

# David Wiegand, Chronicle arts editor and TV critic, dead at 70

By Sam Whiting | May 1, 2018 | Updated: May 2, 2018 1:43pm

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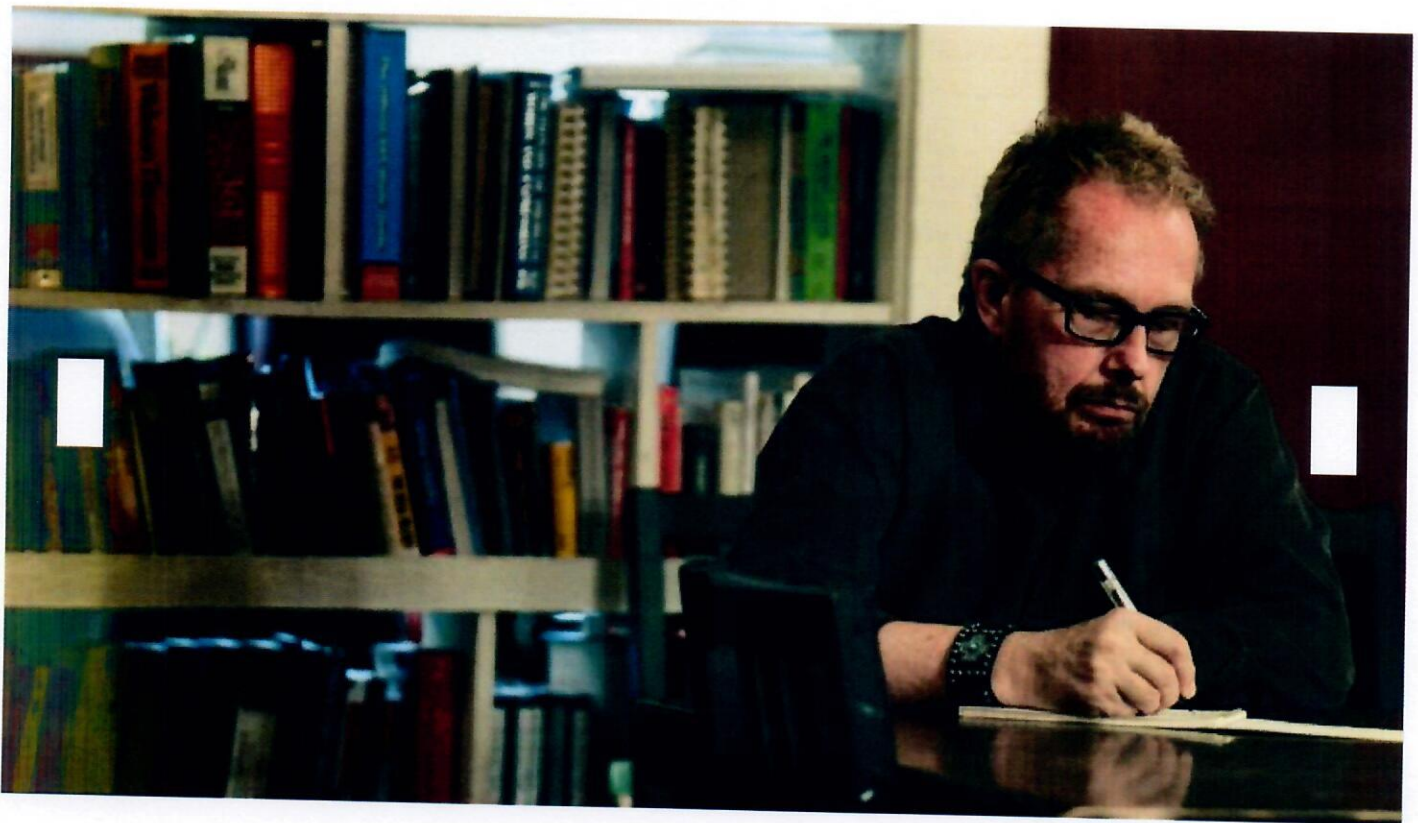
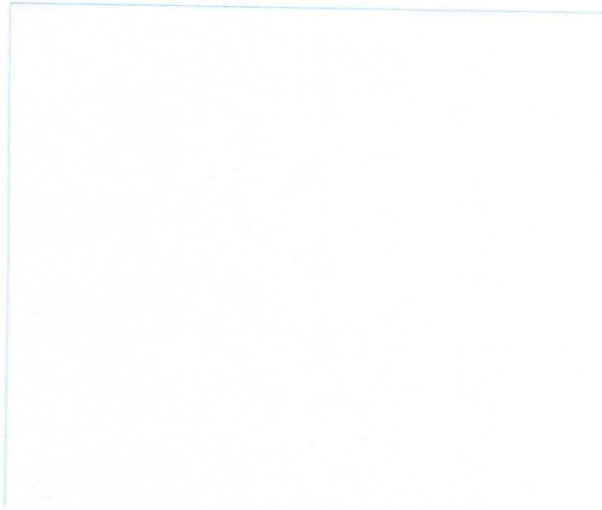


Photo: Lance Iversen / The Chronicle

IMAGE 1 OF 8

San Francisco Chronicle Datebook Editor-Writer David Wiegand takes notes during a writers workshop for high school age teens by singer Natalie Merchant Tuesday August 10, 2010.

David Wiegand, an assistant managing editor who led The Chronicle's arts and entertainment coverage for decades and was an impassioned member of the Bay Area arts community, has died, apparently of natural causes.



Wiegand was found Tuesday in his San Francisco home after co-workers expressed concern that they had not heard from him. He was 70.

"David's death is a devastating loss not only to our newsroom, but to the arts community," said Chronicle Editor in Chief Audrey Cooper. "I've never known a journalist with deeper knowledge of the cultural institutions that make the Bay Area such a wonderful, thriving place."

His long career at The Chronicle began when he was hired in May 1992 as a temporary copy editor in the section he would go on to oversee, Datebook. Wiegand distinguished himself as someone with empirical knowledge about every art form, high and low, from opera to ballet to country music to the latest trends in pop culture. Over the past several years, he had added his own voice to the paper's roster of critics, providing incisive, award-winning television reviews.

He also lent his voice — literally — to "The Do List," a KQED show about weekend events in the Bay Area that he co-hosted with Cy Musiker for nearly a decade until his departure from the radio segment last year.

"He was really a devoted fan of all art forms," said Nancy Bechtle, past president of the San Francisco Symphony who often ran into Wiegand at shows and plays going back

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## REMEMBERING DAVID WIEGAND

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Chronicle

David Wiegand: A look at  
the work of an influential



two decades. "I always counted on him for a reaction to what he had just seen and heard because he was so smart and intuitive, with fabulous taste."



Wiegand was a regular at the San Francisco Symphony, Opera and Ballet, along with American Conservatory Theater and Magic Theatre.

Bechtle recalled that after she became president of the Symphony she invited Wiegand to lunch at the private Villa Taverna club downtown. He walked in wearing a vibrant paisley shirt, as was his custom. When he was told he had to have a necktie, Bechtle recalled he dug through the bin of loaners for the most garish one he could find, to mismatch with his shirt.

"He cared so much about the arts in the city, and he cared so much about how they were covered and how they were viewed, and in what regard they were held," said Kary Schulman, director of the city's Grants for the Arts, and a longtime friend and lunch/performance partner. "He could be critical, but it always came from a place of love."

In 2010, Wiegand became The Chronicle TV critic. Two years later, a column he wrote called "Television Drags Its Feet on Diversity" won an award from the Northern California Society of Professional Journalists.

"He'd talk TV all day if you wanted," said Ronn Owens, on whose KGO talk show Wiegand frequently appeared. "He was insightful and really knew how to pick the TV shows. If he liked something, I watched. If he didn't, I didn't."

Wiegand wrote about TV almost daily, while also overseeing both the daily and Sunday Datebook sections. In his spare time, he wrote fiction, earning the O. Henry Award in 1996 for his short story "Buffalo Safety."

Robert David Wiegand was born May 19, 1947, in Rochester, N.Y., where he was raised. He graduated from Irondequoit High School in 1965. He earned a bachelor's degree in English (1969) and a master's in journalism from American University in Washington, D.C. (1973).

Award-winning fiction writer Ann Beattie met Wiegand at college, where he was editor of American magazine, the university's literary magazine. "From then on, we were in constant



contact,” she said by email, “and that remained true until two days ago.

“He’s been my biggest supporter, and he never failed to read anything I asked him to read — which he inevitably made much, much better (or pointed the way to my doing that, even if it involved making a huge X through an entire paragraph). He was an amazing editor, who had a clearer sense of what I meant, often, than I did.”

Wiegand worked for a variety of newspapers, rising to the positions of managing editor of Dole Newspapers in Somerville, Mass., and editor of the Amesbury (Mass.) News.

After joining The Chronicle as a copy editor in 1992, he was eventually promoted to assistant managing editor for Datebook in 2014.

“David Wiegand did so much for the arts, keeping them front and center for all of us in San Francisco,” said Michael Tilson Thomas, music director of the San Francisco Symphony. “Ever since I arrived in San Francisco, I have felt his steadfast support.”

Carole Shorenstein Hays felt it, too.

“He was an enthusiast, wasn’t he?” she said, noting that while she was remodeling the Curran theater, Wiegand regularly stopped by to offer advice on color and tile selections. “He just had such a knowledge and an openness for all the possibilities of things.”

Outside of the arts, Wiegand loved his dogs. He lived in a condominium in the Dogpatch neighborhood for years, where he could be seen walking his Australian shepherds, first Morgan and most recently Angus.

Wiegand’s last cultural outing was to the opening of “Angels in America” at the Berkeley Repertory Theater on Saturday. He was wearing a silk purple wraparound coat and flashy shoes, fashion being his one indulgence.

After three hours and 35 minutes of “Millennium Approaches,” Wiegand reluctantly left before “Perestroika,” which ran three hours and 45 minutes. He would have liked to have stayed, but he said he had to get home to walk Angus.

He is survived by a sister, Elsbeth Starzynski, and a niece, Jessica DeWitt, both of Rochester, N.Y. Services are pending.

*Former Chronicle Pop Music Critic Joel Selvin and Chronicle staff writers Carlyne Zinko, Tara Duggan, Lily Janiak, Leah Garchik and Leba Hertz contributed to this report.*

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