

In Memoriam

Cory Burris

April 1, 1994 – February 23, 2025

Class of 2013

From Cory's Obituary:

Cory Michael Burris was born on Good Friday, April 1, 1994 — more than three months premature. Though he was not expected to survive, he defied all odds, leaving St. Joseph's Hospital just 10 weeks after his birth. At the age of two, Cory was diagnosed with severe autism, with predictions that he would need institutional care by his teenage years. But once again, he proved expectations wrong. While other children played, Cory's childhood was dedicated to intensive therapies, eventually thriving in mainstream education at Echo Mountain Elementary School and the Arizona School for the Arts. The faculty and therapists who supported him became his lifelong friends. He graduated high school with a scholarship to Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he flourished, earning a bachelor's degree in Music with an emphasis on Organ Performance. He returned to Phoenix and completed his Master's Degree in Piano Collaboration at Arizona State University.



From an early age, it was clear that Cory had a rare musical gift. He sang with the Phoenix Boys' Choir, performed in high-level choirs, and competed in piano events, winning numerous awards and gold medals. Even as a child, he played for weddings and funerals and was recognized as an exceptional musician. At just 16 years old, he began working as a paid pianist for churches across the Valley. While in Ohio, he worked as staff organist at Saint Clarence Catholic Church, Saint Richards Catholic Church and the Newman Center at Oberlin College while filling in at churches throughout the Cleveland area and once gave a Carillon concert in College Circle, where he cleverly sneaked in a rendition of the Jeopardy! theme song into his performance. When he returned to Phoenix, he worked as staff organist at St.



Matthews Episcopal Church, but left to hold simultaneous Staff organist positions at Our Lady of Joy Catholic Church and Holy Cross Catholic Church, while also filling in around the valley at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, St. Mary Magdalen, Queen of Peace, Church of the Ascension, St. Theresa's Catholic Church, All Saints Catholic Newman Center. Beyond his work in church music, Cory performed for weddings, funerals, and theatrical productions while also teaching piano at home and at the Scottsdale Studio of Music.

A true linguist, he spoke more than 10 languages and longed to travel the world. His talent took him on an organ crawl through Germany. One summer he was selected from pianists across the United States to spend two weeks in Europe with Musiktheater Bavaria in Germany and also visited Holland, Italy, and Rome.


Born on April Fool's Day, Cory had a sharp and playful sense of humor. He loved being pranked on his birthday and, in turn, delighted in playing thoughtful pranks on others. He never forgot a face, a name, or a date, and his warmth made him beloved by all who knew him. He was passionate about cats, game shows, and Super Mario, but above all, he loved his family deeply.

Throughout his life, Cory was a man of great faith. Raised Roman Catholic, he converted to Evangelical Christianity during his illness. His unwavering faith was a source of inspiration to all who knew him.

At the age of 27, Cory was diagnosed with Clear Cell Sarcoma. Though he had always feared medical procedures, he faced three years of grueling treatments with courage and grace, never once complaining. He fought bravely, demonstrating the same strength that had defined his entire life.

Cory was a beloved son, brother, grandson, godfather, nephew, uncle, and friend to so many. As a musician, he was a pianist, teacher, organist, composer, and musical transcriptionist. He accomplished more in his 30 years than many do in a lifetime. We will always wonder what he could have achieved with a full lifespan, but we take comfort in knowing that his legacy will live on in the music he created and the countless lives he touched.

ASA alum and teacher Jessica (Hernandez) Wooley sums up Cory's influence at ASA, "Cory was a classmate, a friend, and a quiet teacher to all of us. From the time we met him in middle school, he showed us the power of authenticity and reminded us that true



connection comes from empathy and understanding. Through his unique perspective and gentle spirit, Cory taught our community what it means to be inclusive, patient, and kind. His presence made our school a better place, and his legacy will live on in the way we support and uplift one another. We are better for having known him, and he will never be forgotten."

Cory will always be a treasured member of the ASA community. We honor the memory of his talent, his kindness, his wit, and his determination.

