



## Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell

October 29, 1927 - December 16, 2020

With sorrow and fond memories, the passing of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell, age 93, on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 is being shared by his son Ricky. Also left to cherish his memory are his three grandchildren, Derek, Kadenna and Joshua; and a host of extended family members and friends.

Joseph is preceded in death by his wife, Patsy Grimes Mitchell; daughter, Brenda Yvonne Edwards; three siblings, Esther M. Jenkins, James R. Mitchell, Jr. (both of New York) and Josephine M. Plummer (Durham).

Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell's story began on October 29, 1927, when he was the fourth and last child born to the late James Robert Mitchell, Sr. and the late Lucy Evans Mitchell in Durham, North Carolina. He attended Durham public schools and was a student at Hillside High School during the World War II era. At Hillside, he played football and he was the last member of the infamous '43 Hornets football team that was "undefeated, untied, unscored upon". Joseph was also among a group of students who helped sustain the band program in the absence of a band director--perhaps a harbinger of the career in music that lay ahead of him.

Dr. Mitchell's long association with St. Joseph African Methodist Episcopal Church began before he graduated from high school. In the spring of 1944, with fewer men in the church due to the war effort, Mrs. Bessie Whitted,

director of the Senior Choir, and J. J. Henderson, the choir's president, decided to invite male singers from Ms. Teresa Claggett's Hillside High School chorus to sing with the Senior Choir. Thus the relationship between Joe, as friends call him, and St. Joseph AME was born--a collaboration that has produced beautiful music for 70 years!

After graduating from Hillside in 1945, Joe enrolled at North Carolina College, now North Carolina Central University, on a football scholarship. While majoring in music at NCC, he filled in as director of St. Joseph's Senior Choir, and officially took on that position in 1956. Dr. Mitchell then directed the Senior Choir from 1956 to 1971, followed by Dr. Charles Gilchrist from 1971 to 1975. Dr. Mitchell resumed the work as Senior Choir director from 1975 to 1979, from 1996 to 2003, after the death of Dr. Gilchrist in 1996, and again in 2008. Dr. Mitchell also earned two advanced degrees along his musical journey: a master's degree in music education from Chicago's VanderCook College of Music, and an Ed.D. in music from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Under Dr. Mitchell's direction, the St. Joseph Senior Choir recorded two albums: Handel's Messiah in 1966 and Theodore Dubois' The Seven Last Words of Christ in 1971. He stepped down as director of the Senior Choir in 2003 to teach at Fayetteville State University. Upon his return to Durham and St. Joseph's in 2004, Dr. Mitchell reassumed the position of director of the Men of St. Joseph Chorus, which was assembled under his musical leadership in 1998.

Over the years between 1944 and the present, Dr. Mitchell's musical talents, studies and successes as a teacher and band director have taken him away from St. Joseph at various times. Fortunately for us, however, he has always come back home. His many notable career achievements include directing the bands at Freedman High School in Lenoir, North Carolina; Hillside High

School and NCCU. He also has taught at Morris College, Shaw University and Fayetteville State University. On a more personal note, he counts the loves of his life first among the highlights of his adult life: his wife, Patsy Grimes Mitchell; daughter, Brenda Yvonne; son, Rick, and grandchildren Derek, Kadenna and Joshua.

Beyond St. Joseph, Dr. Mitchell served as music director/saxophonist with the North Carolina Jazz Ensemble. His many musical activities in the larger community also include imparting his insights and wealth of musical knowledge to the next generation of musicians. Bravo and very special thanks to St. Joseph's own maestro and treasured friend, a master conductor, consummate music educator, and inspiration in the larger Durham community and beyond -- Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell!

We ask that you keep the Mitchell family in your thoughts and in your prayers.

A memorial service has been scheduled for Saturday, January 16, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. at St. Joseph AME Church, 2521 Fayetteville Street, Durham, North Carolina 27707. The memorial service will be streamed live via the St. Joseph AME Church's website at <https://www.stjosephame.org/>

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

JAN 16. 1:00 PM (ET)

St. Joseph AME Church  
2521 Fayetteville St  
Durham, NC 27707  
(919) 683-1379

# Tribute Wall

TH

“ I wish to convey my long belated condolences upon hearing of the passing of Dr. Joseph Mitchell. He was my colleague during my early years as a member of the NCCU music faculty, having served as an adjunct professor after his tenure as director of bands. He was a fine musician and scholar; I am honored to have met and worked with him.

*Dr. Timothy Holley, Associate Professor of Music, NCCU*

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**Timothy Holley** - February 17, 2024 at 02:31 PM



“ *Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell*

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October 05, 2023 at 11:31 AM

CW

“ *Mr. Mitchell, (Dr. Mitchell) as he was known when he came to our little town of Lenoir, N. C. to start a band program is the reason that I became a Band Director. It was his teaching that enabled us to not only learn to play an instrument but also to do it to the best of our ability. I was terrified of him because he expected the very best at all times and the band program at Freedman High School became very successful because of his leadership. I will be forever indebted to him because he is the reason that I chose to pursue music education at N.C.C. and became a band director. He was the spark that ignited my desire to teach young people how to play and master their instruments.*

*Mr. Mitchell was "One Of A Kind" and a MasterTeacher. He will be missed and all of the lives he touched will continue his legacy.*

*Rest In Peace, Mr. Mitchell.*

*Sincerely,*

*Charles Williams*

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**Charles Williams** - January 14, 2021 at 02:26 PM

AC

“ I had not seen Mr. Mitchell in awhile as with everyone because of the virus, but still was surprised at his passing. Only had one year with him @ HHS before he went to NCCU, but that was quite memorable. I'm glad I went to the luncheon honoring him a few years ago. He was definitely a force...!! Rest now.

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**Anita Cox Cobbs** - January 05, 2021 at 11:35 AM

XC

“ Condolences to the family of my professor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Joseph Mitchell. I entered the profession of music education under his guidance, and have long enjoyed his encouragement and advice throughout my career. That infectious laugh and smile will truly be missed.



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**Xavier Cason** - January 01, 2021 at 03:57 PM

DW

“ My sincere condolences to the family of Joe Mitchell, a longtime friend, former music instructor, and neighbor. There was no finer person or musician than Mr Mitchell, a true professional in every sense of the word. Perhaps my most treasured memory of him was in 1961 when we backed Sam Cooke in Fayetteville (along with Clarke Edgerton and others). May God bring comfort and inner peace to the grieving family now and in the future.

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**David Wiggins** - December 30, 2020 at 04:07 PM

GR

“ *GLORIA RENTROPE lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell*



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**GLORIA RENTROPE** - December 28, 2020 at 05:46 PM

GR

“ *Dr. Joseph T. Mitchell was my Instructor in the Marching Band, The Concert Band and the Orchestra at Hillside High School. He was my Band Instructor at North Carolina College for the 2 months that I was in the Band there.*

*But "Joe" was first of all my first cousin. His mother and my father were sister and brother (Evans Family). Joe's passing leaves me with no other first cousins on my father's side to my knowledge. He as also a cousin on my mother's side as his father and my mother were cousins (Mitchell Family). So for me, it is a lost of part of my legacy.*

*I cherished the times with "Joe." I was part of some of the celebrations of his later life, a life filled with music.*

*I extend my condolences to "our" family. I pray for Blessings, comfort and peace to his son Ricky and to all of the family.*

*Fondly,*

*Gloria Evans Rentrope*

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**GLORIA RENTROPE** - December 28, 2020 at 05:42 PM

MH

“ I had the privilege to meet Dr. Mitchell after he signed my dad's (Nathaniel Hayes Sr.) guest book at Fisher Funeral Home. I went to his home and he told me that he and my dad started teaching in Lenoir at the same time. I was supposed to come back by to look at pictures he had. He was a great man and influenced many to go into music education.



Marsha Hayes Harris - December 27, 2020 at 08:05 PM

EB

“ Dear Mitchell Family,

Scripture states Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. My prayer for you is that the love and prayers of those who loved your dear patriarch and the precious memories of a life well-lived will bring you comfort in the days ahead.

Dr. Mitchell was a kind, talented, and beautiful gift to all who were fortunate enough to have been in his presence. We rejoice that he is now in the presence of his Lord and Savior.

God's blessings to you,

E Brickhouse



Eboni Faith Brickhouse - December 24, 2020 at 08:56 AM

CW

“ To the Mitchell family,  
I remember Dr. Mitchell from the wonderful years as our band teacher at Hillside High School.. We danced and stepped to his performance commands as he taught us the satisfaction of excellence. After 60 years of seeing him often since the Hillside days, he always greeted his former students with that big smile as if he never forgot who we were.  
Heaven has a master musician and he's still playing. You have my sympathy.  
Constance Sartor Walker-HHS '60

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**Constance S Walker** - December 24, 2020 at 12:48 AM

HD

“ Harriette VanHook Davis lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



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**Harriette VanHook Davis** - December 23, 2020 at 11:46 AM

PW

“ Deepest Condolences to the family; I have years of fond memories of Joe via HHS, NCCU, etc.  
Preston Weaver Atlanta, Ga



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**preston d weaver** - December 22, 2020 at 05:11 PM

DB

“ *Denise Ratliff Brandon lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell*



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**Denise Ratliff Brandon** - December 22, 2020 at 04:51 PM

RH

“ *Roes Howell lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell*



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**Roes Howell** - December 22, 2020 at 03:53 PM

VW

“ *Dr. Joseph T. Mitchell's passing was shocking news! "Joe," as he was called by close friends and neighbors, and I were next door neighbors on Fargo Street. Although I was not the accomplished musician as Joe, I played the piano and longed to be the great maestro like Joe. He was so friendly, quiet and unassuming. I just loved his personality and his willingness to always help me with my pursuit to learn more about music. He will truly be missed, but he leaves a legacy that will remain in the recesses of my memory forever. RIP Joe.*

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**Velma Sims Wilson** - December 22, 2020 at 01:37 PM

GH

“ *Geraldine Horton lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell*



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**Geraldine Horton** - December 22, 2020 at 11:27 AM

RS

“ *Mr. Mitchell as been a family friend, literally, all of my life. He was a huge influence on my father and mother. I extend my deepest condolences to his family.*



*He will be missed.*

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**Rodney Scurlock** - December 22, 2020 at 09:46 AM



“ I so admired and respected Dr. Mitchell. He was my high school band director and when my class graduated, those of us who continued our studies at NCCU were, once, again, under his direction in marching and concert band. My life was opened because of Dr. Mitchell’s confidence in my ability to play the instrument and choreograph for Central ‘s drama department. His influence, along with my parents teachings, formed my approach to every endeavor I have undertaken, and his confidence gave me the courage to face the fear of performing at work or in concert. Dr. Mitchell was the help God sent to help me realize my purpose in life. I feel the loss of him passing into eternity, but I know God has a plan. All who have trusted in Him for their redemption will feast together and live in communion forever. Farewell for the moment to Dr. Mitchell. I pray that you, his family and friends will be comforted with this hope.  
Phyllis Ledbetter

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**Phyllis Ledbetter** - December 21, 2020 at 08:20 PM

DM

Phyllis you demonstrated your gratitude to him by spearheading the living tribute to him. Thanks.

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**Dennis Mathews** - December 22, 2020 at 11:38 PM

MW

“ Womble family



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**Marilyn Womble** - December 21, 2020 at 03:04 PM

JP

“ James T. Pippin, Sr lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



James T. Pippin, Sr - December 21, 2020 at 07:02 AM

DM

“ Although I was an ungifted musician, he always treated me like his most talented musicians. As the new band director at NCC (NCCU), he insisted that I attend NCC by handing me an admission application with a stamped envelope. I will miss him checking on me 800 miles away. May he be blessed. He blessed so many.

Dennis Mathews - December 20, 2020 at 08:29 PM

HS

“ Dr. Mitchell was my band instructor at Hillside High, both marching and concert bands. Very knowledgeable, very disciplined, very competitive especially when developing routines for half time shows at football games. I will always remember his laugh. He was a wonderful instructor and teacher of music.

Hilda Smith - December 20, 2020 at 07:09 PM

RM

“ To the Mitchell family:

*Growing up on West Weaver St, we got to know our neighbors very well as my parents had the “it takes a village” concept. Dr. Mitchell was a vital part of our community. You are in our thoughts and prayers and may the peace of God sustain you during this time. God bless you.*

*The Raymond McAllister Family*



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**Raymond McAllister** - December 20, 2020 at 06:34 PM

JJ

“ Jerry Head, Jr. lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



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**Jerry Head, Jr.** - December 19, 2020 at 11:30 PM

LD

“ I would like to extend my sincere condolences to the family of Dr. Joseph T. Mitchell. He was a great educator, mentor, colleague and friend. He demanded the best from all of his students and we will continue to strive to be our better selves. Rest In Peace Dr. Mitchell and we will miss you performing with the North Carolina Jazz Ensemble.



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**Leon C. King, Ph. D.** - December 19, 2020 at 10:25 AM

CB

“ I would like to express sincere condolences to the family of Dr. Joseph Mitchell. May you find peace in knowing that he inspired many to achieve their dreams. Continue to Rest in Paradise my friend. I will miss that smile and encouraging words.



**Chester Bobo** - December 19, 2020 at 09:18 AM

DG

“ Duncan C. Gray lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



**Duncan C. Gray** - December 18, 2020 at 08:30 PM

DG

*My mentor and respected professional*

**Duncan C. Gray** - December 18, 2020 at 08:33 PM

NW

*I would like to extend my condolences to the family of Dr Joseph T Mitchell. Dr Mitchell leaves a legacy of wealth of knowledge as a music educator, mentor, and a humanitarian for all people that he has served. The musical knowledge and aspects of life that he displayed through his teaching is everlasting. Dr Mitchell you will always be remembered.  
Nathaniel E Walker*

**Nathaniel E Walker** - December 19, 2020 at 11:15 PM

SB

“ *Fond Memories as his Saxophone student ,  
Mastertraxx and his best student  
the BEST guys* 💜💜



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**Sandra Battle** - December 18, 2020 at 04:37 PM

JH

“ *RIP Mr Mitchell. A few years ago he and my  
Mother were neighbors on Weaver Street.  
May his son and family find Peace in knowing  
“ Absence from the body is PRESENT WITH  
THE LORD” GOD BLESSINGS AND  
COMFORT* 🙏🙏



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**Jackie HollowayJohnson** - December 18, 2020 at 04:15 PM

VH

*What a man, what a man, what a man, a mighty great man, mentor,  
educator, musician, and downright friend. I've had several opportunities  
to be honored to share the same stages with him. To know him was to  
love him. The Mitchell family has my heartfelt condolences.*

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**Val Hannah-Murphy** - December 20, 2020 at 03:19 PM

AJ

“ Dr. Mitchell was my teacher , a mentor , a friend , band member . He would always find time to talk about music and life whenever you had questions about either. His dedication to professionalism has benefited so many musicians ; many of whom are current performing artist , band & choir directors. His approach to music teaching was totally focused and demanding , yet the rigor was applied with awareness of the individual's strengths and weaknesses .

Although he was absolutely serious about musical proficiency in the development of artist pursuits , regardless of genre , his sense of humor could be totally infectious .

His warm and empathetic nature made him a friendly and reliable source of support for so many.

RIP My friend !

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**Alvis O. Grady , Jr.** - December 18, 2020 at 11:13 AM

CH

“ Cedric Mario Horton lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



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**Cedric Mario Horton** - December 18, 2020 at 10:53 AM

RA

“ Rolanda L. Allison lit a candle in memory of Dr. Joseph Thurman Mitchell



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**Rolanda L. Allison** - December 17, 2020 at 10:01 PM