



Richard William Pickar

December 16, 1931 - October 3, 2024

Richard William Pickar, Conductor/Music Director of the Galveston Symphony Orchestra for 33 years (1979-2012) and principal clarinetist with the Houston Symphony Orchestra for 31 years (1959 -1990), passed away on Thursday, October 3, 2024, in Houston, Texas.

He was born December 16, 1931, in Chicago, Illinois to Rachel Hinda Smith (Pickar) an accomplished violinist, who came to the United States from Lithuania to attend the New England Conservatory of Music. Richard's father, George Harrison Pickar, was graduated from Brown University and subsequently Harvard Law School, after which he clerked for Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter and led a distinguished career as law professor.

Richard and his mother re-located to Los Angeles, a mecca for musicians playing for the movie studios, where he began his study of the clarinet at age 12 with Kalman Bloch, principal clarinetist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. A child prodigy on the clarinet, Richard was chosen to appear on the Don Ameche show in Hollywood. By age 16, he had become the principal clarinetist of the Glendale Symphony and the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music orchestra where he had his first experience conducting as backstage chorus director in a production of Giacomo Puccini's opera, La Boheme.

In 1951, Richard joined the U.S. Military Academy at West Point where he played clarinet in the West Point Band until his honorable discharge in 1954. He received his liberal arts degree from UCLA summa cum laude. With supporting recommendations from internationally renowned musicians: violinist Yehudi Menuhin, violist William Primrose, cellist Gregor Piatagorsky, composer Castal-nuevo Todesco, and conductor Richard Lert, Richard received a Fulbright scholarship and continued his clarinet studies in Vienna. There, he graduated with highest honors from the Akademie fur Musik und Darstellende Kunst. While a student in Vienna, Richard became acquainted and performed with friend and classmate, Zubin Mehta. In 1957, he competed in and was a prize winner in the Munich International Clarinet Competition and was engaged as the principal clarinetist of the Philharmonia Hungarica.

In 1959, Richard returned to the United States and, at the request of conductor Leopold Stokowski, accepted the position of principal clarinetist of the Houston Symphony. His first solo performance with the Houston Symphony was a contemporary work by Paul Nelson commissioned by Leopold Stokowski for Richard. Throughout his thirty-one (31) years as principal clarinetist with the Houston Symphony, Richard performed with many of the world's most distinguished conductors including Ernst Ansermet, Sir John Barbirolli, Eric Leinsdorf, Andre Previn, and Leopold Stokowski, and often appeared as guest soloist. Among his solo performances are the Nielsen Clarinet Concerto with Edo de Waart, the Copland Clarinet Concerto with Aaron Copland, the Weber Clarinet Concerto with Sir John Barbirolli and the Debussy Rhapsody with Lawrence Foster.

In addition to performing, Richard held a music faculty position at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville where he received a master's degree. He also taught clarinet performance at Rice University for fifteen (15) years at the Shepherd School of Music. When teaching at Sam Houston, Richard rode his 10-speed bicycle fifty-five (55) miles each way from Houston to

Huntsville. He was also an avid runner who completed several marathons. In addition to clarinet performance, teaching and his position as music director of the Galveston Symphony, Richard also served as music director and conductor of the Houston Metropolitan Symphony, the Houston Balalaika Society Orchestra the Houston Contemporary Chamber Ensemble and Syzygy.

Richard is survived by his wife of 34 years, Rita Junker Pickar; two daughters, Michelle Jordan and Lora Pickar; son-in-law, Matthew Jordan; grandchildren, Katie Jordan, Anna Jordan, Emma Unglaub and Simon Unglaub; brother, James Pickar, M.D.; sister, Joanne Pickar; and cousins, Neil Friedman, Jeffrey, Joel, Andrew and Daniel Pickar, Andy Smith and sons Micah and Levi, and Cantor Rennie Brown.

The funeral service took place on Tuesday, October 8, 2024, at 11:00 am in the Kagan-Rudy Chapel at Emanu El Memorial Park, 8341 Bissonnet Street, Houston, Texas 77074.

Cemetery Details

Emanu El Memorial Park

8341 Bissonnet St
Houston, TX 77074

Previous Events

Cemetery Chapel Service

OCT 8. 11:00 AM (CT)

Kagan-Rudy Chapel at Emanu El Memorial Park
8341 Bissonnet Street
Houston, TX 77074

Tribute Wall

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“ *The handful of occasions I was blessed with to spend time with Mr. Pickar were a treat! He was always kind and made an effort to make us laugh. He was a genuine delight! I am just now finding out of his passing and my thoughts are with Rita and their family.*

*Chantal Froehlich
Fidelity National Title*

Chantal Froehlich - July 11, 2025 at 04:17 PM