

## **Fritz Benedict remembered with great love and hot jazz**

By Loren Jenkins (Aspen Times July 15, 1995)

In the hot summer sun of afternoon, friends, relatives and just plain admirers of Fredric "Fritz" Benedict converged on the music tent that bears his name for Tuesday's final tribute to the man who had touched and elevated their lives.

While soft white clouds scudded across a sky so blue it reminded of Fritz's ever-sparkling eyes, hundreds took their seats under the soft folds of the music tent to pay final homage to the man who for half a century among them had been the epitome of a life lived with vision, empathy, humanity, dignity, creativity and wit.

Though there was a natural sadness among the gathered, as there must be at the recognition of the loss of a titan and mentor of our valley community, there was also a sense of warmth and joy that vibrated through the crowd as stories of Fritz were exchanged among mourners in the long minutes before the official memorial.

"Fritz was simply the most creative, spirited, most remarkable person I ever met," said Mayor John Bennett in introductory remarks about the architect, planner, environmentalist and just plain good citizen and philanthropist who died 10 days ago at 81.

With Benedict's bleary-eyed wife, Fabi, sitting next to their only son, Nicolas, in the front row before the flower-bedecked stage, Bennett termed Fritz an "immortal" who was "a mentor to so many, touched so many, influenced so many around him."

While citing the hundreds of homes Benedict had built in Aspen since his arrival from 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division battles in the Italian Apennines in World

War II, the public parks he had designed and helped create, the ski resorts planned here and in Vail and Breckenridge, his philanthropic gifts of lands and monies to community causes and institutions, and his unflagging efforts in public forums in support of affordable housing, sensible transportation solutions and ski mountain-linkage schemes, Bennett quoted a friend's remark about Benedict's "wonderful balance of wisdom and innocence."

"Fritz, we shall not forget your dreams," the mayor said, echoing a sentiment that seemed to be shared by the 1,200 or so mourners who had gathered.

To honor one of the Aspen Music Festival and School's ardent supporters from its inception - and for seven years its chairman - violinists Robert and Nicholas Mann played a series of Benedict's beloved Bartók Duos. Cellist Lynn Harrell and pianist Brooks Smith performed a Schubert Sonata and, later, Harrell joined the Manns, violinist Earl Carlyss and violist Masao Kawasaki in a moving rendition of Mozart's Quintet in G Minor.

The musical performances were interspersed with brief words from friends such as Les Anderson, Robert Maynard and Jack Frishman, who regaled the audience with loving tales of Benedict's personality, his intelligence, his wit, his human foibles, his unflagging optimism and good will, and his openness to all he met.

"Fritz was so generous, on so many levels, in so many ways that it is hard to put them into words," said Aspen Music Festival President Robert Harth, recalling "his wonderful sense of humor and ability to laugh at himself."

“What was so admirable was that he never stopped caring, never stopped dreaming, he never stopped living life to its fullest,” Harth concluded.

But it was left to Benedict’s son, Nicolas, to sum up the overwhelming awe and delight of all who had come to know his father.

“Fritz was the oldest kid I ever knew,” Nicolas Benedict said. “Traveling with a man so comfortable and so accepting of his surroundings was humbling.

“No one can ever fill the void of his loss and no one should,” Benedict the younger concluded. “The greatest tribute we can all offer him is to continue to work together as a community as we move to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Nicolas Benedict revealed that his father had made only two requests about his eventual funeral. One was to have a jazz band from New Orleans play, and the second was to have a big party afterwards.

With that, the stage doors parted and in marched the New Orleans Heritage Jazz Band to play a rollicking version of Benedict’s favorite, “Sweet Georgia Brown.” Then, in Louisiana style, the band led the mourners out of the tent and into the shining sunlight for a party of lemonade and cookies, and exchanges of good cheer mixed with sorrow in one of those most special of events, one that would have warmed Fritz Benedict’s heart and cheered his soul.

For in death as in life, Fritz Benedict proved once again that there is indeed a vibrant and caring and extraordinary sense of community in the valley that he had so long loved and fought for. For that he will remain immortal among us.