

## In Memoriam James Avery

### Dániel Péter Biró

James Avery passed away on March 8, 2009.

James Avery, known as Jim to friends and colleagues, was born in Hutchinson, Kansas in 1937. He studied in the U.S. first in Kansas with Roy Hamlin Johnson and Robert Baustein, and then at Indiana University with Walter Robert and conducting with Tibor Kozma. He later went on to study in Freiburg, Germany with Carl Seeman as a Fulbright scholar. Jim was a prizewinner in the Gaudeamus competition for interpretation. After residing as visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome, he went on to become professor of piano at the University of Iowa, a position he held from 1967 until 1980. In 1980 he was appointed a professorship at the Freiburg Musikhochschule, a position he held until 2004. He also taught at the Eastman School of Music from 1986 to 1988 and at SUNY Buffalo from 2007 to 2008. In Freiburg he became an essential, guiding force in the New Music scene, as pianist and conductor with ensemble recherche until 1990 and since 1992 as artistic director of Ensemble SurPlus.

Jim loved challenges. One might say that he lived for challenges. For Jim the performance of difficult music was never viewed as a problem, but rather as an opportunity. Open to all directions of New Music, Jim performed and conducted every work, regardless of style or direction, with a refreshing openness and conviction. Such a spirit of inclusiveness and intense curiosity became the motivating force behind his establishment of Ensemble SurPlus, an ensemble of the highest caliber that has set ground-breaking standards for the interpretation of New Music. With Jim conducting, Ensemble SurPlus has mastered some of the most challenging works in the repertoire and has commissioned and performed many of the seminal works of our time. The performance of Matthias Spahlinger's recent work *Farben der Frühe* for seven pianos, commissioned by Ensemble SurPlus, was directed by Jim with amazing precision and vitality. He regularly concertized with percussionist Olaf Tzschope and oboist Peter Veale in the Trio SurPlus, commissioning and performing new works for this formation. His ongoing collaboration with musicians such as Steve Schick and Heinz Holliger brought 20th century classics by Bartók, Wolpe and Stockhausen to new levels of perfection, most recently on recordings.

Jim was a person filled with dedication, patience, optimism and humor. After tirelessly rehearsing, he would love to sit with a glass of wine and discuss music and life, tell jokes and be in good cheer. He had a calm, quiet presence and seemed to experience the sensations of the world and music with the vivacity of a child. His collaborations with countless composers and composition students (most recently at the Composition Summer Academy at Schloss Solitude) made him a lot of friends in the field. His students and colleagues loved him dearly. His absence is felt by many.

May we remember him and continue in his spirit.

Dániel Péter Biró  
Victoria, BC  
March 2009