

# Honoring RORY COONEY

BY LISA STAMOS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA M. BARRETT



## Notes From Heaven

RORY COONEY has touched millions of lives across the world with his beautiful and inspiring music. Written mainly for those who worship in the Catholic tradition, his published songs can be found today in hymnals of several denominations. He has recorded 20 albums of his moving compositions featuring his voice (“only one song per album”), his wife Terry Donohoo’s vocal mastery, and friend Gary Daigle’s contributions as well.

“For decades, Rory Cooney has been one of the leading composers of music for the Roman Catholic Church,” said Alec Harris, president of GIA Publications. “Songs like Jerusalem, My Destiny; Canticle of the Turning; I am for You; and Heart of a Shepherd are staples of Roman Catholic liturgy throughout the English-speaking world.”

This one-man epicenter of heavenly music has called Saint Anne Catholic Community in Barrington his church home, where he is Director of

Music and Liturgy. Next year, he will celebrate 30 years there.

Some Saint Anne parishioners call him their “superstar,” another says he’s an unsung hero. Another long-time friend credits Rory as a consummate liturgical musician and poet. Most who worship with his music as a guide say he helps fill their spiritual needs.

Rory is the oldest of seven children in his Irish Catholic family. His first years were spent in Ohio. His family moved to Phoenix, Arizona, when he was 5. With the priesthood quietly calling him, Rory attended a Catholic Seminary high school and college. During a college semester away at DePaul University, he saw Chicago as a potential home. As can happen, Rory realized that a calling to the priesthood would not be his career destination. Instead, he landed an entry level job at an international travel agency where he spent 10 years. It was the moment he was let go, he says, that was divine intervention. This would open him up to a path through several stops and starts on his journey to becoming a music director with a church—his true calling.

Rory spent 10 years at his first music director position in Phoenix. A

chance meeting with a member of Saint Anne, Courtney Murtaugh, at the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, connected him to his next 30 years of serving the Saint Anne community. He took six weeks to wrap up his job in Phoenix, and make arrangements with his former wife and children whom he would keep in close contact with. Saint Anne's then-pastor Rev. Jack Dewes held the music director position for Rory until he could relocate.

The soaring beauty and scriptural relevance of Rory's music is the result of a blessed intersection between seminary training, music education, playing alongside a guild of highly talented musicians, knowledge of the history of the church, composition classes, working with clergy, and choral experience. He writes music inspired by biblical events and themes that encapsulates the struggles everyday people face. He amends brokenness with healing lyrics.

Rory traveled to Jerusalem with fellow parishioners where he heard his music sung at a mass in the Garden of Gethsemane. The moment recalled brings him to tears.

"Music comes out of our own lives," Rory says. "I'm inspired by the people I've been with for my whole life."

## HERE ARE SOME WORDS THAT OTHERS SHARED ABOUT RORY COONEY.

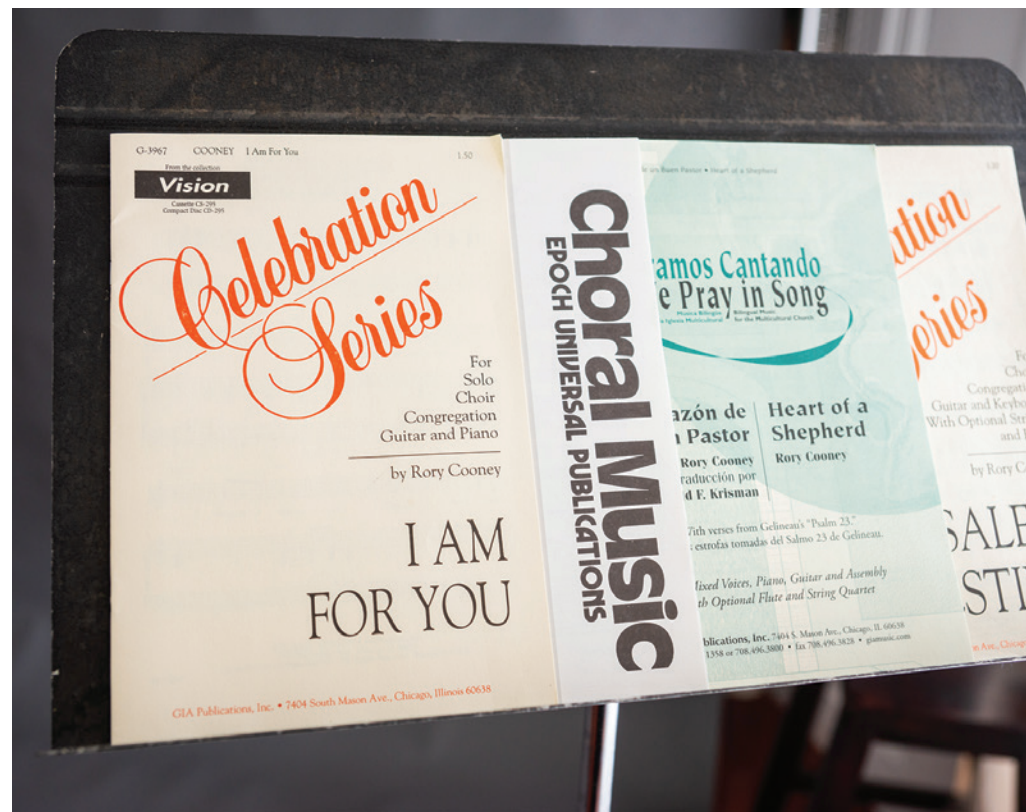
### Nancy Daluga, PARISHIONER

The Daluga Family holds Rory Cooney in the highest esteem, and we consider ourselves fortunate to have experienced the magnificence of his talent, intellect, and dry humor since his arrival at Saint Anne all those many years ago. He is a Superstar, and we are his Groupies. We played his CDs in our car. If we went to another parish for Mass, we checked the hymnal for Rory Cooney songs. Our three children looked forward to the Easter Vigil every year because Rory made it a wonderful, spiritual experience. As parents, we were grateful for the music that drew our kids in, making them want to attend Sunday Mass.

Some years ago, on our wedding anniversary, Rory, his lovely wife, Terry, and Gary Daigle, his dear friend and collaborator, were performing in concert at Saint Anne. What better way to celebrate our anniversary than to attend the concert with our kids? When we arrived, the church was crowded, and we settled into a pew towards the back. We were several songs in, when to our surprise, they announced the next song was dedicated to Nancy and Jim Daluga on their wedding anniversary. Imagine our shock and delight when these three fabulous people sang Rory and Gary's Covenant Hymn. Rory's lyrics sung to Gary's music, "Wherever you go, I will follow, wherever you live is my home," were the perfect anniversary gift. We will always be grateful that Rory Cooney shared his many, many gifts with us.

### Karen Darch, BARRINGTON VILLAGE PRESIDENT

For a man who has created many beautiful songs, Rory Cooney is very



much an unsung hero. Since Rory's arrival three decades ago at Saint Anne's parish, the music and services have a level of artistry and reverence that has truly been inspiring. He is a man of great faith, with the heart "of a shepherd" who has shared both with the Saint Anne's community and a far greater community, as well. Rory has made himself a part of the fabric of this community. He has been a regular participant year after year in the Crop Walk raising funds to feed the hungry locally and worldwide. He has offered informative programs at Saint Anne that bring a deeper understanding of faith and faith in action beyond that imparted at church services. His liturgical music inspires millions to experience and celebrate their faith as it appears in hymnals across America.

Along with his wonderful, uplifting music, Rory has brought a terrific sense of humor, an always pleasant demeanor, and a genuine concern for others in our community. His quick wit brings laughter to many situations, but never undermines the strength of his presence. While he might be the first to remark "better to ask forgiveness than permission," his playful spirit is always leading down the right path.

Music, mirth, and a man on a mission—our community is very blessed to count Rory Cooney as one of our own.

### Alec Harris, PRESIDENT OF GIA PUBLICATIONS, INC.

I have worked with Rory since the 1990s. I have seen him constantly strive to do more, to learn, and to work to make positive contributions. He has been so helpful to us at GIA, making Saint Anne's Parish available for recording sessions and concerts over many years. He is dedicated to his craft and to his community.

For decades, Rory Cooney has been one of the leading composers of music for the Roman Catholic church. Songs like 'Jerusalem, My Destiny',



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'Canticle of the Turning,' 'I Am for You,' and 'Heart of a Shepherd,' are staples of Roman Catholic liturgy throughout the English-speaking world. Rory has also been a leader at The Liturgical Composers Forum, an important network of composers, where he has been a mentor and leader of other musicians.

The life of a church musician means long hours—countless nights and weekends—and every holiday. That hard work has touched thousands of lives. Congratulations, Rory!

### Rev. Ed Murphy, FRIEND

Rory has been a treasured friend for 52 years. We have gone to school together, traveled together, and celebrated his songs together. He has an amazingly sharp wit and an understanding of the heart struggling to find faith and fellowship in an increasingly complex and divided world. He has been a loving and supportive friend through good times and struggles.

The greatest gift he has given me is filling my spiritual needs through his music. There is no one better than him in all the American Catholic Church. The beauty and poetry of his work is unparalleled and has been at the core of my spiritual journey for most of my adult life. You could not have chosen better. Thank you.

### Amy Florian, FRIEND

I first knew Rory as a consummate liturgical musician and poet writing insightful and profoundly beautiful lyrics. His gift with words and melodies gained much-deserved recognition and awards professionally, yet his focus

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**-REV. ED MURPHY**

is always to help communities understand their faith and lift their voices in sung prayer.

I've also had the privilege to know Rory as a friend. His outward personality can seem larger-than-life at times, and his frequent booming laugh always makes me smile! Yet inside he's a thoughtful introvert with a generous, kind heart. Behind the scenes, he raises money for friends in need and gives of himself in so many ways.

Rory's devotion to music is only matched by devotion to the Cubs! He cheers every "W" and laments every "L." His artistic interests don't stop at music, either. He's also a gifted nature photographer whose stunning photos, especially of birds, raise the spirits of those unable to get out into the woods.

Finally, Rory is committed to his family and friends, to whom he is a source of support and comfort, wisdom, and grace. He is a blessing to all who know him. He is an amazingly talented person who makes the world a better and kinder place.

### Dennis Wells, FRIEND

When I first met Rory Cooney, I was still in the Vincentian Fathers &



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Brothers' seminary in Perryville, Missouri. Rory was back at his alma mater to do a workshop and concert of liturgical music. We had already been using much of his music for years. What struck me immediately was the joy that he exudes, along with his incomparable talent and creativity.

After I left the seminary and became Director of Liturgy & Music at the Vincentian's parish in St. Louis, I was blessed with Rory's friendship and wisdom over these many years. Rory has always been gracious in sharing his music with the Church, touching the hearts of thousands and thousands of people whom he will never even meet. I cannot count the number of times that a parishioner will come up to me and tell me how one of Rory's songs moved them to tears, or it was just exactly what they needed to hear that day. Every day, somewhere in the world, Rory's music is reaching someone's heart!

Finally, for me personally, I am so thankful for all the conversations and time spent over the years. Rory's quick wit and humor never fail to make me laugh. I am so happy that Rory is receiving this honor and that he is recognized by so many for his innumerable contributions. 