



Jay Thomas Dawson

OCT 22, 1947 - SEP 19, 2025



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Jay Thomas Dawson

OCT 22, 1947 - SEP 19, 2025

Nashville's Native Son, Jay Thomas Dawson, passed away peacefully in the early hours of Friday, September 19, 2025.

During a professional music career spanning almost 60 years, the award-winning Conductor, Composer, Arranger and Multi-Instrument Musician left a lasting imprint on the Global Music Community, influencing generations of musicians and helping to transform the Marching Band World.

Jay began his music journey playing French Horn at Isaac Litton High School as one of 'The Marching 100+' and the Nashville Symphony Youth Orchestra, later moving on to The Nashville Symphony Orchestra and earning his Music Degree at George Peabody College (now Vanderbilt) with further studies at Southern California and Northwestern Universities. After completing his studies, he started his professional career at East High School, then McGavock High School as Associate Band Director. Jay went on to become the Assistant Conductor for the Nashville Symphony Orchestra and Nashville Symphony Youth Orchestra Conductor, along with numerous other musical appointments and accomplishments over the years.

Jay co-founded Arrangers Publishing Company and set in motion the reshaping of traditional Marching Band music, taking contemporary popular songs and arranging them for Band. In effect, making Marching Band music 'cool' and delighting crowds at High Schools and Universities across the country with arrangements that directors love to rehearse and students love to play. Jay was greatly respected for his compositions and arrangements for Concert Band, as well. During his time as President, Editor, and Arranger at APC, Jay composed over 300 arrangements, with 170 publications still in print.

He was the Pipe Major for the Nashville Pipes and Drums for 14 years, during which time he expanded and led the band to two back-to-back US Open Pipe Band Championship wins.



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Jay leaves a legacy in his body of work that will live on and continue to inspire musicians for years to come.

Jay's love for music was echoed in his love for his garden, where he enjoyed spending time designing beautiful, complex flower beds. He was a man of strong Faith who was devoted to his church and serving his community. He loved his family and many friends and was a natural entertainer, welcoming host, and amazing Pawpaw.

Jay Thomas Dawson was preceded in death by his parents J. Thomas Dawson and Sarah (Mims) Dawson. He is survived by Cindy, his devoted wife of 22 years, stepson Nathan Dungan (Ashley), stepdaughter Suni Goff (Chris), grandchildren (Bailey, Toby, Brayden, and Anna Claire), sister Pam Dawson (Gil Gibbs), and sister Debbie Shelton.

A memorial service to honor Jay is forthcoming and details will be announced at a later date.




Events

Jay Thomas Dawson

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Celebration of Life Visitation


 **Saturday**, October 25, 2025


 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM CT


 **Dalewood United Methodist Church**
2300 Ridgecrest Dr, Nashville TN 37216



Celebration of Life Memorial Service

 **Saturday**, October 25, 2025

 4:00 PM CT

 **Dalewood United Methodist Church**
2300 Ridgecrest Dr, Nashville TN 37216





Tribute Wall

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Donyale Williams-Walls posted:

My condolences to Jay's loved ones. I didn't know Jay, but when I joined the marching band at Jackson State University, we played one of his original compositions "Journey to Tomorrow." It was the absolute most beautiful -- and special -- pieces of music I had ever heard. All of my peers agree that it is unexplainable what we feel when we play it, or hear it. The "Sonic Boom of the South" is what the band is called and they continue to play it to this day. The feeling is all the same. So, I just wanted to share that about Mr. Jay Dawson's gift to us at Jackson State University and thank him posthumously. He left us something very very special. - Donyale Walls

April 15 at 6:51 PM



John S. shared 2 photos and a video to the **Tribute Wall** album.

We so treasured Jay as a friend over the years and especially loved when he visited us in Maryland while on a guest conductor visit to our county school system. Here he is, in action with the kids. And here is, in action at the crab house! Love you Jay! Sonja and John Sutton



September 21 at 12:03 PM



Alicia & Bill Woods sent a Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet to the Dawson family.



October 24 at 11:32 AM



Marie Czapinski sent a Sweet Tranquility Basket to the Dawson family.



October 24 at 8:04 AM



Marie Czapinski planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Jay.



October 24 at 8:04 AM



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Mnpd Drill & Ceremony Team sent a Sacred Duty Spray to the Dawson family.

October 23 at 12:41 PM



Anonymous sent a Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum to the Dawson family.

October 16 at 7:34 PM



The Mnpd Aviation Unit planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Jay.

October 16 at 7:34 PM



Lori Odom posted:

In a city of amazing musicians, Jay was a standout. I loved to hear him play and loved to work with him for several years when his bagpipe arrangements were the highlight of our Church's Christmas program. What a lovely man. Our family extends our deepest sympathy to Jay's family. May God bless and comfort you.

September 25 at 12:42 PM



Rob James posted:

Had the honor to stay with Jay and Cindy while adjudicating Contest of Champions. Jay was so gracious to share their home. We had a blast that weekend! Rest in peace. Rob James

September 23 at 9:21 PM



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Tom Wilhoite posted:

So sorry to hear about the passing of Jay. Although I only knew him for a small portion of his life his impact will be forever life changing for me. How do you thank someone who has given you the gift of music? Jay introduced me to the pipes thru my church and under his instruction provided me and many others a glimpse of a world I never would have otherwise seen. I will always think of him and give him a quick thought of thanks when I play. I often play his original tune "Highland Processional" and it has become one of my favorites. I have heard it said that " To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die" and in this thought Jay will live long into the future in many hearts. "We all die. The goal isn't to live forever, the goal is to create something that will." Please take comfort in the fact that Jay has done this in so many ways and for so many people. He will continue to be a part of our lives and the lives of our students in the future. a grateful piper, Tom Wilhoite

September 23 at 3:08 PM



Scott Perry posted:

Over the past several years I appreciated Jay Dawson more and more. He became a member of Dalewood United Methodist Church in the 90's. Since then he became a leader in the music ministry at Dalewood. While being the choir director at Dalewood he also became the driving force of Dalewood's ministry at Stratford High School. During his time in this ministry he gave it his all. Every week during the football season he witnessed to the players and was an ear to any questions they had about religion. During this time he also developed a close relationship with the players. I also remembered and enjoyed the times that I saw him dressed in his Scottish regalia and playing his beloved bagpipes

September 23 at 11:18 AM



Scott Perry posted:

Over the past several years I appreciated Jay Dawson more and more. He became a member of Dalewood United Methodist Church in the 90's. Since then he became a leader in the music ministry at Dalewood. While being the choir director at Dalewood he also became the driving force of Dalewood's ministry at Stratford High School. During his time in this ministry he gave it his all. Every week during the football season he witnessed to the players and was an ear to any questions they had about religion. During this time he also developed a close relationship with the players. I also remembered and enjoyed the times that I saw him dressed in his Scottish regalia and playing his beloved bag-pipes.

September 23 at 10:03 AM



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JS

Jennie Smith posted:

When playing bagpipes for weddings, Jay would always ask what color the bridesmaid's dresses were - he wanted his kilt to match!

September 22 at 12:35 PM

DS

Don Shenenberger posted:

I am a McGavock class of 1979, French Horn player. Jay wrote a piece for us to play at the Tournament of Roses Parade on 1 Jan 1979. Jay made me want to play my horn better, my whole McGavock band experience made me want to be better. Thank you Jay for being such positive influence on me and the scores of players before and after me. You will be missed but the ripple effect of your influence will last forever. Sincerely, Don Shenenberger, MD Chesapeake, VAMcGavock class of 1979

September 22 at 6:53 AM

LS

Laurel Wolfe Surles posted:

Jay was my cousin & although we met later in life, really accepted & took me into the fold. My most funny & fond memory, was when I was visiting the cousins and we all gathered at Sarah Claire's, Jay, Pam & Debbie's dear Mom's house, Jay brought his bagpipes & played for us dressed in full regalia. We are talking a low ceiling smallish living room 😂 oh my.... I never realized bagpipes could cut through eardrums like butter! 🤯 And not to miss an opportunity for an audience, yup, this wasn't a short song... Bless you Cousin Jay for us staying in touch. My deepest condolences to your wife, & your sisters & their families... All the stories I ever heard were those of kindness & your deep love of music. Fly high Cousin 💜 As my husband Mark passed in Oct 2021, truly, my heart goes out to you all. 💜 Laurel

September 21 at 8:14 PM

JM

Jessie Maurer posted:

I enjoyed going to Blessing of the hounds and then to The Puffy Muffin for lunch.

September 21 at 5:16 PM



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SG

Sarah Gholson posted:

Dear friend of the family; my older sisters went to Issac Litton H.S. and from the time I was small, I heard the cool guy on French horn. Years later, he encouraged me in my music and later on, in music ministry at my church. Everytime we met was a special coffee moment. My deepest sympathy to the family.

September 21 at 3:16 PM

CB

Cherese Brooks posted:

Jay was the music director for the Oakland High School production of "Hello Dolly" in 1975! His passion for production and music was contagious. Jay interacted with all of us as though we were part of his professional music world with kindness and feedback to improve our musical contributions. Prayers for all that will need a new normal without Jay, but joy for all that Jay has left for the world to continue to enjoy and be inspired by. Cherese Garner Brooks

September 21 at 1:13 PM

DB

David Bearden posted:

There are very few bands, in our part of the country anyway, that have not played one of Jay's arrangements, or something from APC. As a young director in the 80's, I always looked forward to getting an album each year with the newest arrangements. He did a lot for marching bands, and will be remembered for his contributions. RIP Jay.

September 21 at 12:03 PM



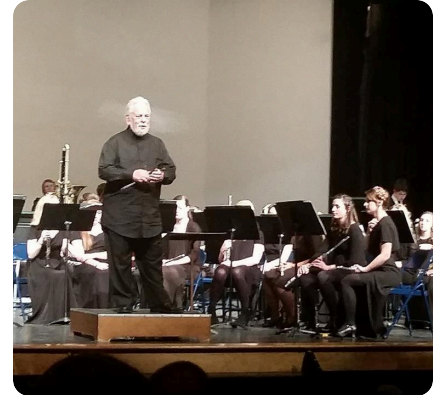
Media

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John S. shared 2 photos and a video to the **Tribute Wall** album.

October 24 at 6:01 PM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Jay by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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