

Robert Twynham, acclaimed Baltimore composer and musician, dies at 80

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Robert Twynham, an internationally known composer of liturgical music and the longtime music director at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland, died March 23. He was 80. A memorial Mass is being planned for early May at Corpus Christi in Baltimore, his home parish.

Monsignor Robert Armstrong, retired rector at the cathedral, called Twynham a “great artist” who was passionate about his vocation. The musician was devoted to good liturgy, Monsignor Armstrong said, and had high expectations of others.

“His whole life was dedicated to music – and particularly ecclesiastical music,” Monsignor Armstrong said. “You say ‘music,’ you say ‘Twynham.’ You say ‘Twynham,’ you say ‘music.’”

Monsignor Armstrong said Twynham “brought out the best in others.” He was the choirmaster and a well-respected organist at the cathedral.

Following the Second Vatican Council, Twynham composed numerous psalm settings, acclamations and large-scale works – many of which were published in hymnals and used in parishes across the United States.

Daniel Sansone, the cathedral’s current music director, said his predecessor was on the “cutting edge of supporting and affirming great sacred music in the Roman Church.”

Twynham’s compositions were “towering works,” Sansone said, and the composer’s “Magnificat” was especially well known. Commissioned for the Baltimore Choral

Arts Society in 1980, it has been performed across the country.

“What most characterized his compositions was that he had a very strong affinity for French impressionistic music,” said Sansone, noting that Twynham studied in Paris with the Catholic impressionist composer, Olivier Messiaen.

The cathedral will host a memorial concert in the fall featuring musicians from across the country that will play Twynham’s greatest works, Sansone said

Twynham began his musical career at age 13, serving as organist at the Walter Reed Army Hospital Chapel in his native Washington, D.C. He then studied at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore on a scholarship. He was the winner of the Bach “Horstmeier” prize.

Twynham served at the cathedral for nearly 40 years, beginning in 1961. He retired in 1998. He is survived by his wife, Eileen.

“He was very devoted to his faith, to God and the church,” Monsignor Armstrong said.