

mystery of his lack of documentation remains. The Cathedral newsletter lists the new compositions *Cantate Domino*<sup>306</sup> and *Deus misereatur* by name and recalls that they were sung at Evensong in May of 1948. The newsletter also makes reference to a work for Easter that is probably *Christ our Passover* but does not list anything about this much more distinctive work. Also, Dirksen was very meticulous in documenting and arranging his compositions. Why did he not say anything about this work which is so identified with him and which was also important in his development as a composer? The silence is deafening.<sup>307</sup>

### The Crisis of the early 1960's

In many ways, the 1960's were a watershed time for the cathedral.<sup>308</sup> It was the era when Dean Sayre was pushing the building and the vision of the cathedral outward and upward. This decade included the dedication of the South Transept, and the completion and dedication of the Gloria in Excelsis tower. There were many new chapels dedicated, and construction on the nave began. This time period also included a massive growth for the musical program to include the College of Church Musicians and the Advance Program which brought many musical festivals to the cathedral. The great organ was renovated as well as other smaller organs acquired or built for use in chapels and as continuo instruments. For Wayne Dirksen too, the late 1950's and early 1960's were a watershed moment for compositions with many of his famous and more adventuresome works being written during this period. However, it also included a time of crisis and discernment.

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<sup>306</sup> Psalm 98. This was introduced into the Book of Common Prayer 1552 as an alternative to the Magnificat at Evensong. Massey Hamilton Shepherd Jr., *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 27. Henceforth called "OABCP"

<sup>307</sup> Rick suggests that perhaps in the early 1990s when Dirksen was organizing his catalog, his primary focus was actually on the computer engraving of scores. He would have paid less attention to published works and he may have been thinking of *Christ our Passover* in terms of its publication date. RSD, email 19 September 2016. Mark Dirksen wonders if he just did not get around to making the entry for this work. Dirksen could have come back to it later because its history was obvious in Dirksen's mind.

<sup>308</sup> Quinn, 118.

Dirksen had begun to make a big mark on the national music scene and this did not go unnoticed by others outside of the cathedral close. Sometime in 1960, the Oberlin Conservatory of Music offered Dirksen a position at the school. This included a substantial salary, a house, an entertainment budget, and free tuition for his children.<sup>309</sup> This is a tremendous honor and speaks to Dirksen's competence as a musician. He did not hold any degrees other than a performance certificate. However, he now had several published works and also had made a name for himself through both his organ playing and his choral development with the Glee Clubs. There were other offers too. West Point had been making overtures to Dirksen to head up their music program and to play the immense chapel organ there. The organ firm Aeolian Skinner was also offering him a job.<sup>310</sup> Other Episcopal establishments were also inquiring after Dirksen. In a letter from 8 February 1960 from Dean Sayre to the Very Rev. Benjamin Minifie, outgoing Dean of the Cathedral of the Nativity in Bethlehem Pennsylvania and incoming Rector of Grace Church, Manhattan, Sayre asks his fellow cathedral dean to back off recruitment of Dirksen. Apparently as Minifie was going to New York, he needed a new organist for Grace Church.<sup>311</sup> Sayre also asks how much Minifie plans to offer to pay Dirksen so that he can pay him more. Sayre was extremely committed to keeping Dirksen on his team in running the cathedral.<sup>312</sup>

There were troubles in his working relationship with Callaway too. There were rumors of Callaway's drinking getting in the way of his job. Often he would be "under the weather" on a Sunday morning and Dirksen had to fill in.<sup>313</sup> Finally, as with his "assistant-itis" in the early 1950's, Dirksen again was feeling the need for his own turf - to have his own creative space. On

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<sup>309</sup> Correspondence between Dean Sayre and Neil Phillips, 3 January 1963, Cathedral Archives.

<sup>310</sup> Geoff Dirksen - CITATION NEEDED.

<sup>311</sup> This church also has a musical tradition which is very strong and features a choir of men and boys.

<sup>312</sup> Letter from The Very Rev. Francis Sayre to The Very Rev. Benjamin Minifie, 8 February 1960, Cathedral Archives. Minifie would go on to be a very well known if outspoken Rector of Grace Church - especially dealing with social issues.

<sup>313</sup> J Shenefield, interview Mt. St. Alban, 16 May 2016.

the first Monday of Advent of 1961, this all came to a head and Dirksen had had enough. It is uncertain exactly what happened. Mark characterizes it as a "nervous breakdown" whereas Rick and Geoff characterize it as "he'd just had enough and couldn't take it anymore."<sup>314</sup> Basically Dirksen could not bring himself to get out of bed or to work.

Dean Sayre intervened and began to give him other responsibilities to keep Dirksen working at the cathedral and to give him his own turf. The cathedral already had a music director who Dirksen worked well with. But he felt the need for creative space where he could direct for himself. Sayre got innovative with this and looked around for projects for Dirksen to lead. First, Sayre helped relieve Dirksen of the stress of some of his manifold duties by hiring a second assistant organist. Norman Scribner, newly appointed Music Director of St. Alban's Parish<sup>315</sup> became part time assistant to Dirksen and Callaway at the Cathedral. This freed up Dirksen for more time for composing and other cathedral endeavors.<sup>316</sup>

### Compositions from 1961

With the exception of the monumental musical theater work *Tularosa*, 1961 would see Dirksen writing exclusively music for children. Gwendolyn Coney set a number of medieval mystery plays together to form *A Festival of Plays* for Christmas. They were arranged for the Girls of the National Cathedral School and Dirksen provided the music. The works are *About the fields they piped full right (Tyrley, tyrlow)* for SA and organ, *Alleluia: A new work is come* for SA, organ and handbells, *From heaven high* for unison and organ (the final chorale of the whole festival), *Hail, O Sun, O blessed light* for SA and organ, *O my dear heart* for SA and organ, *O radix Jesse, supplices te nos invocamus* for SA and organ, and a setting of the *Magnificat* for

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<sup>314</sup> Rick, Geoff and Mark Dirksen, Email exchange 6 November 2015.

<sup>315</sup> St. Alban's is the Parish Church located on land adjacent to the Cathedral Close. The National Cathedral is not, as such, a Parish Church.

<sup>316</sup> Yang, 68.