

JAMES RIVES JONES: 1942-2007

At SMU and with DSO, conductor nurtured fellow artists

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By **SCOTT CANTRELL / The Dallas Morning News**
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James Rives Jones, a former resident conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and before that head of orchestral studies at Southern Methodist University, died Friday of cancer.

He was 64.

Born June 24, 1942, in Tulia to James H. and Sara Rives Jones, James Rives Jones grew up in Richardson. He graduated from Richardson High School and went on to studies at SMU and the Vienna Academy of Music in Austria. In 1967 he became the youngest prizewinner in the Dmitri Mitropoulos Conducting Competition in New York.

Two years later, he became associate professor of music and director of orchestral activities at SMU, transforming the level of orchestral playing there. With a mix of students and community musicians he founded the Dallas Civic Orchestra, which performed on a professional level.

After 12 years at SMU, Mr. Jones spent another dozen years, from 1984 to 1996, as resident conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Respected by both musicians and critics, he conducted more than 400 performances with the orchestra.

"He had to do the many things that an assistant or associate conductor has to do, including pops and parks concerts, many on just one rehearsal," said Mark Melson, the DSO's vice president of artistic operations. "But he did it professionally and without complaining."

Mr. Jones was something of a legend for his command of a vast repertory, and his ability to master a score in a very short time.

"He could come in and conduct anything, basically, with no rehearsal," said DSO principal trombonist John Kitzman. "The short rehearsal time, the big piece – Jim was your guy."

"More than anything, Jim really loved music. Some conductors love being conductors."

In addition to his work at SMU and the DSO, Mr. Jones at various times had associate and principal guest conductor appointments with the Oklahoma and Denver symphony orchestras. He was also music director of Dallas and Colorado ballets.

From 2004 until he was sidelined by failing health, Mr. Jones was artistic director of Camerata Winds, a Dallas group devoted to larger-scale chamber music for winds. A 2006 *Dallas Morning News* review praised "taut, finely finished and generously expressive performances."

"It must be a treat," the review continued, "to play for so musical a conductor, and one whose physical gestures are so precise and meaningful."

Robin Garner, president and principal clarinetist of Camerata Winds, described Mr. Jones as "very warm, very nurturing, somebody who was always looking out for the good of the whole."

"He certainly could be firm if he needed something to be different, but he was always kind in his suggestions. He would encourage people to play up to the best of their abilities, in a very nurturing way. We all felt privileged to have the time we did with him."

Having wrestled with alcoholism in his earlier years, Mr. Jones proudly dated his sobriety to Jan. 12, 1984. He was a longtime and active member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Mr. Jones is survived by his son, James Rives Jones II, daughter-in-law Svetla Rousseva and grandson Christian Roussev Jones of Metuchen, N.J.; sons Rico and Jacoby Jones and daughters Marissa and Ayana Jones, all of Plano.

Services will be at 1 p.m. Monday at Restland Funeral Home in Dallas. Visitation is from 6 to 8 p.m. today at Restland..