital at Alix Goolden Hall on January 10, 2012. Dowling died June 30, 2015, of cancer. Photograph By DARREN STONE, Times Colonist

Tuba player Eugene Dowling, who brought the back-row brass instrument to centre stage — and to downtown Victoria every Christmas — has died.

Dowling was diagnosed with prostate cancer two years ago and died at his home Tuesday.

He was the Victoria Symphony principal tubist for 25 years, taught at the University of Victoria for more than 30 years and founded Victoria's Tuba Christmas 36 years ago.

"It's a hard way to make a living, but it's a glorious way to be involved in music," Dowling told the Times Colonist in 2012.

Colleagues and friends remember him as a tireless advocate for the tuba and generous mentor.

Trombonist Scott MacInnes said Dowling put his neck out for him 10 years ago and helped him get a job at UVic, even though MacInnes was only 24 and had limited experience.

"If he saw someone who he thought had a love of music, teaching ability or ability to play, he definitely went out of his way to make sure they had every opportunity possible," said MacInnes, who played with Dowling in the Pinnacle Brass Quintet.

The two bonded over a common approach to teaching, working with each student's strengths and identifying what drives them. "He approached every student as a blank slate and tried to use their strengths to help him reach their weaknesses."

Dowling took up the tuba at the prodding of his school band teacher in Grade 6, while he lived on a farm in Michigan. He began teaching himself music beyond class assignments, entered festivals and received positive feedback. He studied under one of the foremost brass teachers in the world, Arnold Jacob of the Chicago Symphony, and was picked up by the Victoria Symphony at 26.

He has performed with tenor Peter Pears and bass Giorgio Tozzi and under top conductors, including Georg Solti, Claudio Abbado and Carlo Maria Giulini. Dowling and his unwieldy instrument also joined a Dixie band, backed up the likes of Sarah McLachlan and the Moody Blues.

His recording *The English Tuba* received a Juno Award nomination and he said a career highlight was recording Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Tuba Concerto in F minor* as a soloist with the London Symphony — colleagues say it remains a seminal recording for tuba players.

In Victoria, he played with Pinnacle Brass Quintet, the Bastion Band and others.

Bass trombonist Bob Fraser sat next to Dowling in the Victoria Symphony for 10 years. Fraser joined at 24, when Dowling was about 40. He described him as a voice of reason and of kindness.

"For me, to start my career next to a person like him was like having a lesson and master-class in one, every single day. Because you learned so much listening to him play," Fraser said.

The pair made a game in calling out rehearsal notes using the most confusing associations. Instead of "B as in beta," they'd announce "M as in mnemonic" or "G as in gnostic."

"We could be like two kids in school who the teacher had to separate," Fraser said.

MacInnes said the quintet had a common problem, which was a good problem to have: Dowling's sound sometimes dwarfed the others. "He had this massive, beautiful sound that just had overtones that went for miles," MacInnes said.

When MacInnes learned of Dowling's prognosis, he wrote his first major piece for quintet and dedicated it to Dowling. "It poured out of me," MacInnes said. "To be able to write something for someone who means so much to you and be able to perform it is awesome."

Dowling's student Paul Beauchesne followed him into the seat as principal tubist with the Victoria Symphony and will take over his UVic studio this fall. Beauchesne also plans to continue organizing Tuba Christmas, which raises money for the Times Colonist Christmas Fund.

"He was really dedicated to sharing his musical gifts with people around him," Beauchesne said.

Two days before his death, Dowling took an ambulance to and from a concert organized to support the new Eugene Dowling Scholarship to support UVic students studying tuba or euphonium.

His family has asked that in lieu of flowers, donation be made to the fund at extrweb.uvic.ca/eugene-dowling-scholarship.

On Sunday, The Bastion Band CD Release Party featuring Eugene Dowling will instead become a celebration and remembrance of his life.

The CD was Dowling's last complete recording, however he was also working on a brass quintet recording.

The event will be held at The Oaks Restaurant from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

[asmart@timescolonist.com \(mailto:asmart@timescolonist.com\)](mailto:asmart@timescolonist.com)

© Copyright Times Colonist