



In Memoriam: John R. Miller
1981-2011

John R Miller, a resident of New Haven, Connecticut, died Thursday, September 15, 2011 in New Haven. He was 29. Son of Richard and Vee Miller of Poughkeepsie, he was born November 17, 1981 in Poughkeepsie, New York.

John earned his undergraduate degree at the Hartt School of Music. He joined the staff of the Yale School of Music immediately after earning a master's degree in trombone performance from the school in 2007. Around that time, Miller also started the middle school music program at the John C. Daniels School of International Communication and served as its band director. To help fund the band program, Miller secured a grant from the VH1 Save the Music Foundation, which provides money to help schools establish music programs.

Colleagues and friends from around New Haven and Yale called Miller's death a huge loss for both communities. Miller led the Music in Schools initiative, a program that sends Yale School of Music graduate students to New Haven public schools to provide music lessons for children. Those who knew Miller well praised his ability to inspire a genuine love of music in his students.

"He was so compelling and passionate about music education," said William Purvis, director of the Yale collection of musical instruments. "[For him,] the point was not training musicians, but training human beings."

Gina Wells, principal of the John C. Daniels School, said Miller was personally invested in his students' success. Miller often drove his students to auditions, she said, and would counsel them as they considered which high school was best for them. Even after his students left the John C. Daniels School, Miller kept in touch with them. "He became the heart and soul of the music program [at the John C. Daniels School] that is now widely acclaimed," Wells said.

Miller used creative tactics to engage students, said Vincent Oneppo, MUS '73, a retired spokesperson for the Yale School of Music who came to campus Thursday after learning of Miller's death. Though music was his passion, Miller blended multiple disciplines in his lessons, Oneppo said, and even asked his School of Music tutors to compose music based on stories that the New Haven students had written in English class, and on illustrations they had drawn in art class. The tutors and students would play the resulting score together, Oneppo said.

Relationships with students and colleagues were a priority for Miller, who made a genuine effort to get to know those encountered in the course of his work.

Last fall, Miller officially stepped down from his post as band director at the John C. Daniels School to focus on Yale outreach projects at other New Haven public schools, Wells said.

Ellen Maust, facilitator of music for New Haven Public Schools, said that before Miller took over the School of Music's tutoring programs, few New Haven students earned spots in selective music festivals. But she said over 40 city students qualified for the most recent Connecticut Music Educators Association Southern Regional Middle School Concert Festival — more than ever before.

“We show that music is about expressing yourself and collaborating with so many other mediums,” Miller said during one visit to Lincoln-Bassett School in Newhallville. “When you combine them together, the experience students can have is tremendous.”

Dean of the School of Music Robert Blocker, who knew Miller both as a student and a staff member, said he is confident that Miller's work will continue to benefit New Haven youth even after his death. “John gave us a strong foundation for our music program in the New Haven schools, and we will build on that foundation,” Blocker said. “We will build on it, first of all, because children in New Haven schools deserve music in their lives.”

John was a member of CSMTA and had recently accepted the position as CSMTA State Treasurer. He also served on the board of CMEA.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in John's name may be made to John Miller Instrument Fund for New Haven Public Schools, Office of the Dean, Yale School of Music, PO Box 208246, New Haven, CT 06520-8246.

[This article was compiled from several sources.]