

# Joaquina Calvo Johnson

**Joaquina Calvo Johnson died at 10:30 p.m. August 11, 2012 from cancer, which was first diagnosed on October 19, 2011 but had been insidiously and without obvious symptoms, ravaging her body for too long. Too long for a fair fight but...** for Joaquina this was war, the time to put on her makeup, her scarf pinned just so, a spritz of Tresor and with great resolve to join the doctors in the fight to be the miracle, the one person who slips through the keyhole. Through seven cycles of chemo, the loss of her hair was just an excuse to buy a wig--or two. By April she said she felt normal, prepared the Yuba Sutter Master Chorale for a great concert with the Veridian Symphony Orchestra and continued to rehearse the Borgamaria Lyric Opera singers for the June Opera Scenes; it then became apparent that the cancer, with too great a head start, was winning the battle. Her body lost the war but her spirit was unvanquished.

Joaquina was born on April 3, 1938 in the small company town of Westwood, CA to parents Mary and Celestino Calvo. When the family moved to Sacramento in 1943, there were also two boys, Joaquina's brothers Gregory and William. They settled in the Hagginwood area where Joaquina attended Hagginwood Elementary School and graduated at 17 from Grant Union High School. Music was already an important part of her life. She sang for fun but practiced her violin every day and managed to find time for piano lessons. At California State University Sacramento, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music with an emphasis in Violin performance. While continuing her college studies, she began studying voice privately with her teacher-mentor, Julia Monroe, and it was then that her musical world shifted from violin performance to the serious study of singing. The decision to sing and to teach is what changed many lives, not just her own.

The first stop in Joaquina's teaching career was in the school system of Kettleman City, CA, then on to Pinole and Oakland. Her marriage to Thomas Jensen in 1961 and their move to Covina, CA gave her the opportunity to build a powerhouse choral program at Northview High School before the couple relocated to Sacramento, CA. Thomas Jensen died in a car accident in 1970 which nearly claimed Joaquina's life. With her strong sense of purpose, Joaquina fought to regain her health and with a heavy heart restructured her life. With encouragement from her mentor, she returned to being a student and, as a result, Joaquina holds a M.M. in Vocal Performance from the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana, a Diploma in 1975 from the London Opera Centre, London, England and a certificate in German Lieder from the Hochschule für Musik, Salzburg, Austria.

Joaquina performed internationally in Wales with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, in Italy at the Opera Barga Festival, in London, England at the Sadler Wells Theatre, Collegiate Theatre, Mermaid Theatre, and Saint John's Smith Square. She also performed with the Indianapolis Symphony, Sacramento Symphony, Camellia Symphony, Stockton Symphony, Auburn Symphony, and Yuba Sutter Symphony Orchestras. She was heard in recital at Crocker Art Gallery, as a Community Concert Artist, Sacramento Opera Mini Opera Series, Brown Bag Series, Pippin Pocket Opera, Sacramento Bach Festival and in recitals at Yuba College and elsewhere.

When Joaquina joined the music faculty at Yuba College in 1977, she was greeted by a Symphony Chorus of seven. Undaunted, she began to build with the help of her colleagues what eventually became a virtual music conservatory. She directed the Yuba College Chamber Singers, the Yuba College



Symphony Chorus, the Yuba Sutter Youth Chorus, taught voice classes, a basic skills class for Early Childhood Education students, Applied Voice for advanced students, directed the music preparation for more than a dozen musicals and welcomed the opportunity to bring music to the service clubs in the area. In 1994, the Yuba College Chamber Singers and the Yuba College Symphony Chorus were invited to participate in the International Music Seminars Cambridge Experience for performances with conductor John Alldis in Stratford-Upon-Avon, Cambridge, and London, England. Joaquina also established both the annual Community College Vocal Music Festival and the High School Vocal Festival bringing hundreds of visiting students to the Yuba College campus.

In 1995, she received a National Award For Excellence in teaching and contributions to music education. Awards also came from the Rotary Club of Yuba City; Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, Iota Sigma Chapter; Yuba College Faculty Senate; in 2009 for service to the Arts, she received the DON Award.

After 25 years of nurturing Yuba College students, Joaquina retired from her full-time faculty position but she continued with her devotion to the arts. She became Artistic Director/Conductor of both the Yuba Sutter Master Chorale and the Borgamaria Lyric Opera as well as maintaining a private voice studio in Yuba City, CA. She was a board member and past president of the Yuba Sutter Regional Arts Council, ex-officio board member of the Borgamaria Lyric Opera, and board member of the Tri-County Concert Association. Her professional affiliations included the American Choral Directors Association, past state board member representing Community Colleges; past president of the San Joaquin Valley Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing and past governor of the Northern California Region; Music Educators National Conference; Music Teachers National Association. Joaquina frequently conducted master classes and clinics on the voice and was highly sought after as a clinician for various music festivals and conferences. Joaquina's students have gone on to sing with professional opera companies, symphony orchestras and choral ensembles throughout the United States. Many have chosen to become teachers.

Joaquina was passionate, sensitive, thoughtful, strong, willful, possessed a wonderful sense of humor, loved her family deeply, was beloved, bright, funny, loved to dance, loved St. Arbucks for their Tall-decaf-nonfat-extra hot-one sugar-no whip-mochas, loved peanut butter on graham crackers, good champagne, loved tending her flowers, was devoted to the arts, loved the traditional Roman Catholic Mass with elevated music, was full of brilliant ideas for another concert or opera production, was a relentless advocate for the arts, loved her dog Ohne ein Lied, was beautiful inside and out, and loved finding a new scarf.

The poet had it right:  
*Some people come into our lives and quickly go.  
Some people move our souls to dance.  
They awaken us to new understanding  
With the passing whisper of their wisdom.  
Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon.  
They stay in our lives for a while,  
Leave footprints on our hearts  
And we are never, ever the same.*

Joaquina and her surviving husband, Howard W. Johnson, were married December 23, 1978 in Fair Oaks, CA. Her parents preceded her in death. She is also survived by step-children, Marc Alan Johnson (Eliane Elias), New York, NY; Miles Norlin Johnson (Gwynne), Denton, TX; Terese Lynn Johnson Atkins, deceased; six step-grandchildren, Gunnar, Francesca, Chase, Trace, Ian, and Piper; brother, Gregory Calvo, Citrus Heights, CA; brother, William Calvo (Mary Jane), Gold River, CA; niece, Michelle Calvo; nephews, Alexander Calvo, Adam Calvo, William Calvo, and Mark Calvo; three great-nieces; one great-nephew; many cousins; beloved friends; and hundreds of former students.

The family wishes to thank the staff of the Fremont-Rideout Cancer Center, Fremont-Rideout Memorial Hospital, Fremont-Rideout Hospice, and doctors William F. Nakashima M.D., Karen Takishiba M.D., and David Harrison M.D. for the concern and care shown to Joaquina. Home hospice provided by family members and friends was a gift of love that is without price.

Joaquina had not considered memorial donations but she felt very strongly about supporting the Saint Isidore Catholic School, the Joaquina and Howard Johnson Music Scholarship established in the Yuba College Foundation, the Sutter County Animal Control, and Sacramento Ballet. The Tri-County Concert Association, the Yuba Sutter Master Chorale, and the Yuba Sutter Regional Arts Council were especially close to her heart.

One last tribute to the special person Joaquina has always been, excerpted from an email sent to her in 2005:

*"I don't know if you remember me as I haven't had any contact with you for so many years. I graduated from Northview High School in '69. I just yesterday received the Alumni Reunion book (I didn't attend) and was absolutely thrilled to see your picture, address and email. You have come to my mind many, many times in the past years, and always with deep warmth. You probably don't know what a difference you made in my life. I was unhappy at home and found my joy in Choir, Madrigals, and the musicals; 'Camelot' was by far my favorite. But more than the Choral Department, you impacted my life. I really loved you. I remember at the Awards Ceremony just before graduation you were giving out the awards, which were 8x10 photos of the "Stars" to be put on the choir room wall's Hall of Fame. I was a behind-the-scenes person, never a soloist but always a background singer, so there was no hope I would be chosen for the Hall of Fame. But you did choose me. You said that it isn't only the ones in the limelight who make the music but everyone involved. Thank you so much for that. I continue to love music and have never forgotten you."*

And, dear Joaquina, neither shall we.

A Rosary was held at 7:30 p.m. on August 21, 2012 at Saint Isidore Catholic Church. A Mass will be offered at 10:30 a.m. on August 22, 2012 also at Saint Isidore Catholic Church in Yuba City, California.