Washington Concert Opera Mourns the Passing of WCO Founder Stephen Crout

Former opera and ballet conductor Stephen Crout, who founded Washington Concert Opera in 1986 and served as Music Director of The Washington Ballet from 1989-2001, died on November 23 at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, DC. He was 77.

A native of Elmira, New York, he was the younger of two sons of Dorothy Frank Bly and Walter Bly, taking the surname “Crout” upon his mother’s second marriage to Norman Crout and the latter’s adoption of Stephen and his older brother Glenn. Upon his completion of a bachelor’s degree as a piano performance major at Ithaca College in 1966, he was drafted into the U.S. Navy to serve in the Vietnam War. Following the war, he joined the New York-based chorus The Gregg Smith Singers as both accompanist and a member of its tenor section, touring the U.S. and Europe and recording music from Gesualdo to Stravinsky at ORU’s Liner Auditorium. During Crout’s tenure as general and artistic director, which ended with his move to Colorado in 2001, WCO highlights included the Washington debuts of soprano Fleming (her first performance of the title role of Messiaen’s Turangalila Sinfonie in 1992 in another signature role, Desdemona’s Basilius) and Deborah Voigt (Weber’s Der Freischütz, 1992), mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves (Delibes’ Lakmé, 1989, with returns in Donizetti’s Anna Bolena in 1992 and Saint-Saëns’ Samson et Dalila in 1995) and Canadian tenor Ben Heppner (Giordano’s Andrea Chénier, 1994). Washington Concert Opera, now celebrating its 35th season, also saw the first local professional performances under Crout’s leadership of Rossini’s Guillaume Tell, Denyce Graves’ Lakmé, Alice Coote’s Violetta and Christoph von Dohnanyi’s Beethoven Symphony No. 9.

As Music Director of The Washington Ballet from 1989 – 2001, Crout not only conducted over 200 performances of The Nutcracker at GWU Lisner Auditorium and the Warner Theater but also Orff’s Carmina Burana in the Kennedy Center Opera House. In 1989 and 1990, he conducted performances of Menotti’s Amahl and the Night Visitors staged by the composer at the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater and GWU Lisner Auditorium, respectively.

Donations in his memory can be made to Vocal Arts DC, Washington Concert Opera, and Urban Arias. No funeral service is planned.

Washington Concert Opera

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