

Cathedral Choirmaster Richard Dirksen

Richard Wayne Dirksen, 82, a composer of liturgical music who was canon emeritus of Washington National Cathedral and its former organist and choirmaster, died of cancer July 26 at his home in Washington.

Mr. Dirksen wrote nearly 300 works for choir, instruments and theater, and his liturgical works were widely performed. He was the organist on recordings of the National Symphony Orchestra, the Kennedy Center premiere of Leonard Bernstein's "Mass" and other performances. He produced liturgical recordings at the cathedral and elsewhere.

Among his compositions were "Chanticleer," "Welcome All Wonders," "Vineyard Haven," "A Child My Choice" and other music often sung at Christmas and Easter. His annotated catalogue of music was published by Oxford University Press. He won a Washington Emmy Award for "Six Carols and Lessons," televised in 1965, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in music for his oratorio "Jonah."

Mr. Dirksen, a native of Freeport, Ill., joined the cathedral staff as assistant organist and choirmaster in 1942, during his final year at the Peabody Conservatory of Music. He was named precentor in 1968, with responsibility for planning and overseeing worship services. A cathedral spokesman said he was believed to be the first Anglican layperson appointed to that position.

Mr. Dirksen was organist-choirmaster from 1977 to 1988, when he gave up the job to plan events celebrating the consecration of the cathedral. He retired in 1991.

As organist-choirmaster, he directed the Cathedral Choirs, including the Choir of Men and Boys. In the 1960s, he taught at the briefly established College of Church Musicians. He also directed the combined glee clubs of St. Albans School and the National Cathedral School, as well as music for the Cathedral School summer festivals.

In the mid-1960s, he was interim director of the Cathedral Choral Society, an independent symphonic chorus housed in the cathedral. It

was founded and directed for many years by Paul Callaway, who was cathedral choirmaster and organist from 1939 to 1977. Mr. Dirksen was interim conductor of the society in the mid-1980s.

Mr. Dirksen was awarded an honorary doctorate of fine arts by George Washington University, an honorary doctorate of music by Mount Union College, a Distinguished Alumni Award by Peabody, and the Medal of Excellence of the Shenandoah Conservancy. He is included in Washingtonian magazine's Washington Music Hall of Fame.

He belonged to the American Federation of Musicians, the Association of Anglican Musicians and the American Guild of Organists.

His wife of 52 years, Joan Shaw Dirksen, who was the librettist for several of his works, died in 1995.

Survivors include four children, Richard S. Dirksen and Geoffrey Dirksen, both of Washington, Laura Dirksen Green of White Hall, Md., and Mark Dirksen of Fairhaven, Mass.; a brother; a sister; and six grandchildren.

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WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL ANNOUNCEMENT

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Former Organist-Choirmaster and Precentor Canon Emeritus Richard Wayne Dirksen Has Died

Canon Precentor Emeritus Richard Wayne Dirksen, Washington National Cathedral's former organist-choirmaster and precentor died Saturday morning, July 26 at his home in Washington DC. He was 82 years old. His funeral service will be held August 26, 2:00 pm. at Washington National Cathedral.

Canon Dirksen, a native of Freeport, Illinois, was a member of the Cathedral staff for 48 years. In 1942, during his final year at Baltimore's Peabody Conservancy, he was invited to join the Cathedral as assistant organist and choirmaster. He resigned the position in 1964 to become the cathedral's first director of programs. In 1968 he was appointed by then Cathedral Dean, Dean Francis B. Sayer Jr. as precentor. He became responsible for planning and overseeing all worship services at the cathedral. According to accounts of the time, he was believed to be the first layperson to ever be appointed to that position in the 400-year history of the Anglican Church.

While continuing to head the worship department he was appointed the Cathedral's fourth organist-choirmaster in 1977, a responsibility he dropped in 1988 to focus full time on planning events for the soon to be completed Cathedral. He retired April 1, 1991. He was named a Cathedral Canon in 1982.

In 1994 he published *An Annotated Catalog of Music Composed by Richard Wayne Dirksen* (Oxford University Press). He won an Emmy Award from the Washington DC Area Television Academy for "Six Carols and Lessons" televised December 24-25, 1965 on WTTG-TV.

Canon Dirksen's honors include Doctor of Fine Arts, *honoris causa*, The George Washington University, Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, Mount Union College, Alliance Ohio, Distinguished Alumni Award, Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Medal of Excellence, Shenandoah Conservancy.

He is survived by four children; Richard S. Dirksen, Washington DC, Geoffrey Dirksen, Washington DC, Laura Dirksen Green, White Hall, MD and Mark Dirksen, Fairhaven, MA.; six grandchildren and siblings Garriet Dirksen, Palm Springs, CA and Phyllis Mae Dirksen, Madison, WI.

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July 28, 2003

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July 28, 2003

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Canon Dirksen, a native of Freeport, Illinois, served on the Cathedral's staff for 48 years. In 1942, during his final year at Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory, he was invited to join the Cathedral as assistant organist and choirmaster. He resigned the position in 1964 to become the Cathedral's first director of programs. In 1968 then Cathedral Dean Francis B. Sayre, Jr., appointed him precentor with responsibility for planning and overseeing all worship services at the Cathedral. He was believed to be the first layperson appointed to that position in the 400-year history of the Anglican Church.

While continuing to head the worship department he was appointed the Cathedral's fourth organist-choirmaster in 1977, a responsibility he relinquished in 1988 to focus full-time on planning events to celebrate the completion and consecration of the Cathedral. He was named a Cathedral Canon in 1982. He retired April 1, 1991.

Canon Dirksen authored nearly 300 musical works for choir, instruments and theater. In 1994 he published *An Annotated Catalog of Music Composed by Richard Wayne Dirksen* (Oxford University Press). He won an Emmy Award from the Washington DC Area Television Academy for "Six Carols and Lessons" televised December 24-25, 1965, on WTTG-TV.

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He is survived by four children: Richard S. Dirksen, Washington, D.C., Geoffrey Dirksen, Washington, D.C., Laura Dirksen Green, White Hall, Maryland, and Mark Dirksen, Fairhaven, Massachusetts; six grandchildren; and siblings Garriet Dirksen, Palm Springs, California, and Phyllis Mae Dirksen, Madison, Wisconsin.

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*Office of Public Affairs
July 28, 2003*

Dr. Richard Wayne Dirksen
Canon Precentor

Richard Wayne Dirksen is gifted with such versatile talents that it is near impossible to classify him. He is organist, choirmaster, composer, choral group 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 running water on a lovely summer day from a cathedral gargoyle at the exact moment of the conclusion of the dedication service, 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 also innovator of the lovely summer evening concerts and developed the format for the annual fall open house event.

Fresh from the Peabody Conservatory of Music, a young Mr. Dirksen joined the cathedral staff in February 1941 but departed shortly thereafter for 3-1/2 years in the U.S. Army. Upon his return, he resumed the productive association with Dr. Paul Callaway and the cathedral's music, its services, recordings, and the new programs he innovated. In December 1982, Bishop Walker conferred upon him the title of Canon of this cathedral. Canon Dirksen is possibly the first and only lay person to be named Precentor of a large cathedral in the four-hundred year history of the Anglican Church. Evidence of his ability as a composer is found in having six of his hymns in the 1982 hymnal.

As the cathedral fabric has been gradually enlarged, so has Richard Wayne Dirksen expanded his talents to assist in bringing about the superb music for which this cathedral is now so widely known. As distinct from many notable organists, Dirksen has recalled how he learned to build an organ before he could play one. His organ building father was a great inspiration to him. Not just Wayne's talents but his wife, Jo, and their four children have also been much of a part of this cathedral's life and helped bless it. Canon Dirksen's retirement leaves an immense void in the staff structure of this cathedral organization, however, his name and music will endure as long as this cathedral will stand. Thanks be to God for his life and talent given to Washington Cathedral.

A longtime colleague
March 1991

~~memories-of-GRAND-ECCELESIASTIC-DRAMA--In-his-Precenter's-role,-Wayne-is~~

As one begins to read the Old Testament, the overwhelming lineage of Enoch begat Irad, Irad begat Methujael, etc., etc. becomes a bit tiresome. I suspect that God grew weary too, so every few generations He would spcie the population with a special individual to liven up the world. Saul begat David who, with his harp and psalms, enriched te liturgy.

The Roaring Twenties gave God pause. It was to inject a spiritual, creative and loving talent into the world. So in 1921, Maude and Richard Watson begat Richard Wayne and in 1942 this special man started his lifelong career at Washington Cathedral.

Let us disect Richard Wayne Dirksen.

Spiritual: No one can doubt his calling nor his dedication to the LÖrd. There were many opportunities to succceed in the secular world, more money to be made, wider audiences, greater acclaim, but after a bit of agonizing, Wayne always chose to stay where his heart and soul were rooted.- Washington Catherdal.

Creative: First of all as a musician and composer he ranks with the finest. As a conductor his ease and camaradéie tempered with discipline earned him the respect of young choir boys and choir men, high school young men and women of the Cathedral Schools"glee clubs and the singers of the Cathedral Choral Society. He loved to "make Music". As an organist he was renouned. As acomposer his works are found nationwide in ^{hymnals of many} ~~the hymnals~~ denominations and in numerous music publishing houses. ~~What-would-~~
~~Christmas-be-without-Weleome,--Chantieeleer-and-Child-of-My-Choice?~~ However, he Will be remembered equally for his sense of the dramatic. Those of us who participated in or attended the various spectacular dedications over th years including the final consecration services will forever cherish the

memories of GRAND ECCLESIASTIC DRAMA. In his Precentor's role, Wayne is without péer.

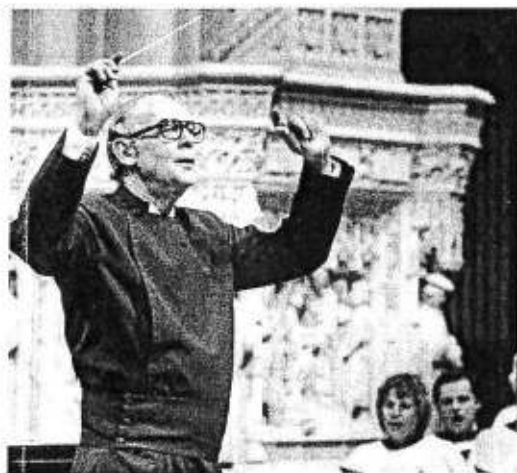
God has been ~~served~~ well served by Richard Wayne Dirksen. May he now "depart in peace according to Thy will.", and with our love and acclaim. We wish him a hble-in-one, a ten pound bass on the line, and a royal flush.

A friend

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Canon Richard Wayne Dirksen Dies at Age 82



Washington National Cathedral photo

Richard Wayne Dirksen, 1921-2003

Richard Wayne Dirksen, canon emeritus of Washington National Cathedral, composer, educator, organist and choirmaster, died July 26 of a recurrence of cancer at the age of 82.

Prior to his retirement on April 1, 1991, Canon Dirksen served the cathedral for 48 years, beginning as assistant organist and choirmaster while still a student at Peabody Conservatory. In 1964, he became the first director of programs, and in 1968 he became precentor, probably the first lay person ever to hold such a position. He became organist-choirmaster in 1977. He was

named a canon of the cathedral in 1982. From 1988 to his retirement he devoted his energies to planning the celebration of the completion of the west towers, the finale of the cathedral's 83 years of building.

Canon Dirksen composed perhaps 300 choral and instrumental works, including six hymn tunes in the Hymnal 1982: *Inisfree Farm*, *Decatur Place*, *Hilariter*, *Wyngate Canon*, *Vineyard Haven*, and *Mt. St. Alban NCA*.

James Litton, choirmaster at the cathedral, said, "I met him on my first visit, in high school. He spent 20 minutes playing the organ for me!"

THE AMERICAN ORGANIST

OCTOBER 2003



Richard Wayne Dirksen, 82 years old, July 26, 2003, peacefully at his home in Washington, D.C. The eldest son of Richard Watson Dirksen and Maude Logemann, Wayne (as he was universally known) was born and raised in Freeport, Ill., northwest of Chicago. Early keyboard studies were with his mother; 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 was encouraged to apply to the Peabody Conservatory, where he was accepted as a scholarship student of Virgil Fox. While still enrolled at Peabody, Mr. Dirksen was hired as assistant organist-choir-master to Paul Callaway at Wash-

ington National Cathedral in 1942, but enlisted in the Army immediately upon his graduation (magnum cum laude) in June of that year. He was stationed at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, where he founded a private radio station for the patients. Richard Dirksen married his high school sweetheart, Joan Milton Shaw, in 1943.

Following brief service in the European occupation, he returned to the cathedral in late 1945, where he remained until his retirement in 1991. In 1949 he was appointed director of the glee clubs of the National Cathedral and St. Albans Schools, in which role he and his wife 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. In 1969 Mr. Dirksen was named precentor. This appointment (believed to be 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 plan-

ning of 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 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 include 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. He had a lifelong interest in recording and television production, creating both documentary and live programs for many cathedral activities, including the annual national Christmas telecast.

Wayne Dirksen was awarded three honorary degrees: doctor of fine arts, George Washington University (1980); doctor of music, Marymount College (1988); and the Medal of Excellence (1988), Shenandoah Conservatory of Music. He is survived by a sister, Phyllis Reeser, and brother, Garret; children Richard Shaw, Geoffrey Paul, Laura Gail, and Mark Christopher; seven grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. A funeral service was held on August 26 at Washington National Cathedral. Memorial donations may be made to the Coleman Jennings Choir Scholarship Endowment at the National Cathedral.

The Washington Post

The Cathedral's Musical Tribute to One of Its Own

August 27, 2003

By Tim Page

The organist, choirmaster and composer Richard Wayne Dirksen was associated with Washington National Cathedral for almost half a century and, yesterday afternoon, several hundred people of all ages gathered there to honor his memory.



Dirksen, who died on July 26 at the age of 82, joined the cathedral in 1942, while he was still a student at the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. There he found a lasting professional home and eventually became the cathedral's senior organist and choirmaster. Dirksen also made recordings with the National Symphony Orchestra and played organ in the first performance of the first work ever staged at the brand-new Kennedy Center in 1971 -- Leonard Bernstein's opera-length, genre-bending "Mass."

Yesterday, there was music by Johann Sebastian Bach, Johannes Brahms and Cesar Franck (participating artists included J. Reilly Lewis of the Cathedral Choral Society, Norman Scribner of the Choral Arts Society, and Michael McCarthy, Erik Wm. Suter, Scott Hanoian and Edward M. Nassor, of the cathedral music department).

Dirksen was a composer himself, and the team of colleagues, friends and family that put together his memorial service knew just what would have pleased him most -- namely, to have his music heard. And so the program paid honor to Dirksen's sizable output of works for chorus and organ, many of which had received their world premieres within the cathedral.

To judge from what was played and sung, Dirksen had a real mastery of devotional idioms. An anthem set to an 1870 text by John Ellerton (sung by the cathedral's Great Choir) fleshed out the words as a hand would a glove, giving them shape and sinew. Dirksen's melodies move in ways that are predictable enough to give security to performers yet surprising enough to assert the composer's originality. Even his most vigorous and affirmative pieces have a hint of contemplative melancholy, in the best English choral tradition.

The Rev. Francis H. Wade, rector of St. Alban's Episcopal Church, read a moving homily to his associate. He noted that Dirksen, who died of cancer, had experienced "the uncomfortable blessing of saying goodbye to friends and family."

"Most of us have learned from Wayne Dirksen over the years," he continued. It seems likely that Dirksen will continue to illumine listeners for years to come, through the direct, affecting eloquence of his own music.