

Elizabeth and Joseph Kahn

Farewell and Thank You –

by Tammy Hawk



Joe and Elizabeth Kahn



Joe and Arturo Toscanini, Israel 1938

You may not always consider their origins, but for over 20 years, you've read insightful, informative program notes written by Joseph (Joe) and Elizabeth Kahn. Now, at 95, Joe has chosen to “retire” and pass on the program note torch. Elizabeth Kahn passed away in 2022. On behalf of everyone at Spivey Hall, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Joe and Elizabeth for enriching our concert experiences with their deep knowledge, thoughtful perspective, and enduring love of music.

Joseph Kahn's Story

Joe's journey began in Nazi Germany, from which he and his family escaped to Israel when he was just six years old. He grew up in a small community of German refugees, mostly former businessmen and professionals, who had become poultry farmers. Though music lessons were impossible, listening to great music became vital to Joe's life. Through a keen ear, an avid curiosity, and a photographic memory, he built an extraordinary foundation of musical knowledge—entirely self-taught.

Professionally, Joe became a professor of biochemistry at North Carolina State University. But his passion for music never waned. He hosted a classical music request program on WCPE in Raleigh, NC, and later gave pre-concert lectures for the North Carolina Symphony's Raleigh series. Alongside his wife, Elizabeth, he served as a classical music critic for *The Independent Weekly*. When classical music coverage began to decline, the couple founded the Classical Voice of North Carolina (cvnc.org), offering reviews, features, and a calendar for classical events across the region.

Elizabeth Kahn, the daughter of the late New York music critic Paul Affelder, had music in her blood. She grew up attending concerts, operas, and theater with her father and studied oboe. She majored in voice and piano at Brandeis University and pursued graduate studies in musicology. Elizabeth earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Harvard, where she carved out a unique niche exploring the connection between music and text. She also taught music appreciation and humanities at Brandeis and Harvard. Elizabeth began writing program notes for her father, one of the first people in the US to establish a concert program note service.

Joe retired from NC State in 1989 and began focusing seriously on the program notes business. At the time, Elizabeth was working as a corporate translator and interpreter, uninterested in following in her father's

footsteps. But when her company was sold, destiny took over, and she joined Joe to create a new venture: WordPros. The couple worked side by side for nearly 30 years, serving more than 40 clients at the company's peak, many, like Spivey Hall, for more than two decades.

"While Elizabeth was a musicologist with more technical training, I've always wanted to help people see how the music they're hearing fits into the history, culture, and world in which it was created," Joe shared.

He also noted how much audiences have changed: "People were more musically knowledgeable in the 1990s when we began. Even though many of the pieces remain the same, the way you talk about them—and tell their stories—has to evolve to meet the audience's needs."

As the saying goes, "*If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.*" That sentiment perfectly captures Joe's second act, a true labor of love that has enriched all of us fortunate enough to read his words and share in his passion.