

In Memoriam: Eleanor Dubner Cohen, Professor Emerita of Music (1926 – 2026)

“Ellie” Cohen, Professor in the Music Department, 1974-2001, passed away peacefully in March 2026 in Oakland, California at the age of 99. She completed her Master’s degree program in music at Cal State Hayward (now Cal State East Bay) graduating summa cum laude in 1974 and receiving a teaching position there prior to graduation.



She completed 27 years of dedicated service to the university's vocal and choral programs before retiring to become Professor Emerita in 2001. She taught voice, piano, choir, lyric diction, and any course that needed her. Her voice studio was always jam-packed with students wanting to study with her.

She was pivotal in the careers of hundreds of students around the world. She saw talent in everyone and the encouragement she provided made a lasting impact.

In describing her work, Ellie wrote,

“I emphasize body awareness, breath management, proper approach to vocal registers, knowledge of the vocal mechanism, and dramatic involvement in performance.”

Ellie was born in October 1926 in Passaic, New Jersey, to Russian immigrant parents, George Dubner and Helen (Mostovoy) Dubner. She attended Public School No. 1 in Passaic. As a child Ellie studied piano, and at age 16 she won a local piano competition sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution. She was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree, cum laude, from New York University’s School of Education and began her singing career with the Robert Shaw Chorale.

While living in the New York area, Ellie performed with Arturo Toscanini and spent summers at the Tanglewood Music Festival, where she met her husband, Simon Cohen, a cantorial student at Hebrew Union College. They married in November 1950 and had two boys, Joshua (April 1952) and Joel (October 1953). In 1953, the family moved to Oakland to take a cantorial position at Temple Beth Abraham, where Ellie worked as the synagogue’s choir director. She became very active in Temple life, and in 1957, while 9 months pregnant, Ellie went into labor while conducting the High Holy Days choir on Kol Nidre. A doctor friend in

the back row of the choir timed her contractions, and after the service he whisked her off to Kaiser Hospital in Oakland to give birth to Jeremy (October 1957).

In addition to synagogue life, Ellie sang in the West Coast premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley) and Donald Pippin's chamber concerts in San Francisco (Spaghetti Factory).

Ellie was active as a singer, choir director, piano soloist and accompanist in the Berkeley Piano Club, where she was a member for 66 years. She sang with the Lucy Kinchen Chorale, Kol Truah (Temple Israel's High Holy Days choir), and many local San Francisco Bay Area choirs. She and Simon can be heard on the Country Joe and the Fish track, "Doctor of Electricity" (Here We Are Again album, Vanguard, 1969.)

In retirement Ellie was always busy with her private teaching studio, volunteering as a reading tutor for the Oakland Unified School District and supporting activities of the Coalition of Concerned Medical Professionals, attending the Humboldt Chamber Workshops, supporting the Oakland Symphony and other local concert series, and participating in seminars as accompanist and assistant with vocal specialist Jo Estill giving workshops in Milan, Sidney, Melbourne; and in the U.S. in North Carolina and California.

Ellie is predeceased by her son Warren Joel Cohen (Michele Rivard) and survived by sons Josh (Genevieve) and Jeremy (Andrea Liguori), grandchildren David (Aleyna), Hannah (Brahim), and their mother, Susanne Friedrich; Zachary (Gillian) and Gabriel (Lara), and their mother, Nicole Liboiron.

The music scholarship created at CSUMB when she retired, is still providing support to many voice students: **Eleanor Cohen Endowed Scholarship in Vocal Performance.**

Ellie's wonderful memorial service is available to view on **YouTube:**
Eleanor Cohen's Memorial Video-2026-June-7.