

cathedral age

SUMMER ISSUE 1991 VOLUME LXVII, NUMBER TWO

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COVER: *Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, visited the cathedral on May 17, 1991. They were greeted by crowds of school children and a group of cathedral representatives, led by Provost Garner and Bishop Haines. The royal visit will be chronicled in the fall issue of Cathedral Age. Photo: Morton Broffman*

Copyright 1991 Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation ISSN 0008-7874 CATHEDRAL AGE is published quarterly by the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation, Mount Saint Alban, Washington, DC 20016-5098. Yearly subscription \$15, single copy \$3.75 additional foreign postage \$2 a year. Second class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional post offices. Editorial comments should be addressed to: The Editor, Cathedral Age, Mount Saint Alban, Washington, D.C. 20016-5098. Telephone (202) 537-6200. TTD (202) 537-6211. Send subscription orders, change of address and other circulation correspondence to the address listed below. CATHEDRAL AGE is a member of the Associated Church Press and Episcopal Communicators.

Postmaster: Send change of address to: Cathedral Age, Records Department, Mount Saint Alban, Washington, DC 20016-5098.



Canon Richard Wayne Dirksen, at the close of the concert in his honor, with (left) J. Reilly Lewis, director of the Cathedral Choral Society, and (right) organist/choirmaster of Washington National Cathedral Douglas Major

Richard Wayne Dirksen CATHEDRAL RENAISSANCE MAN

NANCY S. MONTGOMERY

As befits a person who has spent forty-nine years living, breathing, working for Washington Cathedral, Canon Richard W. Dirksen received a glorious send-off when his retirement date arrived the first of April, 1991. At a service of Evensong that day he and his family were honored with music and tributes, with the applause of his friends and co-workers and, at the reception following, with more gifts of love and music.

During the service a needlepoint kneeler for the great choir was dedicated in his honor. Given by the Needlepoint Committee, the cushion features words

and musical notes to one of the ten canticles sung during services. The quotation on the Dirksen kneeler reads: "Cantate Domino Canticum Novum," illuminated in the medieval manner with banks of organ pipes.

The reception was held in National Cathedral School's Hearst Hall and the surprise of the day—for the Dirksens and guests—was a reunion of NCS and St. Albans Glee Club members who had gathered to reprise several songs from Wayne and Jo Dirksen's famous musicals written for the schools. Close to fifty alumnae returned, rehearsed and sang with obvious

enjoyment. They were led by Norman Scribner, at the piano, but Dirksen—seated in the place of honor facing the singers and behind the conductor—could not keep still and was soon leading the group.

On April 15, at a gala concert, composer Dirksen was honored with an evening of music featuring his work. Performers included the Cathedral Choir of Men and Boys, Douglas Major, conductor; the Cathedral Choral Society, J. Reilly Lewis, conductor; National Cathedral School and St. Albans Chorale, Richard Roeckelein, conductor; with soloists Gene Tucker, Richard S. Dirksen and members of the National Symphony Orchestra. R. Benjamin Dobey was organist.

The performance opened with fanfares and ceremonial music by Dirksen, played by Douglas Major, organist, and the brass quartet from the NSO. Interspersed with the Dirksen compositions was music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, Bach, Louis Vierne, Heinrich Schutz, Schubert and Brahms. What the audience clearly admired was the close of the program when the combined choirs, conducted by Dr. Lewis, sang two of Dirksen's best-loved hymns, "A child my choice" and "Welcome all wonders." The first, a Christmas carol, has been sung at Christmas services every year since its composition in 1958.

Former choirboy John Shenefield provided one of the delightful surprises of the evening when he announced that past choir members had decided to award Dr. Dirksen a commission to write "perhaps an anthem for this great cathedral." Shenefield told of the awe in which junior boys held the "larger than life" choirmaster who had, it was reported, once thrown a baseball over the apse of the cathedral. How to enthrall young males.

In their tributes both Bishop Ronald Haines and Canon Sanford Garner mentioned the special quali-



Ramona Forbes, teacher of piano and voice at NGS, reminisces about her long-time musical association with the Dirksens.

ties of the man, his total commitment to the cathedral, its music and its program. A great Broadway showman was lost when Wayne Dirksen dedicated his life to the Lord.

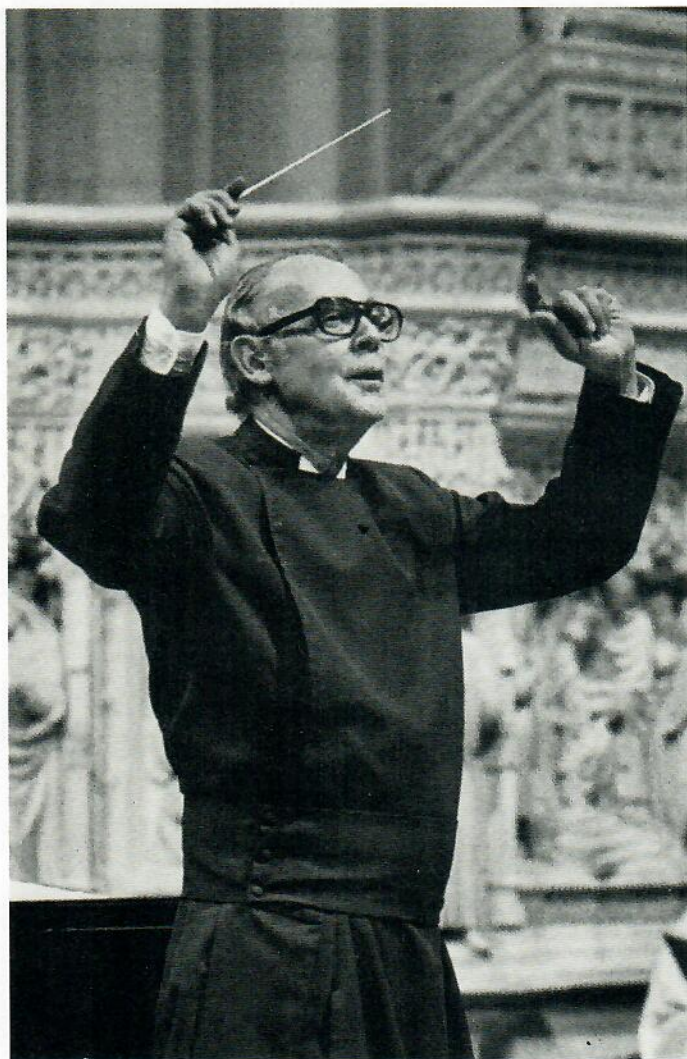
His two organist friends, Major and Lewis, played some of the most splendid music on the great organ and it resonated through the grand spaces of the cathedral in just the way that Dirksen liked best. Each of these brilliant young musicians was applauded warmly by an audience in which such musicians as Dr. Paul Callaway, Dirksen's predecessor, were seated.

Proceeds from the concert went to benefit the restoration of the Bethlehem Chapel organ, designated as a thanksgiving for the life and work of Richard W. Dirksen. The organ was built by Aeolian-Skinner and designed by G. Donald Harrison. Since its birth in 1953 the organ has been used for countless weddings, services, funerals, memorials, organ teaching and as a practise instrument for cathedral organists.

Restoration work will begin in the autumn of 1991 and will be completed in about four months. 🎵

Norman Scribner, at the piano, plays and conducts the returning glee club members from NGS and St. Albans Schools as they serenade their friend and mentor seen seated left with his wife Jo.





Conductor Dirksen at a concert in the cathedral, one of hundreds he led during his tenure. Photo: David Werth

A Dirksen Biography

NORMAN SCRIBNER

RICHARD WAYNE DIRKSEN was born on February 8, 1921, in Freeport, Illinois, the eldest of three children of Richard and Maude Dirksen. His father was a skilled organ builder and his mother an accomplished pianist, organist and singer. Dirksen's musical talent was apparent as a young child, and his first instruction was from his mother beginning at age six. With a stimulating musical environment combined with a strong family and church life, Dirksen was exposed from his earliest years to the three areas which have marked his life-long commitments: his family, his church and his beloved art of music.

After graduating from high school in 1938, he continued his musical studies at the Peabody Conservatory of Music under the world-renowned virtuoso organist Virgil Fox, graduating magna cum laude in June 1942. During Dirksen's final year at Peabody, Paul Callaway, then organist-choirmaster of the Washington National Cathedral, invited him to be his assistant organist. Dirksen accepted, and on February 1, 1942, he began his long association with the cathedral, which was to span forty-nine years and two-months until his retirement.

There was one interruption for military service in World War II. Dirksen enlisted in the U.S. Army in June 1942 and served as a chaplain's assistant. In January 1943, while at Walter Reed, he married Joan Shaw, his high school sweetheart and an individual of enormous talent and accomplishment in her own right. There are four Dirksen children: Richard Shaw, Geoffrey Paul, Laura Gail and Mark Christopher. To date there are five grandchildren.

In October 1945, Dirksen was discharged from the Army, and in December of that year was invited to rejoin the cathedral's music staff. Paul Callaway was on active military duty abroad at the time, but when he returned shortly after Easter in 1946, the Callaway-Dirksen association, so successfully initiated in 1942, resumed in what was to become an extraordinary relationship producing a constant stream of excellence for many years in the musical life of the cathedral.

In the fall of 1941, Callaway had founded the Cathedral Choral Society. The twenty-year-old Dirksen was a chorister in the first performance and went on to serve this distinguished organization over the years in several ways. He was—at various times—its accompanist, associate music director and general manager. When Callaway retired in 1984, he served as interim music director for a season (1984-1985) while the search for a permanent successor was undertaken.

In 1949, Dirksen became director of the Glee Club of St. Albans School for Boys and in 1950 he took the same position with the National Cathedral School for

The needlepoint kneeler dedicated at the Dirksen retirement service was designed by Val Hadley and worked by Kathryn Schachner.





The Cathedral Choral Society, with members of the National Symphony

Girls. The following eighteen years under his direction were marked by many outstanding concerts, frequently with professional orchestras and by a series of musical productions including five original operettas, three of which were created in collaboration with his wife Jo.

As the years rolled on, Dirksen became more and more active in long-range artistic planning for the cathedral. In 1964, he relinquished his post as associate organist-choirmaster and was named the first director of advance program in order to develop a comprehensive program of music, drama, dance and all other arts-related areas. The effects of Dirksen's brilliant early planning are felt to this day in the rich and diverse offerings of the cathedral.

In 1969, Dirksen was appointed precentor by Dean Francis B. Sayre Jr. and became head of the worship department, planning and overseeing all worship services at the cathedral. In 1982, he was made a canon of the cathedral by Bishop John T. Walker.

When Paul Callaway retired as organist-choirmaster in 1977, Dirksen succeeded him as the fourth organist-choirmaster of Washington Cathedral. In 1988, he retired to devote himself to planning the great events surrounding the consecration of the completed cathedral in September 1990. This task he accomplished

with the special skills and understanding acquired over a lifetime of service.

Richard Wayne Dirksen's accomplishments form a large and impressive body of work. For this writer, his achievements as a composer stand at the head of the list. His fertile imagination and unerring musical instincts have led to the creation of works characterized by great craft and understanding. There are, of course, many and varied works for the church—works for voices, organ, instruments and combinations thereof. Anthems, motets, hymns (six in the 1982 Episcopal hymnal), chants, service music, chancel dramas, full-scale pageants, fanfares and other ceremonial music—the list goes on and on. Then there is the oratorio *Jonah*, composed for the school glee clubs; the musical drama based on Paul Green's *Faith of Our Fathers*, composed for the opening of the Carter Barron Amphitheatre in 1950; and the music for *American Adventure*, a multimedia work created in 1976 in honor of the bicentennial of the United States and heard by thousands of tourists visiting the nation's capital. His total output forms an enormous corpus embracing nearly every genre of musical composition.

As a performer, Dirksen has enjoyed a distinguished career as a keyboard artist (organ, piano,

harpsichord) and conductor. Among his many conducting credits are the 1969 NBC Television production of Dave Brubeck's oratorio *The Light in the Wilderness*, produced in Washington Cathedral with the Cathedral Choral Society and Dave Brubeck, and the highly acclaimed Arena Stage production of Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* in 1963.

Dirksen has had a lifelong interest in recording, radio and television and is expert in both the engineering and production aspects of the fields. His skills have been at the core of numerous outstanding broadcasts, telecasts and recorded releases. He has taken a page from his father's book as an organ builder through his longtime involvement in organ design and construction, including the overseeing of the renovation of the Great Organ of the cathedral over a period of more than three decades. He is also an enormously gifted teacher and has always been

unfailingly generous in sharing his knowledge and insights with others. Dirksen has received three honorary degrees to date: Doctor of Fine Arts, George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1980; Doctor of Music, Marymont College, Ohio, 1986; and the Medal of Excellence, Shenandoah Conservatory of Music, Virginia, 1988.

Richard Wayne Dirksen's accomplishments form one of the most outstanding careers in American music and churchmanship in this century. In devotion to his family, his God and his art, Dirksen's life is an example for all. Dirksen himself said it best in a 1989 interview: "Most important, make of your life a 'Temple not built with hands. . . .,' make it, your life of giving to others, cathedral-like in dimension, and in authority, in richness, and in loving, an all-embracing example." 🖱



A humorous moment at Evensong

Richard Wayne Dirksen

COLLEAGUES REMEMBER HIM AND HIS WORK

"I have always admired him and felt that I was extremely fortunate to have him with me all those years. I especially admired his abilities as a composer, conductor and organist."

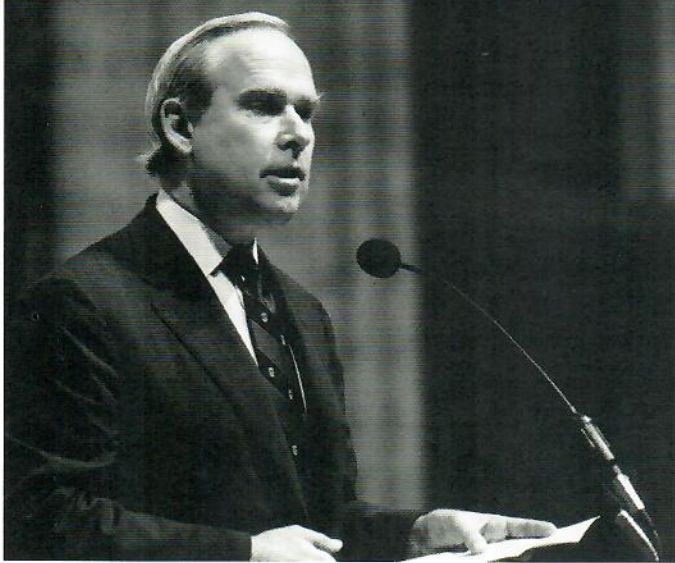
PAUL CALLAWAY, Organist/choirmaster emeritus

"Easter morning can be a sleepy time for a brass quartet and tympanist who have not quite slept off the previous night's National Symphony Orchestra concert. Enter Wayne Dirksen and Paul Callaway. Through the years these partners brought sunshine

with them and helped make Easter music at the cathedral so memorable.

"Years ago, when Wayne wrote such music as 'Christ Our Passover' and 'Welcome,' he knew that Lloyd Geisler would be on trumpet and I would be on tympani. He always wrote interesting and enjoyable things for us to play; this is a personalized musical experience—it is friendship. My friend has given me much musical joy."

FRED BEGUN, Principal tympanist, National Symphony Orchestra



John Shenefield announcing the commission awarded to Dirksen by the "old boys" of the Cathedral Choir

"When I arrived at Washington Cathedral as dean in 1951, there was Wayne Dirksen. He was already a fixture, like a stone in the foundation, adored by the girls in the NCS Glee Club, delighting the St. Albans boys in the musical plays he designed and wrote, and best of all his unassuming but wonderfully skilled assistance to Paul Callaway and the music of the cathedral. He was already a great man. Yet he grew more in the years that were to follow. When Paul stepped down, Wayne took his place as organist/choirmaster and even then moved up again to be canon precentor. Thus, in his imaginative person he combined music and liturgy—the great gifts a cathedral can give to the society around it.

"I doubt very much if Wayne would have excelled to such a degree as composer, as musician, as leader, if it were not for his family around him. Jo, his wife, ever in the background, creative and steady, encouraging him on; his children, following their father in the life of the cathedral with the bells, the choir, playing, singing, giving of themselves.

"So what can I say? Only that Wayne was a great blessing all through the years that I served on Mount Saint Alban."

THE VERY REVEREND FRANCIS BOWES SAYRE JR., Dean emeritus

"What a lot of fun this has been!" That was the gist of what Wayne Dirksen said at the reception following evensong honoring his nearly fifty years of service. And that is what an old chorister who sings under Wayne's direction feels. I once heard him say that rehearsals bored him but he was never bored with the actual performance (and neither were his performers nor his audiences). One reason: He kept you on your toes with his spontaneity, his inspiration of the moment—new tempi, different dynamics."

CHARLES J. BAKER, Senior vicar choral

"Now Wayne's a very decent fellow. He's an able cuss and has done a remarkable job as canon precentor. He's sensitive and creative and a great musician. Of course, he's human and has his limitations. For example, whenever I bring up the subject of blessing the animals I get a no. And that's not good.

"Imagine the service. There would be a great procession with people and their pets to be blessed—dogs, birds and all manner of beasts, including a few barnyard animals. You know, those little Asian pigs have become very popular and are very interesting. God certainly blesses all of us with a variety of pets.

"Still Wayne's all right. He learns. There's the service he planned for my retirement. It was a good service, even special. What made it so special was the fact that all on his own he brought Cleopatra VI, my English bulldog, into the service.

"While the service was well planned, what really got the attention of the people, and stirred them deeply enough to applause, was the final procession—there came the crucifer and candle bearers, the choir and clergy, a few banners and then, just after the final verger and before Martin, came Cleopatra VI giving Martin's son a tough time as she pulled him along on her lead, obviously enjoying herself and proud to be a part of things.

"It was a master stroke on Wayne's part, a proper climax to the service. As I say, Wayne's a very decent fellow, and he does learn. We'll miss him!"

CANON CHARLES MARTIN, Headmaster emeritus, St Albans School

"Washington has been my home since earliest childhood and Washington Cathedral has played a prominent role in my musical development since the age of eight. At that time I joined the Junior Choir under the direction of Richard Wayne Dirksen. I well remember the impact that this dynamic figure had on the mind of a boy taking his first tentative steps along what was to become a life-long musical journey. The lofty sound of the mighty Aeolian-Skinner organ under his facile fingers made a deep impression on me.

"Several years later, it was Wayne Dirksen who gave me experience as an organ student playing that same majestic instrument and instilled not just the disciplines but also his infectious enthusiasm: music is and should be fun! It was he who guided my path towards the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, an institution which profoundly shaped my life. Both Oberlin and West Point tried to lure him away to serve as dean. But no offer, no matter how attractive, could swerve Wayne Dirksen from the 'greater calling' he believed to be on Mount Saint Alban.

"The contributions of this towering figure will continue in years to come, and his spirit will live on as long as our cathedral stands and beyond."

J. REILLY LEWIS, Music Director, Cathedral Choral Society

"Richard Wayne Dirksen is gifted with such versatile talents that it is nearly impossible to classify him. He is organist, choirmaster, composer, choral conductor, liturgist and creative planner. If the cathedral has had need of a new musical composition for a special service, or music for an entire operetta or a majestic service for a visiting head of state, or a mighty consecration service for the completion of a cathedral, a litany or a simple, beautiful prayer, it has turned to Wayne Dirksen. He was the innovator of the summer evening concerts, and he developed the format for the annual fall Open House."

"As the cathedral fabric has been gradually enlarged, so has Richard Wayne Dirksen expanded his talents in bringing about the superb music for which this cathedral is now widely known. Canon Dirksen's retirement leaves an immense void in the cathedral staff. However, his name and music will endure as long as this cathedral will stand."

CANON RICHARD T. FELLER, Clerk of the Works

"As the Cathedral Choral Society executive director, my fondest memories are of Wayne Dirksen, the entrepreneur. A man who brings the New York Pro Musica to do The Play of Herod in a partially finished cathedral is brilliant. A musician who produces outdoor summer festivals, opera and ballet and directs the National Symphony and a conductor who keeps two hundred musicians playing through an all-

Canon Dirksen stands to applaud his friends at the close of the concert in his honor.



night television recording session of Brubeck's Light in the Wilderness has untapped strengths. A precentor who choreographs and writes such services as the installation of Presiding Bishop Browning and the consecration of Washington National Cathedral has unbounded creativity. It has been a privilege to work with Wayne. The Choral Society has benefited from his expertise and loving care. We have all been truly blessed."

MARION DREW LEACH, Cathedral Choral Society

"As one begins to read the Old Testament, the overwhelming lineage of Enoch begat Irad, Irad begat Mehujael, etc., etc., becomes a bit tiresome. I expect that God grew weary, too, so every few generations he would spice the population with a special individual to liven up the world. The roaring twenties gave God pause. So in 1921, Maude and Richard Watson begat Richard Wayne and in 1942 this special man started his lifelong career at Washington National Cathedral."

"Spiritual: no one can doubt his calling nor his dedication to the Lord. There were many opportunities to succeed in the secular world, more money to be made, wider audiences, greater acclaim, but Wayne always chose to stay where his heart and soul were rooted—Washington National Cathedral."

"Creative: as a musician and composer, he ranks with the finest. As a conductor, his ease and camaraderie tempered with discipline earned him respect. He will be remembered for his sense of the dramatic and for the final consecration services. In his precentor's role, Wayne was without peer."

"We wish him a hole-in-one, a ten-pound bass on the line and a royal flush."

SANDY HYNSON, Retired Altar Guild Director

Precentor Search Announcement

The cathedral seeks nominations or applications for the position of precentor. The precentor is responsible for the oversight of worship services and the many other events that take place at the cathedral annually.

Ordained persons with a background in liturgics, an understanding of church music, experience in planning worship in large spaces and management skills are invited to request an application package by writing: Kathleen Cullen, Personnel Director, Washington National Cathedral, Mount Saint Alban, Washington, DC 20016.