

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
TODAY HONORS WITH ITS
DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS DEGREE**

RICHARD PROULX

Richard Proulx, for more than a half century you have brought great joy to churchgoers of all faiths around the world by enriching their worship with your beautiful music.

Organist, conductor, teacher and composer of more than 300 works, you have practiced your craft with such exquisite perfection that those who have performed under your baton call you not only the dean of American church musicians but also their hero.

Born in 1937 in St. Paul, you began your piano studies at the age of six and have attributed in part your success to the rigorous musical training that you received in this city's Catholic school system. You also studied at MacPhail College of Music, the American Boychoir School of Princeton, St. John's Abbey in Collegeville and the Royal School of Church Music in England.

You served as organist at the Church of the Holy Childhood in St. Paul from 1953 to 1968 and were music director at parishes in Tacoma and Seattle before moving to Chicago in 1980 to become organist and music director of the Cathedral of the Holy Name. During 14 years there, you founded The Cathedral Singers, an independent recording ensemble.

Jonathan Miller, founder and artistic director of the group Chicago *A Capella*, auditioned for the Holy Name choir in 1982 and remembered that he found himself "in the most extraordinarily challenging environment I had ever sung in," under "this brilliant musician who heard *everything!* You couldn't get away with anything when you were singing for Richard."

Word spread about your Holy Name choir, and "people came into town with the highest of expectations – that Holy Name was *the* place to go to where you would have the best representation of Catholic music," singer Kristi McGonagle-French said in a 2007 video tribute to you. "It was accurate liturgically, and artistically very sophisticated."

She and others link your success to an innate ability to compose beautiful music, understand what one called "the chemistry of singing," recruit talented singers and coax the best from them during performances of what they affectionately called "Proulx-ductions." Your dry sense of humor also served you well. McGonagle-French told of how a telephone was attached to an organ in the choir loft so you could communicate with the sacristy: "We'd be in the middle of this beautiful prelude in a big service and the phone would ring. Richard would pick it up and say, 'Joe's Bar ...'"

While your upbringing was Catholic, your music crosses all denominational lines and can be found in Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite and Episcopalian hymnals, many of which you have served as a consultant. Consequently, says Carroll Cole, a former recording producer for The Cathedral Singers, yours "is the most performed music every Sunday throughout the United States."

You also have excelled at other music forms, including composing scores for movies and television shows as well as a commissioned opera for the National Endowment for the Arts, and you have conducted choral festivals and workshops in Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Among your many honors are Pastoral Musician of the Year by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians and Composer of the Year by the American Guild of Organists.

Robert Batastini, retired senior editor of GIA Publications, might have stated it best in a tribute when he talked about the “tremendous influence” that you have had on a generation of composers. “In my own work as a church musician,” he said, “Richard has always been my hero.”

The University of St. Thomas is privileged to have Father Jan Michael Joncas, a noted liturgical composer, on its theology faculty and to count him and his peers, Marty Haugen and David Haas, among our distinguished alumni. It gives us great pleasure on this day to add your name to that list of alumni who have made their mark as liturgical composers as we confer the degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*.

**Citation to accompany the conferral of the degree Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*,
at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, on the third day of May, two thousand and nine.**