

## A Tribute to Richard M. Graham

24 September 1931 – 4 May 2015

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**Photograph 1:**  
Richard M. Graham

Dr Richard M. Graham was born in Kansas City, Missouri and began playing piano at an early age, changing to trumpet in high school. He had a love of music and decided he wanted his career to be in music. He was educated at the University of Kansas, earning a bachelor's degree in music education in 1955 and a master's degree in 1958, completing his internship at Topeka State Hospital. Graham then went on to work three years at

Logansport State Hospital in Indiana, followed by a position at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, where he built a new music therapy programme for the university. While teaching at the university, he went back to the University of Kansas and completed his doctorate (1968), again under the direction of E. Thayer Gaston, a major figure in the development of the profession of music therapy. University of Georgia (UGA) Professor Emeritus, Dr Olin Parker, was also a student of Gaston, a few years ahead of Graham.

In the mid-1960s Dr Parker joined the faculty of what was then the Department of UGA. He was well-acquainted with the developing field of music therapy, and with the help of his mentor, Gaston, convinced the UGA administration that they should have a music therapy programme there. Gaston strongly recommended Graham for the new faculty position, and in 1968 Graham joined the faculty of the University of Georgia. At that time there were fewer than 20 music therapy degree programmes in

the country. Furthermore, there were no African American professors at the university. Graham was the first. He set about building positive relationships with colleagues throughout the university. As Parker recalls, he ate lunch every day with a different person, from a different area of study. He built a successful music therapy programme that continues today, and was a well-known and respected member of the university community. In 1994 he was appointed Director of the Hugh Hodgson School of Music, a position he held until his retirement in 2000.

Throughout his career, Graham was an active member of the National Association for Music Therapy, serving as President of that organisation from 1976 to 1978. He is widely recognised for contributing to the success and growth of the association and the profession during those years. He implemented changes in education, training and clinical practice that continue to guide the profession today. He was an internationally respected researcher and scholar, with numerous publications and presentations to his name. His most notable presentation was *'Music for the Exceptional Child'* at the Music Education National Conference, in Weston, VA, in 1975. That led to a series of research studies that culminated in a book, written with Alice S. Beer, entitled *'Teaching Music to the Exceptional Child: A Handbook for Mainstreaming'* in 1980. This publication was the first of its kind and was used nationwide to help educators and therapists alike understand how to use music therapy in the public school system using the best researched techniques that would make the exceptional student successful. The book changed the way exceptional children were taught in public schools. Because of its success and

because of his service to the music therapy organisation, Graham was granted Honorary Life Membership of the National Association for Music Therapy, which is the association's highest honour.

Graham's students can be found all over the country, practising music therapy, conducting research, and heading academic and clinical training programmes. Many have followed in his footsteps to become national officers in our professional association. Notwithstanding his many accomplishments, Graham was first of all a dedicated educator. He was a fierce advocate for his students, expecting nothing less than the best, and putting forth his best effort to help all achieve it. We are deeply grateful for the influence he had on our lives and for his contributions to the music therapy profession, the UGA and the Hugh Hodgson School of Music. It seems UGA was his destiny, and he leaves a rich legacy in the world of music therapy and at the UGA.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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Graham, R. (1975). Music for the exceptional child. Presentation at the MENC National Conference, Reston, VA, 1975.

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