

From the CSO Staff

What is your legacy?

By definition, a legacy is the essence of what an individual leaves behind when they ascend beyond our mortal coil – a testament to their impact on the world and the lasting impression they make on others. It is the culmination of a person's experiences, values, beliefs, and actions collected throughout a life well-lived. A legacy represents our sense of purpose and our desire to leave a positive mark on the world. It is the sum of what we accomplished with the opportunities presented to us – or forged within self-ignited fire when opportunities were not so prevalent. Ultimately, legacy reminds us of the fleeting nature of life and the importance of living with intention and authenticity. When our final note resolves, we all hope to have left behind an unquestionable impact in the shape of our most genuine selves.

The legacy of Maestro Gerhardt Zimmermann is, and forever will be, a shining beacon of esteemed brilliance that will echo throughout space and time. This may sound superfluous, but it rings especially true if you were lucky enough to witness the musical power and prowess he wielded with gleeful, resolute gumption every time he graced a stage. Gerhardt was a remarkable conductor, musician, husband, father, friend, and ultimately, an extraordinary human being who dedicated his life to the pursuit of musical excellence. We will celebrate his profound interpretations, exceptional musicianship, and the fatherly mentorship he bestowed upon us all throughout his more than five decade-long career in music. He has left an indelible impact on all who knew him, but especially those of us who worked with him closely.

Above all else, Maestro Zimmermann served as a shepherd who guided the Canton Symphony Orchestra through times of overwhelming splendor, devastating change, tumultuous social circumstances, and so much more. Life imitates art, and he took that statement in stride by curating concert experiences that evoked much more than what was just on the page – to him, music was the best vehicle of connection we have available to us as humans, and he certainly used it better than most. With his leadership, the Canton Symphony Orchestra reached heights of artistic distinction never thought possible for a once small community ensemble, introducing the people of Stark County and beyond to countless works often left undiscovered or under-appreciated in the canon. His deep understanding of repertoire, meticulous attention to detail, and unwavering commitment to musical integrity transformed each concert into an unforgettable experience. His ability to elicit emotion and bring out the finest nuances of music was second to none.

Maestro Zimmermann's accomplishments extend far beyond his role here in Canton. He conducted renowned orchestras across the world, including The Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Breckenridge Music Festival, the New World Symphony, and several international orchestras and opera companies. Notably, he served as the conductor of the North Carolina Symphony for 21 years in addition to his duties at the Canton Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to his artistry on the podium, Maestro Zimmermann was a passionate advocate for music education. Recognizing the importance of nurturing young talent, he tirelessly worked to inspire and mentor aspiring musicians. He conducted youth orchestras, served as a guest lecturer and clinician, and led educational initiatives that enriched the lives of countless students. This was made most prevalent during his time at The University of Texas Butler School of Music at Austin, where he served as conductor for 13 years and was named Music Director Laureate. His passion for sharing the transformative power of music with future generations remains a testament to his commitment to fostering the next wave of musicians.

As we continue to reflect on Maestro Gerhardt Zimmermann's legacy, we will always celebrate his unwavering dedication to music. Our cherished memories of the Maestro and his ability to touch the hearts and souls of audiences will continue to resonate for years to come. Maestro Zimmermann's contributions have shaped the landscape of classical music and serve as an inspiration for musicians and music lovers alike. While he is no longer with us physically, we like to think he is somewhere chatting with Beethoven himself and asking why he could not be bothered to finish his tenth symphony. Once satisfied with whatever answer that may be, we can only imagine him strutting lively to the greatest podium of all, humming a tune as he takes his eternal locus.

From all of us at the Canton Symphony Orchestra, both past and present: thank you, Gerhardt. May you rest in eternal peace.

With all of our hearts,
The CSO Family