

# Music at Southern Adventist University

*The forerunner of Southern Adventist University was a grade school that opened in the fall of 1892 in Graysville, Tennessee. Called Graysville Academy as it started its second year, it was subsequently named Southern Industrial School and Southern Training School. When the school was relocated to Collegedale, Tennessee in 1916, it was first called Southern Junior College, and then Southern Missionary College in 1946, when it achieved senior college status. It became Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists in 1983 and, ten years later, Southern Adventist University.*

**S**outhern Adventist University was founded when there were few Seventh-day Adventists in the South, a region still reeling from the devastation of the American Civil War, which had ended just 27 years earlier. It was privately funded at first, with no financial support from the church. This reality, coupled with constant changes in leadership, staff, identity and name, and primitive living and working conditions, made its survival at times uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

Despite, or possibly because of, these hardscrabble beginnings under the most challenging of conditions, music was an integral part of life from the school's earliest days. In addition to the singing associated with services and events, there was also instrumental music as evidenced by a photograph of a 1904 band consisting of 28 well-dressed men, including three professors.<sup>2</sup> And, as early as 1908, a diploma in music was being offered at what was then known as Southern Training School.

**G**radye Brooke, one of the first diploma graduates in music, initially completed a diploma in stenography in 1907. Hired to teach at STS that fall, she completed the program in music while teaching that year, and then left to work in the Georgia Conference where she also studied music at the Atlanta Conservatory. Upon graduating from

there in 1910, Brooke returned to the STS to teach both stenography and music. As the next school year started, however, she taught only music. The board, pleased with her work, voted unanimously to rehire her for the next year, but she declined.

She did return two years later, in 1914, to teach and then left as the year ended to attend Washington Missionary College, where she completed a bachelor's degree in music in two years. While she was away at WMC, Southern Training School moved from Graysville, Tennessee, to Collegedale and was renamed Southern Junior College.

Brooke was hired to teach music at SJC when she graduated from WMC, but left after one year to marry B. F. Summerour, a college board member.<sup>3</sup>

**B**rooke was one of at least four different music teachers in the first five years of SJC. The uncertainty in music ended in 1921 when Iva Dell Kirk, a pianist, was hired. Two years later, Melvina Zachary, a violinist, and J. Lowell Butler, a singer, were added to the music faculty.

While Butler was there for only two years, during that time he appropriated a small building that had originally been a child's playhouse and then the president's office for SJA, and made it into a

music studio known as the Doll House. It was the first freestanding music facility on campus.<sup>4</sup> Both Kirk and Zachary taught through most of the 1920's, providing stability in the program during a succession of choir directors.

**A**s that decade ended, Doris Holt Haussler and her husband, Cecil, came to the campus from the Northwest, he officially to teach all of the history and government classes and some Bible, and she to assist in music, teaching piano and voice on a commission basis. She was successful and by the beginning of their second year on campus was appointed head of the music department.

During the next six years she conducted a women's chorus and the orchestra, organized and accompanied vocal groups and soloists, and made the first effort to create a school song.

Her husband, in addition to teaching in other areas, assisted in music also, directing the college church choir, college chorus, and a male glee club. He also taught a conducting class and led out in regular regional radio broadcasts of college choral groups. Even though the Hausslers were totally immersed in all aspects of life at the school, they still found time to take students on field trips to attend classical music events in nearby Chattanooga.<sup>5</sup>

**H**arold A. Miller's arrival when the Hausslers left in 1935 marked the beginning of a new era in music at SJC, the real beginning of today's music program at SAU. A prolific composer of hymns and gospel songs and an inspiring teacher and choral conductor, Miller immediately expanded touring activities and introduced the choir to more challenging works. Soon after his arrival he arranged for the choir to begin participating in annual performances of the *Messiah* with the civic chorus and orchestra in Chattanooga, a tradition that continued for many years.

Miller was 44 when he arrived, an experienced teacher who had studied at Atlantic Union College and then taught at Mount Vernon Academy in Ohio and Washington Missionary College. His teaching experience and exposure to the music programs at these Adventist colleges undoubtedly shaped his idea of what he wanted to do at SJC.

In 1942 he left SJC, only to return in 1945, after teaching briefly at Union and Pacific Union colleges. This contact with the music programs at these schools probably also affected Miller's perspective about what should happen in music as SJC became a four-year senior college, a step taken by the end of his first year back on campus. The school, now named Southern Missionary College, began offering a four-year degree in music.

Miller by this time was a legendary figure on campus because of his success as a published composer, the inclusion of ten of his songs in the 1941 SDA Church Hymnal, and a school song written in his second year, *Come on Down to Collegedale*, which had been a hit on campus and sung with unbridled enthusiasm by the students.

Moreover, Miller had become an important part of life at the school. Students from his years recall with fondness his Friday evening song services, which he would lead while seated at the piano, and his illuminating comments about classical works he played at the beginning of chapels.<sup>6</sup>

**F**or years the music department was housed around the chapel stage area in College Hall, primary instruction building on campus. When the school gained accreditation as a four-year senior college in 1950, plans were made for a music building that was completed in 1954. It was an attractive brick building in Georgian-Colonial style. With its seven studios, seventeen practice rooms, rehearsal room and recital hall, it was a source of pride to the school. Dedicated the year after Miller's retirement, it was named the Harold A. Miller Hall.<sup>7</sup>

**D**uring Miller's leave in the early 1940's, another legendary figure in early Adventist choral work, Clarence W. Dortch, served as chair of the department. Eminently qualified in both training and experience, he had graduated from Pacific Union College and then returned to teach there for six years following World War I.

He then chaired the music department at Southwestern Junior College for sixteen years, completing a master's degree at North Texas State University while there. Dortch had also studied at the University of Chicago and sung in workshops under the leading choral directors of the time.

His quiet, patient manner and commitment to sacred choral music impressed the students. He was known affectionately as "Fessor" during his five years at SJC, a title he had been given while at SWJC, and

one that would continue as he left in 1947 to complete his career at Walla Walla College.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after Dortch's arrival at SMC, Dorothy Evans, a gifted young singer and teacher, joined the music faculty. For two years after Miller returned, the three musicians worked together, creating what would be the beginning of a strong vocal and choral tradition at the school.

**M**iller's penchant for writing gospel music and the popularity of that genre in the South, particularly when sung by male quartets, led to the establishment of many of these groups at SMC beginning in the 1940's and continuing into the 1960's. This passion for quartet music, fueled by the popularity of The King's Heralds quartet, a group associated with H.M.S Richards' Voice of Prophecy national radio broadcasts, and by the Faith for Today television quartet, swept the campus during those decades, persisting in subsequent years as a cherished memory for SMC alumni.

The Crusaders, most prominent of the early quartets at SMC, was soon followed by The Chordsmen, Collegiate Quartet, The Adelphian Quartet, and many others. Although the quartets and women's trios were the most popular, there were other similar vocal groups. Several of the singers from these ensembles became members of the King's Heralds and Faith for Today quartets or gained fame as soloists.<sup>9</sup>

**A**n expansion in the music faculty occurred as the four-year college sought accreditation in 1950. J. Mabel Wood, a keyboard graduate of SJC who had then taught at SWJC and at Union College, where she had earned a master's degree at the University of Nebraska, was the first

to be added, joining the faculty in 1948.

Norman Krogstad and his wife, Eleanor, came in 1949, the first husband and wife team with music degrees to teach in the department. He was also the first specialist in band to direct that group.

In 1952, the Krogstads were joined by Adrian R.M. Lauritzen and his wife, Evelyn, he to chair the department and she to teach voice. Near the end of doctoral study in music, he completed his degree at the end of his first year there, becoming the first music teacher at the college with a doctorate. During his five years as Chairman of the Division of Fine Arts, Lauritzen established a degree program in music education.<sup>10</sup>

**W**hile a number of changes happened in the program and the faculty during the 1950's, J. Mabel Wood remained as a constant, her time at SMC continuing through that decade and into the next. A refined and elegant person, she was an inspirational teacher to her piano and organ students and her music appreciation classes. She served for several years as the church organist.<sup>11</sup> Other keyboard teachers during her first decade at the college included Eleanor Krogstad and Olive Batson. ~~Evelyn Lauritzen.~~

Also, in the 1950's, Margarita Dietel Merriman, who had spent her childhood years at the school and graduated from its two-year music program in 1946, returned to teach theory briefly before leaving to complete a Ph.D. in theory and composition at the Eastman School of Music.

While a student, she had written words for a new school song, *Collegedale Forever!*, which would be sung for the next 20 years. Near the end of her study at Eastman, she accepted a position at Atlantic Union College where she became an

influential and stabilizing influence on that campus in a career that spanned four decades.<sup>12</sup>

Another student, Charles Pierce, a 1951 graduate in piano, would be the first four-year graduate to complete a doctorate in music. During his career he chaired the music programs at Columbia Union and Canadian Union colleges.

Other keyboard teachers during Wood's 20 years at SMC included Del Case, organist, and Judith Schoepflin, Lois Rowell, James McGee, and Elaine and Morris Taylor, pianists. The Taylors, who had married in 1955, just prior to teaching together at Walla Walla College for two years, taught and performed as a popular piano duo at SMC during the seven years they were on campus.

**T**aylor also served as Chairman of the Division of Fine Arts during those years, presiding over a program that, like the college, was rapidly increasing in size. Teachers were added and the number of music majors tripled, keeping pace with the overall growth in college faculty and enrollment. He began laying the groundwork for accreditation of the music program by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and started fundraising for a larger music facility.<sup>13</sup>

**D**orothy Evans Ackerman returned to the campus, after an eight-year absence, in the same year the Taylors arrived. During her absence, four different teachers had taught in the vocal area including Wayne and John Thurber, Joseph Perlman, and Francis Cossentine. Both of the Thurbers had been members of the popular Adelpian Quartet while students. Wayne taught for three years and John for one, before leaving to teach

elsewhere and eventually join the King's Heralds quartet.

Ackerman's reputation as an outstanding contralto and as an exceptionally effective teacher in voice would make her contribution a priceless one for the next 22 years. She was a well-known soloist in that region who performed often in high profile settings to great acclaim.<sup>14</sup>

Her work in the vocal/choral area would continue with Don and Stewart Crook, Larry Otto, Sandra Fryling, Julie Boyd Penner, Marvin Robertson, Don Runyan, James Hanson, and Bruce Rasmussen. Don Crook, another former member of the Adelpian Quartet, directed the choir for six years.

Runyan led the choirs for nearly twenty years while Robertson's service spanned more than three decades. Under their leadership a number of fully-staged musicals were produced, including, *The Music Man*, *My Fair Lady*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and others.

**B**ands were important in life at the school from its earliest days, providing music to lift the spirit, entertain, and celebrate important occasions. From the performers' viewpoint, it was a break from the routine of the sometimes seemingly too restrictive life on a boarding school campus. Ray Jacobs, a member of the band in the early days of SJC, recalls, "The one thing that really thrilled me was the band." A trombonist, he particularly enjoyed playing, and later listening to, *The Poet and Peasant Overture* by Franz von Suppe<sup>15</sup>

The band and related smaller instrumental groups were active over the years, giving concerts and performing in churches and other venues in the area. One noteworthy event for which they provided the perfect touch was the noisy send-off

at the railroad station for President H. H. Hamilton when he left to begin his presidency at Washington Missionary College.<sup>16</sup>

Norman Krogstad, first trained band director at SMC, led the band for eight years. A group of about 40 members, it was later led by Burton Jackson, Lyle Hamel, William Young, James Schoepflin, and Robert Warner through the 1950's and 1960's. During these years band concerts were popular well-attended events. Under Hamel's leadership, the size of the group increased to about 60. One unusual feature of his band at one point was an outstanding tuba section that included two women players.

**T**he appointment of Marvin Robertson to chair the division of music in 1966 started what would be the longest tenure in music leadership in Adventist higher education during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the next 33 years he provided the division with effective and farsighted music leadership as the school and society at large traversed waves of change in mores and music that at times seemed to be occurring at warp speed. As the school's size and finances surged and receded in cycles, he provided steady and effective leadership, leaving a legacy in accomplishment matched by few other Adventist music chairs.

Coming from the Northwest, where he had taught successfully for eight years at all levels, Robertson at the time of his arrival was completing a doctorate in music at Florida State University. Within two years, he gained NASM membership for the department and began to hire a faculty that over the next three decades would provide quality teaching, innovative leadership in their specialties, and stability through lengthy years of service.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, beginning in the 1970's, Robertson began hiring highly qualified musicians from the Chattanooga and Atlanta symphonies and from other area colleges as adjunct faculty to teach in specialized performance areas. These teachers added breadth to the department's offerings and raised the level of performance in the ensembles.

**B**y the time Robertson arrived on campus, the department had outgrown Miller Hall and was scattered across the campus, housed in different buildings. Robertson began to work for the construction of an adequate facility, one that would house the program.

That dream was realized in the fall of 1981 when a new music building was dedicated that accommodated the existing program and provided for future growth. It was named in memory of J. Mabel Wood, who had retired in 1967 and helped raise funds for it until the time of her death five years earlier.<sup>18</sup>

**T**hrough the years Wood and her successors, Del Case, James McGee, Stanley Walker, and Judy Glass, had taught and played on a variety of organs including an old Wurlitzer theater organ purchased by the college and installed by Brad Braley when such instruments had been displaced in theaters by movies with sound tracks.<sup>19</sup> As the 1980's approached, the need for a significant organ on campus, which had been promoted by College President Frank Knittel, became an imperative, particularly as the organ program flourished under the leadership of Glass, who had joined the faculty in 1975.

Even before Wood Hall was completed, a contract for two pipe organs had been signed with John Brombaugh and fundraising had started. The result was the

installation of the largest tracker-action organ in the United States in the Collegedale Church, a remarkable accomplishment.

In 1986, a week-long dedication of the organ, named after Anton Heiller, noted Viennese organist and composer, along with a smaller mean-tone tracker in the Dorothy Ackerman Auditorium located in Wood Hall, attracted worldwide attention.

Six internationally famous organists traveled to the campus and performed on the instruments to a cumulative audience of over 8,000. The concerts were recorded and later aired by National Public Radio. The event was viewed by some as the most significant musical event in the history of the school.<sup>20</sup>

These two instruments, combined with a Brombaugh three-stop practice organ, a tracker-action pipe organ purchased earlier, and a portative organ purchased in 1992, created one of the most significant organ installations in the circle of Adventist colleges and universities.

**O**ther keyboard acquisitions were also made as the music program grew through the 1970's and 1980's. A number of pianos were purchased to accommodate the growth in interest in that area fostered by the teaching of Judith Schoepflin, James McGee, Bruce Ashton, and Robert Sage. Ashton, whose service of 36 years is the longest of any music teacher at the school since its founding, is also a composer with several published works to his credit.

**W**hile the band had been the dominant instrumental group at the school before the 1960's and there had been uneven activity in the string area, that tradition would shift dramatically in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of Orlo Gilbert in 1967. Starting as a

teacher at nearby Collegedale Academy, within two years he had created enough interest as an adjunct string teacher at the college to justify a fulltime position there. As one of the first to recognize the value of the Suzuki violin approach to string instruction, within a decade he transformed a small string program into a flourishing one with a large and accomplished orchestra.

An extensive and successful tour to the Orient in 1979 by the orchestra set the stage for what would become the largest and one of the most successful orchestra programs in Adventist colleges and universities. In the next two decades he took ten more world tours and performed in Carnegie Hall with the group. In recognition of his accomplishments, SAU presented him with its first honorary doctorate in 1997.<sup>21</sup> Since his retirement in 2000, Laurie Redmer Minner, an accomplished and experienced string performer and conductor, has led the orchestra at a level that builds on its past accomplishments.

Inspired by the success of the first world tour by the orchestra, all of the major ensembles began a series of national and international tours. The Die Meistersinger Male Chorus and the Southern Singers, a mixed choir of sixty, both conducted by Robertson, each toured in the Soviet Union twice, as well as in other European countries.<sup>22</sup>

These tours were moving experiences for audiences and performers alike. Robertson would later write about one of the first trips to the Soviet Union:

Following the performance the people would come forward to greet us with "bear hugs," flowers, and tears streaming down their faces. Our music had crossed the language barrier and cut through the "Iron Curtain."<sup>23</sup>

Even with the stellar success of the Orchestra, the band held its own under the leadership of Jack McClarty, Robert Anderson, and Pat Silver. Under McClarty, a dynamic, charismatic, and imaginative conductor, the band was a popular ensemble that always played to a full house. An unusual feature of his concerts was the baton twirling of his daughter, Julie Lee, a national champion in that area.

Silver, first woman band director at SAU, led the band from 1982 to 1997, a record tenure in band leadership at SAU. Large numbers of students performed in her ensemble as it played on campus and toured extensively in the States and the Caribbean, Mexico, and Canada. Her successors, Brandon Beck and Kenneth Parsons, each with a different approach, have upheld the traditions associated with that group.

The retirements of Marvin Robertson in 1999, Silver in 1997 and Gilbert in 2000 signaled the beginning of the end of an unprecedented era of change and accomplishment in music. James Hanson, an experienced vocal/choir director and music chair, facilitated the beginning of the inevitable changes created by the departure of Robertson.

Like their immediate and more distant predecessors, Scott Ball, current Dean of the School of Music, and those who now instruct and direct ensembles, along with their more established colleagues, will continue to creatively meet both the challenges of transition and the ever changing demands of providing a program that is relevant in a new century and era.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dennis Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992*, 9-60 for a detailed presentation on the conditions surrounding the founding of SAU.

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<sup>2</sup> This annotated photo, from the Rochelle Kilgore Collection, is found in Elva B. Gardner, *A School of His Planning: A narrative of seventy years of growth and development of SMC, 1892-1962*, 5, where it is dated 1905-06; and in *A Century of Challenge*, 29, where it is dated 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Gradye Brooke information based on material provided in *A Century of Challenge*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> *A School of His Planning*, 51; *A Century of Challenge*, Photograph section between pages 173 and 174.

<sup>5</sup> *A Century of Challenge*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Miller information based on material in Wayne Hooper and Edward White, *Companion to the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, 478,479; *A School of His Planning*, 156, 157; Elva B. Gardner and J. Mabel Wood, *Eighty Years of Progress*, 184; *A Century of Challenge*, 127,128.

<sup>7</sup> *Eighty Years of Progress*, 179,180

<sup>8</sup> Clarence Dortch information based on material presented in Dan Shultz, *A Great Tradition, Music at Walla Walla College*, 114-116; Dan Shultz, "A Tribute to Clarence William Dortch," *The IAMA Journal* (1991), 52-54.

<sup>9</sup> See *A Century of Challenge* for a more complete presentation on quartets and other smaller vocal ensembles at SMC, 171,172.

<sup>10</sup> Information on the Krogstads and Lauritzens based on material in *A School of His Planning*, 151 and personal knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> Information on J. Mabel Wood based on material in *Eighty Years of Progress*, 179; Obituary in Southwestern Union Record, 27 March 1976; Marvin Robertson, Margarita Merriman, and Chloe Foutz, Conversations with Dan Shultz, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Information on Margarita Dietel Merriman based on material in *A Century of Challenge* 129,166,262; Merriman interviews by Dan Shultz, March 2003; and personal knowledge.

<sup>13</sup> Information on Elaine and Morris Taylor based on material from *A Great Tradition*, 108,109; Madeline Steel Johnstone, "Variations on a Theme: Retirement from the Music Department," *Andrews University Focus* (Fall 1995), 4-6; *A Century of Challenge*, 225.

<sup>14</sup> *A Century of Challenge*, 171, 225.

<sup>15</sup> *A Century of Challenge*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> *A Century of Challenge*, 112

<sup>17</sup> *A Great Tradition*, 133,134; personal knowledge.

<sup>18</sup> Printed Dedication Program, 23-24 Oct. 1981.

<sup>19</sup> The instrument was purchased from a theater in Boston. During the time of installation Braley met and courted Olive Batson, a piano teacher at the college. They married and subsequently became well known as organ and piano performers with the Voice of Prophecy.

<sup>20</sup> C. Warren Becker, "Organ Dedications at Southern," *IAMA Newsletters* (Summer 1986), 23-25; printed program for the event.

<sup>21</sup> *IAMA Notes* (Summer/Autumn 2000), 17,18.

<sup>22</sup> *A Century of Challenge*, 303-304

<sup>23</sup> Marvin Robertson, "A Russian Odyssey: Journeys of the Heart," *IAMA Notes* (Autumn 1997), 1, 2-10.

Additional Sources:

Faculty Listings in *Eighty Years of Progress. Southern Memories: 1948-1959, 1961-1970, 1977,1978,1982-1988.*

Conversations/Interviews: Elsie Landon Buck, 18 January 2004; Judy Glass, 25 January

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2004; Margarita Dietel Merriman, 27  
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Marvin Robertson, 1976 to 2000, 19  
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