

Eddie Oyer Taught Northeast to Dance



EDDIE B. OYER

KANSAS CITY, Missouri — Mr. Eddie B. Oyer, 85, of Kansas City, Mo., passed away March 17, 2015, at home with his wife Patty and sister-in-law, Vickie by his side.

Eddie's memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, April 18, in the Main Sanctuary at the Independence Boulevard Christian Church, 606 Gladstone Blvd.

Eddie was born on Nov. 20, 1929, in Jacksonville, Mo., to Alfred and Jean Brooks. As an infant, he was adopted by his uncle and aunt, Clarence and Ida Mae Oyer of Kansas City, Mo. A lifelong resident of the Northeast area, he went to Gladstone Elementary School and graduated from Northeast High School in

1947. During his childhood, his adopted mother saw in him a talent for music and he was trained by his sister, Eleanor Mae and others. Eddie's musical accomplishments during his youth were many and legendary. Eddie began performing at the age of three — a piano prodigy — sometimes in lounges and cocktail settings, that because of his tender youth, his mother had to be present. At the age of 10, owing to his music expertise, Eddie was given the extraordinary privilege of playing on the Viennese Steinway piano of the Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the renowned pianist and composer who was the former Prime Minister of Poland.

He continued this career until 1950, when he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. During this time, he was trained as a combat engineer. Eddie had admitted that his talents did not extend to the handling of explosives and was always "getting blown up" during exercises. Before his battalion was to shipped out to Korea, the base commander one day had heard Eddie playing the piano and he decided that is was more important for Eddie to entertain than to blow things up and was transferred into the Base band. It was during this time in the Army, his talent for music was being recognized and in 1954 was featured in a talent contest on the Arlene Francis television show in New York City where he took first place.

After his service in the Army, he returned home to Kansas City. His sister, Eleanor Mae, had a dance and music studio on the third floor of the house on N. Lawn Avenue. He assisted

her by playing the piano during student lessons. Later on, when she had a child, Eddie took over the business and a local legend was born.

In the 60's, Eddie purchased a small building on 5240 St. John Ave., and called it "The Eddie Oyer School of Music and Dance." There, he remained for almost 50 years until his retirement in 2010. His thousands of students learned the gift of music, dance and pageant performance from Eddie, showering him with great respect and love. Many of his students went on to professional music careers, including performing at the Starlight Theater, local music theaters and even the Lawrence Welk Orchestra on television. Part of Eddie's inspired education method was to have children play the piano from small wooden fully functioning pianos that could be situated on a TV tray or table. Even after retirement, Eddie continued to teach one student up to the time he passed away.

On August 25, 1967, Eddie's life was further fulfilled when he married the love of his life, Patty Strohm. Their love story continued for 49 years. During those years, they were inseparable. Together, they shared adventures traveling around the U.S.A. and Europe. Later on, they loved taking ocean cruises, where he continued

to entertain by playing the piano for his fellow passengers.

Even during his years as a teacher, he still found the time to involve himself with many civic activities. His involvement included memberships in: The Kansas City Tourist Commission, The Musicians' Union, the Northeast Community Council (where Eddie and Patty first met), the Kansas City Chapter of the National Professional Business Association, board member of the Kansas City Museum and Chairman of the local Chautauqua Committee.

For many years, Eddie performed for the Glennon Nursing Home. He was an Elder, Sunday School teacher, and pianist at Budd Park Christian Church, as well as an Elder and pianist at the Independence Boulevard Christian Church. In 2005 the Northeast News published an extensive article on Eddie's many accomplishments, in which they named him, the man who "Taught Northeast to Dance."

In the spring of 2012, former student John Armato established the Eddie and Patty Oyer Scholarship at Vandercook College of Music, in Chicago. The scholarship was designed to honor "the powerful impact Mr. Oyer's presence has had" on the life of his many students. The scholarship is a gift awarded to

worthy students in both the Bachelor and Master of Music college programs.

Eddie was preceded in death by his parents; brothers, James and Michael Brooks, and a sister, Eleanor Mae Ryan. He is survived by his beloved wife of 47 years, Patty; brothers Donald Brooks (Mary Lee), A.W. Brooks, Robert Brooks (Bernie), sister Linnie D'Giamcomo (Robert); sister-in-laws Vickie Strohm and Betty West; brother-in-law Charlie Strohm (Candace) and many nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews and great-great nieces and nephews.

Patty Oyer wishes to thank in a special way Dr. Steiner and his staff, North Care Hospice, Rev. Lee Chiaramonte and son, Jaime; their dear next door neighbors; old time friends the Robinsons; and his buddy sister-in-law, Vickie, who deeply misses him; Patty's sister, Betty, Joe the Barber and a special lady who helped "Mr. Eddie" — she knows who she is.

Memorial Contributions can be made to Independence Boulevard Christian Church, 606 Gladstone Blvd., or to the Eddie and Patty Oyer Scholarship Fund at Vandercook College of Music, 3140 S. Federal Street, Chicago, Ill., 60616, also at www.VanderCook.edu. Online condolences can be made to www.mcgilleysheil.com.



**Eddie Oyer - - Keyboard Atom Splitter
Entertainer from Coast to Coast**

By BRAD FINCH
Northeast News

Editor's Note: This article originally ran in the Northeast News in Oct. of 1998.

Although I've lived in Northeast for 10 years now, I hadn't heard of Eddie Oyer until I saw him playing for a Shepherd's Center event just a few weeks ago. From the very beginning, I was impressed.

The first thing that impressed me was the fact that while it was obvious from the start Eddie Oyer is a skilled pianist, he never over-played anything. That is to say that he played each piece the way his audience wanted to hear it; clean and straight forward, in a manner which captivated his listeners, and for many, seemed to take them back to the time they'd first heard the tune.

The second thing you can't help but take note of is his versatility. As I watched him take "12th Street Rag," with its complex 3 over 4 structure, and effortlessly transform it into a Tchaikovsky-esque classical piece, then take it straight into a Rumba, I knew there was more Eddie Oyer than meets the eye.

Northeast High School who you remember helping you the most?

Mr. Nebin Wassen. When they had school shows, like the Viking Varieties he used me in the orchestra. He was a good teacher and stressed good music with a band but also had Glenn Miller arrangements for the band, which kept us interested. If you are a musician, you play

Eddie, was there a teacher at

We got together the next week, and again I found myself impressed. "I began playing when I was 3," he said, "and I've been practicing ever since." he added with a grin. His mother was instrumental in starting him in music. "My mother had no musical training, but she had a good ear for it," he said. "She would listen in while I practiced and call down 'I don't know what you're doing, but that isn't right.'"

By age 15, Eddie Oyer was teaching music at his sister's dance studio on St. John, and playing at supper clubs in the Continental, President and Belrive Hotels, and the Zephyr Room, among others, around Kansas City. Since he wasn't old enough to get into the clubs by himself, a family member had to escort him. He especially enjoyed the double-takes some of the singers would make when they saw the kid that would be accompanying them. Also an accomplished dancer, Eddie often performed at the Gladstone and Mainstreet Theaters.

By 18, Eddie Oyer began playing around the country. His fast paced style earned him the moniker "The Keyboard Atom-Splitter."



Oyer's home. "I've lived in the same house since I was 18 months old," he told me. He went to Northeast High School and played in the school band. The Eddie Oyer Studio is the same place in which his sister taught dance over 50 years ago. "I don't teach dance as much as I used to," he said. "Arthritis." But nothing is slowing him down at the piano. Eddie Oyer can be heard each Sunday at Budd Park Christian Church and on Thursday afternoons at Glennon Place.

By DEAN HUGHSON
Northeast News

Editor's Note: This article originally ran in the Northeast News on Oct. 19, 2005.

If you grew up in Northeast anytime since 1954, the odds are pretty good you took music lessons from long-time music and dance teacher Eddie Oyer. Literally thousands and thousands of hopeful musicians have

studied under this man, and some went on to music careers — including playing with Lawrence Welk's orchestra. We caught up with Eddie recently by telephone and asked him a few questions.

How long have you been involved in music?

Well, I joined the union when I was 12, but became a musician in earnest when

I was 15 playing in bands. I played for my sister's dance classes also.

How did you come to be involved in teaching music and dance?

My sister Donna Elnor May Oyer owned the studio, and I took it over in 1954 when she left to raise her family. I started as a dance teacher, but ended up teaching music. My speciality was

always been piano, and now I teach keyboards a lot also.

Eddie, have you had a favorite music style personally and to teach?

I like classical, jazz, rock and country and western. I learned to be successful that you teach what it is that the customers want.

Eddie, tell us about your personal life.

My dad was a railroad man and worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad. My mom saw to it that I learned to play the piano. I graduated from Northeast in 1947. I went into the Army as a combat engineer but ended up in the music part of the military. I married my wife, Patty Oyer, 38 years ago. I've lived here my whole life.

Eddie, what changes have you

seen in Northeast during your 75 years of living there?

Well, it has changed a lot. None of the people who originally lived around my house are living anymore; I have new neighbors. Most of the businesses in Northeast have changed hands except just a few of us. My business has changed a bit. I used to teach dance but my balance isn't as good at this age so