



## James Milton Akins

June 15, 1956 - December 29, 2025

### James Akins

James (Jim) Milton Akins passed away on December 29, 2025 in Dublin, Ohio surrounded by love, family, and the music of Gustav Mahler. His passing came suddenly, following a brief and severe illness, after nearly fifteen years of courageously battling chronic health challenges caused by vibrational angioedema. Throughout each bout of illness, Jim fought with determination and grace, continuing to live fully and purposefully to the very end. He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend, whose life was defined by love, curiosity, creativity, and generosity.

Born in Savannah, Georgia, Jim was raised in Tallahassee and New Orleans before attending North Olmsted High School in Cleveland, Ohio. Jim met his wife, Lori Mae Akins, while they were both studying music at The Ohio State University, and they celebrated their 47th wedding anniversary just weeks before his passing. In Columbus, he established his career and grew his family to include his two daughters, Julianne and Amanda.

A world-class musician, Jim began his 40-year career as principal tuba of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra in 1981. As a performer, he was a giant and his reputation as a tuba player was known internationally. Jim was capable of astonishing lyricism, power, and emotional depth, often in ways audiences

never expected from the instrument. His artistry inspired countless musicians through passion, refinement, and expressive range. Often described by his colleagues as a “force of nature,” he was unique, artistic, inventive, and in constant pursuit of beauty and perfection. He actively served on orchestra committees throughout his tenure, courageously advocating for a stronger, more relevant orchestra. He was especially proud of a Hurricane Katrina relief concert that successfully raised tens of thousands of dollars to support rebuilding efforts.

A devoted teacher, Jim was Associate Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at The Ohio State University for more than 30 years. He proudly and passionately guided the tuba and euphonium students who joined his studio, inviting excellence from every individual. His mentorship shaped lives far beyond the studio, and his influence continues through the many musicians he taught and guided – even through the recent fall semester.

His creativity extended well beyond performance and teaching. Jim was in constant pursuit of improving his instrument and consulted with several manufacturers on tuba design and also was the inventor of the Dent Eraser. He held a deep commitment to Native American style flute-making and performance, bringing the same artistry and respect to this work as maker, musician, and teacher.

Often referred to as a “renaissance man,” Jim lived a richly layered life. He endlessly loved every family dog and had a knack for fixing and improving projects, even before “DIY” was popular. He was a fountain pen and train enthusiast; a wearer of classic fedora hats; an avid boxer, fencer, golfer, wrestler, kayaker, and hiker. He was also a talented artist, calligrapher, woodworker, inventor, and builder—always making, refining, and imagining what could be better or more beautiful.

Jim was preceded in death by his parents, John Oswald Akins and Joyce Dunham Akins. He is survived by his wife, Lori Mae Akins; his brothers, John Dunham Akins and Robert Ackerman Akins; his daughters, Julianne Akins Smith (husband Joseph “Patrick” Smith) and Amanda Christine Akins; and his beloved grandsons, Blanton Archer Smith and River Armstrong Smith (Julianne and Patrick).

Jim will be deeply missed by his family, friends, colleagues, students, and the many musicians whose lives he touched. Blanton affectionately named him “Babasch,” a name he proudly answered to as a grandfather. He is remembered with immeasurable love and gratitude—for his music, his mentorship, his imagination, and the extraordinary life he shared so generously.

A musical celebration of Jim’s life will be held on Sunday, March 22 at 2 PM EST in Weigel Auditorium at Ohio State. The family invites former students to join the OSU tuba studio and perform Jim’s favorites, including Wagner’s Elsa’s Procession to the Cathedral (sign up: <https://forms.gle/u7tLSC7vZJ3ctNgn9>), led by Jon Waters.

In lieu of flowers, gifts may be made in honor of Jim’s work in education to the Tuba and Euphonium studio at Ohio State (<https://www.giveto.osu.edu/makea-gift/details/318785>: School of Music Low Brass Fund 318785) or in honor of his performance career to the May Festival (<https://secure.cincinnati-symphony.org/donate/i/may-festival-tribute-gift>: tribute gift).

# Previous Events

## Celebration

MAR **22**. 2:00 PM (ET)

Weigel Hall  
1866 College Rd N  
Columbus, OH 43210  
(614) 292-6571

# Tribute Wall



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of James Milton Akins.*



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March 19 at 08:40 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of James Milton Akins.

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March 19 at 08:40 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of James Milton Akins.

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March 18 at 11:55 AM

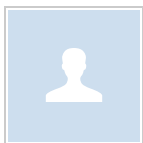


“ *Loving Lilies and Roses Bouquet was purchased for the family of James Milton Akins.*



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March 10 at 06:02 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of James Milton Akins.

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March 10 at 06:02 PM

ED

“ *I remember Jim for his wonderful smile, spirit and kindness. It was always a delight to see him at OSU gatherings and performances. His kind visit to the hospital to see Michael Davis in his last days is etched in my memory.*

*Eileen Davis*

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**Eileen Davis** - March 06 at 09:14 AM

KE

“ *Mr. Akins was such a kind and generous mentor to me when I was in high school, and an inspiring musician. I really looked up to him, and he instilled in me a love of orchestral music that made me want to pursue the tuba as a career. I'll always be grateful for getting to know him and for the impact he had on my life.*

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**Kent Eshelman** - January 12 at 04:53 PM

RM

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



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**Russel Mikkelson** - January 10 at 05:05 PM

RM

*Jim with former Presidents of the International Tuba/Euphonium Association: Scoot Watson (Kansas) and Jerry Young (Wisconsin- Eau Claire).*

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**Russel Mikkelson** - January 10 at 05:07 PM

LB

“ I've known Jim for a long time, originally as tuba prof. at OSU. I'm a flutist and flute maker with a brief time at the OSU music school. One year I'm floored to see Jim exhibiting at the National Flute Association convention and I said "Wait, you're a tube player, what are you doing here?" I got an education on the Native American flute and short lesson on how to play and how they are made. Somewhere in our history his talented and lovely wife, Lori, buys a flute from me and in that process I drop a casual curiosity about fountain pens. Jim knew I'm all about exotic hardwoods in my piccolo making. Next thing I know, I have a complete education in the art of the fountain pen and I am the proud owner of a beautiful olive wood antique fountain pen. You were a renaissance man in every sense, Jim, and inspired all whose lives you touched. Lillian Burkart

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**Lillian Burkart** - January 09 at 06:24 PM