

## A Tip of the Hat to Chip Kaufmann

by Jennifer Vogel

He wears a lot of hats, including a real one.

Blue Ridge Public Radio classical music host Chip Kaufmann is retiring this year, after nearly 36 years at the station. His radio career began as a volunteer in 1983, when the station was located at UNC Asheville. For the past ten years, his volunteering has brought him back to campus, where he's certainly been busy – teaching 42 OLLI classes, most on silent films. The perennially popular instructor began the current session saying, "This is my first last class."

Kaufmann's wit wins him fans both on the radio and at OLLI.

"Chip's knowledge of film is extensive and he shares it enthusiastically," says current student Alice Helms. "I've had an opportunity to see films I'd never see anywhere else — foreign silent films, and African-American silent films, for example."

Chip's current Wednesday afternoon film class is delivered without notes. Likewise, he has an encyclopedic knowledge of the classical canon, although he doesn't play an instrument and surprisingly, can't read music. If there were a musical Jeopardy program, bets would be on Chip, who knows Carl Maria von Weber's thumb was as long as his forefinger.

"Mozart was one of Beethoven's idols," Kaufmann observed in March, as an on-stage panelist at the Asheville Amadeus Festival. Our own OLLI instructor easily held his own with pianist Garrick Ohlsson and Darko Butorac. Why not? He spoke before Butorac's presentation when the new Asheville Symphony Director was auditioning and appeared at Kaufmann's standing "Symphony Talk."

And what's with the cap?

"It was my father's," he explains. Chip grew up in nearby Greenville SC, where "there was no classical music in the home at all. My mother listened to Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra records. My father had a great collection of Swiss yodeling music." It wasn't until Chip went to college that he had the chance to buy classical LPs, where he devoured the liner notes on back. He claims to be self-educated about music from reading liner notes.

As for silent films – how did he learn about those?

In 1962, he attended "Harold Lloyd's World of Comedy" and was hooked by silent films. As well as classic comedy, he's playing some very dark films at OLLI this session, taking the 121 registered students through the whole gamut of emotions.

In addition to music and film, Chip is a movie critic, theatre buff and (of course, the voice) performer. When he moved to Asheville in 1980 to start a dinner theatre, "People would ask questions and they'd just need to point and say 'Ask the man in the red hat.'"

Chip and his wife Diane are moving to Hilton Head in June. His last day on air at WCQS is May 31. His last OLLI class is May 15 – but there happens to be another Osher Lifelong Learning Center nearby. Will he dive right back in to teaching? “No,” he mused. “I’ll take this summer off and will start back in the fall.”