

IN MEMORIAM

Richard Wayne Dirksen

February 2, 1921 ~ July 26, 2003

Requiem æternam dona ei, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.

The eldest son of Richard Watson Dirksen and Maude Logemann, Wayne (as he was universally known) was born and raised in Freeport, Illinois, northwest of Chicago. Early keyboard studies were with his mother, and he was a drum major and bassoonist in high school. Upon graduation, he studied piano and organ privately with Hugh Price, Virgil Fox's first teacher. He competed unsuccessfully for the prestigious organ scholarship at the Curtis Institute of Philadelphia, but was encouraged to apply to the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore where he was accepted as a scholarship student of Virgil Fox.

While still enrolled at Peabody, he was hired as Assistant Organist-Choirmaster to Paul Callaway at the Washington National Cathedral in 1942, but enlisted in the Army immediately upon his *magna cum laude* graduation in June of that year. He was stationed at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C. where he founded a private radio station for the patients. He married his high school sweetheart, Joan Milton Shaw, in 1943.

Following brief service in the European occupation following World War II, he was invited to return to the Cathedral in late 1945, a relationship which continued unbroken until his retirement in 1991, and included a lengthy string of positions and accomplishments on the Cathedral Close and in the musical life of Washington, D.C.

In 1949, he was appointed Director of the Glee Clubs of the National Cathedral and St. Alban's Schools, in which role he and Joan created and produced three original operettas. This theatrical experience was extended in his role as Director of Advance Program for the Cathedral (1964), in which he developed a comprehensive arts program for the growing building.

In 1969, he was named Precentor. This appointment (the first for a layperson in the Anglican Communion) put him in charge of all musical and liturgical arrangements, and was coupled with the position of Organist-Choirmaster upon Paul Callaway's retirement in 1977. In 1982, he was made a Canon of the Cathedral. In all these positions he was responsible for the planning of extensive festival and liturgical activities surrounding milestones of the Cathedral's growth: the dedication of the South Transept and Gloria in Excelsis Tower (1963-64); the completion of the Nave (1976); and the consecration of the completed Cathedral in September, 1990.

For all these events, and many others as well, Dirksen composed over 300 musical works for every combination of voices and instruments to be found in liturgical music. Forty of these have been published, including six hymns and two chants for *The Hymnal*



1982. Extended works included an oratorio, *Jonah*; incidental music for Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo*; *The Ballad of Dr. Faustus*, a trope on Marlowe's *Faust*; an orchestral score for *The American Adventure*, a multimedia presentation created for the nation's Bicentennial; and chancel dramas, pageants, and ceremonial music of every description. In 1994, he published *An Annotated Catalog of Music Composed by Richard Wayne Dirksen* (Oxford University Press). He had a life-long interest in recording and television production, creating both documentary and live productions for many Cathedral activities, including the annual national Christmas telecast. He won an Emmy Award from the Washington, D.C. Area Television Academy for *Six Carols and Lessons* televised December 24-25, 1965 on WTTG-TV.

Dirksen was awarded three honorary degrees: Doctor of Fine Arts, George Washington University (1980); Doctor of Music, Marymount College (1986); and the Medal of Excellence (1988), Shenandoah Conservatory of Music. He is survived by a sister, Phyllis Reeser, and brother, Gerriet; children Richard Shaw, Geoffrey Paul, Laura Gail and Mark Christopher; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. Memorial donations may be made to the Coleman Jennings Choir Scholarship Endowment at the National Cathedral. ♦

by MARK DIRKSEN

WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL'S TRIBUTE TO RICHARD WAYNE DIRKSEN

Six hundred people thronged the Washington National Cathedral on a beautiful August afternoon—the 26th—to pay tribute to Richard Wayne Dirksen, organist, composer, choirmaster, and teacher. There were people from all over the U.S.; many of them were former students of St. Alban's School for Boys and the National Cathedral School for Girls where Dirksen was the idolized music director for many years. Some of them had not been to the cathedral in decades; joyful, tearful reunions were plentiful. Mr. Dirksen was associated with the cathedral for more than sixty years, having come to the post of assistant organist under Paul Callaway in 1942.

A large family contingent included his sister, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. (His wife, Joan Dirksen, died some years ago.)

An hour and a quarter before the stated two o'clock start, the prelude began with four works for carillon, two of which were commissioned for the dedication of the Gloria in Excelsis (central) tower in 1964, the dedication of which Dirksen was in charge. The sound of the carillon was piped into the cathedral through speakers because it cannot be heard clearly inside. Edward Nassor, cathedral carillonist, played music by Roy Hamlin Johnson, Milford Myhre, Leo Sowerby, and Dirksen. His touch produced beautiful rhythmic and dynamic nuances.

Then we heard a satisfying series of organ works played by J. Reilly Lewis, Norman Scribner, Scott Hanoian, and Erik Wm. Suter. Included were the Bach "St. Anne," three Brahms chorale-preludes, Franck's *Pièce héroïque*, and two works by Dirksen, *Cantilena* (1951) and *Prelude on Urbs beata*, 1948.

The procession began at the west end of the nave at quarter past two with the playing of the *Prelude in C* (9/8) by Bach. This timed out perfectly as the head of the long procession finally reached the apse at the east end of the cathedral.

The burial sentences and collect were read. Hymn 392, to *Vineyard Haven*, a Dirksen tune, was sung heartily. The first lesson, from Wisdom ("The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God") was followed by Psalm 23, which was *said* in unison. This was the only odd thing in the service—one wonders what prompted the saying of a psalm. After a reading from Romans ("All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God"), the choir, comprised of girls, boys, and men, sang Psalm 121 to a Dirksen chant. The chant had high G's and A-flat's which were negotiated gracefully by the trebles. The choir was led by newly-appointed director of music Michael McCarthy, an Englishman who has done extensive choral work in that country with John Elliot Gardner and other British greats. The choir's positive response to his conducting and body language showed a strong connection with him, and their desire to do well. (The trebles' choir camp was to have started the day before

the service, so we were hearing the choir at the end of the summer, before they really reconvened.) Tuning and ensemble were impressive. The enthusiastic congregation was filled with lovers of great music and liturgy; one had a sense of sweet transcendence during the choir's singing.

Two other choral items rounded out the service, *Now the laborer's task is o'er* and *A Child my choice*, both by Dirksen.

Just before the retiring procession, we heard Dirksen's *Fanfare for T. S. Eliot*, composed in 1965 for the dedication of the Trompette-en-Chamade, located over the high altar reredos. This piece exploits the considerable sonic differences between the new stop and the old E. M. Skinner Tuba Mirabilis, one of Skinner's finest. Its superior power and body of tone made the 1965 reed sound puny. (Years later, a posthorn was installed in the transept.) There is no paucity of loud reeds in our national cathedral.

The homily was preached by the Rev'd Francis H. Wade, rector of St. Alban's Church. It was stunning: Dr. Wade had been in conversations with Mr. Dirksen during his long illness and recounted some of the subjects they had discussed. The preacher thoughtfully observed that we who handle *holy things* are in particular danger of losing touch with *holiness*. Yet the net that connects our poor efforts to God's endless love is strong and will not break. [The full text of the homily is printed on page 11.]

Bishops John Chane and Theodore Eastman presided, along with Canons Peter Grandell and Michael Hamilton.

The service concluded with Vierne's "Final" from the *First Symphony*. The peal bells, half-muffled, were then rung by the members of the Washington Ringing Society, founded by Richard Shaw Dirksen, the deceased's first-born.

The Washington Cathedral Close consists of fifty-three acres including gardens, playing fields, clergy housing, diocesan offices, a parish church, and five schools. It has its own police force, including two police cars. In this self-contained mini-Vatican city, Wayne Dirksen was a legend. His influence on all who lived and moved through the cathedral as students, worshippers, tourists, and concert attendees is incalculable.

His impatience with boring music and perfunctory performances was well-known. He was an idea man: let's do something different! He questioned the old—but equally questioned the new if it was sleazy or smarmy. He was a man of imagination and integrity. He was also a husband, father, fisherman, and poker player. He will be missed. ♦

- John Fenstermaker
Director of Music, Trinity-by-the-Cove, Naples, Florida,
formerly Assistant Organist at Washington Cathedral,
and Director of Music at St. Alban's School
and the National Cathedral Schools

RICHARD WAYNE DIRKSEN
HOMILY BY
THE REV'D DR. FRANCIS H. WADE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL
WASHINGTON, D.C.
AUGUST 26, 2003

I doubt that you need me to remind you that Wayne Dirksen was a master of the holy arts and certainly his family and friends do not need anyone to speak of his ways of loving and being loved. Our thanks for his life and our grief at his death are the measure of those things far better than any words a preacher might supply. His anthems and his friendships were genuine. He was the perfect complement to the poets whose verse he turned into music, and a wonderful mix of grace and gruff with the venerable and the vulnerable in his own day. He was comfortably at home in this awesome place that lives up to Goethe's description of architecture as "frozen music." Wayne called this cathedral the greatest influence in his life and work. These things are well known, well marked, and well remembered. So let us do something else with these few minutes.

Let us be aware that Wayne Dirksen ran a great risk in his life. A risk undertaken by many of us who gather to celebrate his life and grieve over his death. All of us who dare to work with holy things are in danger of losing touch with holiness. Take a moment and be aware of the huge difference between the holy things of Church and the holiness of God. It is the difference between the tangible and the intangible. The difference between that which appeals to the senses and that which by-passes them and touches the soul.

We who decide where "Alleluias" go can easily be separated from the power of Grace that is behind and inside of the word. We who put crosses on things and things on crosses can sometimes forget what crosses mean. The more we master the arts of holy things, the more elusive holiness can be. We who write anthems or preach, sing hymns or plan liturgies; we whose profession is to bless, consecrate, and absolve, and those who write prayers or lead others in saying them have great work to do. But it is dangerous work, for the gap between holy things and the holiness of God is both wide and deep.

Wayne Dirksen had ample opportunity to be aware of that gap because death came slowly to him. There was time to look it in the eye and watch it approach with unguarded ease, unthreatened by the interventions of medicine or prayer. There was time for the uncomfortable blessing of saying good-by to friends, family, and to a world moving inexorably into the past tense. And there was time to feel the absence of holy things. A bedroom is not a chancel. A pillow is not an altar. A chorus of

good wishes is not a choir. When one lets go of such holy things, or when they let go of us, there is nothing left but the holiness of God—or nothing at all. When we let go or are dropped there is time to wonder: Is it true, this faith we have professed and sung? Is there any music in life that segues into the silence of death? Is there any word ever spoken or written that prepares us for the final word? If we reach in the direction our spires point, will something reach back for us? Is there holiness behind the holy things we have crafted and moved about like chess pieces? Or are they just chess pieces after all? There was time for such wondering as Wayne's death approached.

And wonder he did. Some of you know better than I, but I know for myself that he wondered about these things. I can also tell you that there were times—not consistent times, for the experience of holiness does not have a steady meter—but there were times of clarity. He did glimpse the connection and know that there is a bond between that which God holds perfectly and the arts we express so imperfectly. The bond may stretch but it remains strong enough to hold the weight of both human experience and Divine Love.

Most of us have learned much from Wayne Dirksen over the years. He was Master in every sense of the word, and few of us have failed to spend at least a little time at his feet. Let us learn from him once again. And be aware that there is a danger in what we do in this place, at this moment. The beauty of it can blind us to the gap that opens just a step away. There is a deep and wide difference between holy things and holiness. But there is also a bond between them, illusive and seemingly fragile, but still able to bear the weight of both our feebleness and God's faithfulness.

Wayne Dirksen and all of us whose lives focus on where Alleluias go and how they should sound can be thankful that even at the grave we can still make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. ♦



RICHARD WAYNE DIRKSEN
IN REMARKS TO
THE AAM REGION III MEETING
ST. ALBAN'S SCHOOL
FEBRUARY 17, 2002

Following my graduation from high school in 1938, Dr. Hugh Price, a gifted faculty member of the American Conservatory in Chicago, became my teacher and good friend. With him I studied advanced piano and organ as well as harmony and theory for the next two years. My goal was to reach a level of ability and training that would enable me to compete for a major scholarship. It was achieved in September of 1940 when I began my organ study with Virgil Fox at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

In his early teens, he had begun his study under Hugh Price. At 27 years of age, Virgil had become world-famous as a concert artist and was beginning his second year of conservatory teaching. He was a master of the instrument, convincing in his enthusiasm and knowledge, and he conveyed all of it to his pupils through a compelling and exciting way of speaking about and playing music.

The next two years of intensive study and practice prepared for me a sound foundation of keyboard mastery and classic repertory upon which I would continue to build for life. My parents and early mentors had set me on a straight course. Peabody and Virgil produced the final impetus and the polish for the satisfactory result. Early in June of 1942, I played my senior recital, won an award, and graduated with the Church Organist Certificate, *magna cum laude*. The next morning I enlisted, and the United States Army claimed my full attention until October of 1945.

In February of 1942, I had begun work at the Washington Cathedral as a part-time assistant to the third cathedral organist and choirmaster, Paul Callaway. I commuted to Baltimore four times each week while completing my last semester at the conservatory. It was only a period of four months, but in that short time Paul and I worked well together—good, personal chemistry. But the war was on, the draft imminent, and no future career planning was practical.

Paul was drafted in August of 1942, and began bandmaster training at Fort Myer in Arlington. I was stationed at the Walter Reed General Hospital in the Army Medical Center where I had enlisted, and I began learning signal corps skills while serving as the organist, choirmaster, Chaplain's assistant, and janitor of the chapel on weekends. Our military service responsibilities were to be many and quite different. At the war's end I wound up in Europe, a technical sergeant with the 19th Special Service Company, and Paul in the South Pacific as a Warrant Officer bandmaster.

On June 8, 1942, we had parted and gone our separate ways. Almost four years later, in May of 1946, the end of World War II rejoined us in the cathedral music department. We would work

together as associates for the next thirty-one years until his retirement in 1977. As the fourth organist and choirmaster (and also precentor) of the cathedral, I would continue for another fourteen years until 1991, working with my associate, Douglas Major. In 1988, he succeeded me as the fifth organist and choirmaster of the Washington National Cathedral.

Paul Callaway, one of the founders of AAM, was a master of the organ and conducting skills, and had impeccable taste in choral and instrumental music for a cathedral church. But as years passed he acquired musical experience and abilities far beyond that of an organist and choirmaster. The large repertory of oratorios that he conducted with his Cathedral Choral Society, and the many operas he prepared and conducted as the founding music director of the Opera Society of Washington and the Lake George Summer Opera Company, raised his musicianship to the highest possible levels of achievement.

I was his associate in the preparation and administration of the cathedral music, and the accompanist, assistant musical director, and business manager of the choral society for twenty-six years. Through daily contact with him, I was able to observe and imitate and convert to my own mastery his wealth of musical experience.

It is no wonder that my many compositions exist when such a superior musician and tutor constantly spurred their creation. He did this by performing everything I composed for the cathedral. So did I gain steady confidence by quickly hearing what was satisfactory, and learning what was not as good as we could expect. For his long and able support I am immeasurably thankful and indebted.

Now a comment on the strongest influence on my life and work: the vast dimension of the cathedral itself must be noted. Its magnitude and beauty offer endless inspiration to the artist and ennoble the richness of its worship and culture. An incomparable esthetic paragon, it is unlimited in challenge for special gifts and service, ever inviting discerning attention and attracting excellence. Its essence is that of the Eternal and Mysterious Holy One, accessible to human aspiration. Therein lies its greatest power.

I conclude these remarks with a quotation that has been of greatest theological influence in my creativity. Louis Pasteur wrote: "The Greeks understood hidden power of things infinite. They bequeathed to us one of the most beautiful words in our language—the word 'enthusiasm'—*en Theos*—a God within. The grandeur of human actions is measured by the inspiration from which they spring. Happy is he who bears a God within and who obeys it. The ideals of art, of science, are lighted by reflections from the infinite."

My succinct perspective is this: when people perform music together, that enthusiasm within each engenders a community-wide awareness of those reflections of the infinite. The sharing of "a God within" through making music puts us in unison touch with the infinite God, and intensifies our knowledge of and enthusiasm for Him. Collectively, therefore do we embody and live our theology.

Continued on next page...

Richard Wayne Dirksen Remembered...

by Dale Krider, D.M.A.

Richard Wayne Dirksen, composer, conductor, keyboard artist, teacher, and friend, died at his home in Washington, D.C. on July 26, 2003, of cancer. "Wayne," as he became known to his friends, was born in Freeport, Illinois, and grew up in a musical home. His mother, Maude Logemann Dirksen, was an accomplished singer and pianist. His father, Richard Watson Dirksen, was an organ builder and founder of the Freeport Organ Company, and later was a part of the Reuter Pipe Organ Company. By the time Wayne finished high school, he was already a fine keyboard player and conductor. He held a church job as organist, accompanied the school glee clubs, and was student conductor of the band and orchestra in his senior year.

Following high school, he studied with Dr. Hugh Price, a gifted faculty member of the American Conservatory in Chicago. This study of piano, organ, and theory prepared him to receive a scholarship to the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, where he studied organ with Virgil Fox. In his senior year at Peabody, Wayne became a part-time Assistant to Paul Callaway at the Washington National Cathedral. Wayne graduated from Peabody in 1942, *magna cum laude*, and the next day enlisted in the United States Army. Paul Callaway was drafted in 1942, and their association had an interruption of four years. In May of 1946, Callaway and Dirksen were reunited as the musical team that was to lead Washington National Cathedral, and indeed the Washington area, for the next thirty-one years in an experience of great music making that has been unparalleled.

Dirksen soon began to take on additional responsibilities at the cathedral. In 1949, he became Director of the Glee Club of St. Alban's School for Boys, and one year later assumed the additional position with the National Cathedral School for Girls. For the next eighteen years, Dirksen led these groups in many outstanding concerts, frequently with professional orchestra, which included three original operettas. His wife, the late Joan Shaw Dirksen,

*Richard Wayne Dirksen's Remarks
continued from previous page...*

This evening has been a warm tribute that you have bestowed upon me. I am more grateful and pleased than words can express. I accept the honor with deep thanksgiving for all whose efforts have made it possible, and offer my reflection that the careers we have chosen are the truest ties that bind us together in doing our Lord's work. May he ever continue to support us in that with his Holy Spirit, strengthening our zeal, enlarging our understanding, and proving to us that our effectiveness in his mission is worthy. ◇

known as "Jo," collaborated with him on many on these. During this time, he maintained his position of Assistant Organist and Choirmaster under Paul Callaway and also found time to compose many pieces for use in the cathedral services.

In 1964, he was named the first Director of Advance Program, a new position established to develop a comprehensive program of music, drama, dance, and all other arts-related areas. Dirksen was clearly the person for this job. The effects of his brilliant planning are felt to this day in the rich and diverse offerings of the cathedral. In 1969, the Very Reverend Francis B. Sayre, Jr., then Dean of the cathedral, appointed Dirksen the cathedral Precentor—the first lay person to ever have this distinction. In this new capacity Wayne became head of worship, planning and overseeing the countless services of worship at the cathedral. In 1982 Bishop John T. Walker made him a Canon of the cathedral which gave him the title of Canon Precentor.

During all of these changes in positions, he continued his gift of composing music for the Church. In Wayne's own words, speaking about Paul Callaway, he wrote, "It is no wonder that a large catalog of music exists when such a superior musician and tutor constantly spurred its creation. He (Paul) did this by performing everything I composed for the cathedral."

In 1977, Paul Callaway retired and Wayne became the fourth Organist and Choirmaster of Washington National Cathedral, a position he held until 1988, when he devoted his full time to planning the great events surrounding the consecration of the completed cathedral in 1990. In 1991, Dirksen retired from the cathedral having served there over forty-six years.



Most church musicians know Wayne Dirksen as a composer, and that he was. He was at ease with the simplicity of his early Christmas anthem, *A Child my choice*, as well as the exciting and rhythmic setting of his *Christ our Passover*, for Easter. His compositions number some three hundred, for church, concert, and theatre. He excelled in each of these compositional areas, giving us a lasting gift for future musicians.

But Wayne's varied interests did not allow him to be just a composer. As evidenced by his many positions at the cathedral, Wayne enjoyed working in many different areas. He was a brilliant keyboard artist. Whether it was one of the Sunday afternoon organ recitals at the cathedral, or playing organ for Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* at Kennedy Center, or accompanying on the piano for the Cathedral Choral Society, or serving as harpsichordist in a Handel oratorio, Dirksen did it with a special flair. He loved music and loved to perform it.

He was also an excellent teacher. This writer was among his many organ students. Not only could he correct a wrong note, he would suggest interesting sounds from the great cathedral organ—and he did all this with an enthusiastic compassion. I always went away from lessons feeling I had really learned something. He even inspired me to practice!

Dirksen was a fine conductor as well. In the early 1960s, when Paul Callaway was asked to play the premiere of Samuel Barber's *Toccata Festiva* with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Academy of Music, Paul programmed the piece at the cathedral shortly after the premiere and Dirksen conducted this difficult score with complete confidence. Dirksen not only conducted the cathedral choir and glee clubs regularly, but was Interim Director of the Cathedral Choral Society when Callaway stepped down.

During his long career at Washington Cathedral, he had several opportunities to move into the secular world, for more money, more acclaim, wider audiences. But Wayne knew his heart and soul were deeply rooted in the church, in particular, Washington National Cathedral. Speaking at a regional conference of the Association of Anglican Musicians he said, "Now a comment on the strongest influence on my life and work: the vast dimension of the cathedral itself must be noted. Its magnitude and beauty offer endless inspiration to the artist and ennoble the richness of its worship and culture. An incomparable esthetic paragon, it is unlimited in challenge for special gifts and service, ever inviting discerning attention and attracting excellence. Its essence is that of the Eternal and Mysterious Holy One, accessible to human aspiration. Therein lies its greatest power."

The academic community recognized Dirksen's enormous musical gifts when in 1980, George Washington University awarded him the Doctor of Fine Arts degree; in 1986, Marymont College awarded him a Doctor of Music degree; and in 1986, he received the Medal of Excellence from Shenandoah Conservatory of Music.

Long time friend Norman Scribner says it well, "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."

On Tuesday, August 26, 2003, a Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving for the life of Richard Wayne Dirksen was held in Washington National Cathedral. Hundreds of former students, colleagues, and friends attended his memorial service. Among them was a small group of former Fellows of the College of Church Musicians, dating back some forty years, all of whom were students of Dirksen at the college which flourished during the sixties. Returning to pay him tribute were William Partridge, of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis; John Fenstermaker, of Trinity-by-the-Cove, Naples, Florida; Charles Bradley from Batavia, New York; Ronald Rice from Atlanta; and local Fellows of the college, Robert Grogan, Kenneth Lowenberg, and myself.

The congregation sang Dirksen's setting of the hymn "Come, we that love the Lord." A moving and appropriate homily was given by the Rev'd Dr. Francis H. Wade, Rector of St. Alban's Church, where Dirksen worshipped following his years at the cathedral. The Cathedral Choir of Men, Boys, and Girls, sang Dirksen's anthem, *Now the laborer's task is o'er*, and also the last two verses of *A Child my choice*. Dirksen actually put the service together because, as one of his sons told me, it was the same service he put together for his beloved wife Jo who died in 1995.

The final verse of his anthem, *A Child my choice*, says it best:

*Alas! he weeps, he sighs, he pants,
yet do his angels sing;
Out of his tears, his sighs and throbs,
doth bud a joyful spring.
Almighty Babe, whose tender arms
can force all foes to fly,
Correct my faults, protect my life,
direct me when I die!*

Robert Southwell
(c. 1561-1595)

Richard Wayne Dirksen left us a rich legacy of great music, and for those of us who knew him he also left an abiding enthusiasm for that music. And for that he will always be remembered. ♦

Dale Krider is organist and choirmaster of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in College Park, Maryland. He was a Fellow of the College of Church Musicians at the Cathedral and also studied privately with Dirksen before and after those college years, developing a friendship of over forty years.
