

Brooks, Charles Lee (1923–1989)

DAN SHULTZ

Dan Shultz, emeritus professor of music, Walla Walla University, has researched and written extensively about Seventh-day Adventist music history and musicians. His publications include *A Great Tradition*—a history of music at Walla Walla University, and the *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*—an encyclopedia with biographies of over 1100 Adventist musicians. He founded the International Adventist Musicians Association, serving as its president for ten years and editing its publications and website for over thirty years. Shultz and his wife, Carolyn (nee Stevens), live in College Place, Washington.

Charles L. Brooks was a pastor, educator, departmental administrator, and acclaimed musician.

Early Life and Family

Charles L. Brooks was born June 8, 1923, in Wilson, North Carolina, and raised in Baltimore, Maryland.

Eldest of five children of Albert and Eva Mae Evans Brooks, Charles showed from his early years a love for ministry, and a passion for reading and music. His denominational service spanned nearly 35 years, beginning in 1954 as pastor of the North Philadelphia Church, and ending with a global service for the world-wide mission of the church in pastoral work, Sabbath School and Lay Activities, and in developing and fostering a love for quality sacred music.

Charles attended Oakwood College (now University) for two years and then graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa, *summa cum laude*, from Howard University with majors in history, classical languages, and education. Later he completed a master's degree with honors at the SDA Theological Seminary, then located in Takoma Park, Washington, D.C. Throughout his collegiate education, he was regarded as an intellectual with a highly disciplined mind.¹

Charles married Gladyce Taylor in 1944 and they had three children, Jacqueline (Winston), A. Dennis, and C. Jeffrey. Originally from Iowa, Gladyce met Charles while attending Oakwood College. She would work as a



Charles L. Brooks

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

secretary in both government and denominational offices, including those at the General Conference and the Columbia Union Conference. After retiring, she was active in women's ministries, serving as a director in that area in the Allegheny East Conference in the 1990s.²

Fruitful Ministry

Throughout his ministry, Charles was known as tireless, devoted, and goal oriented. When he began his career as a pastor in North Philadelphia church in 1954, the first seven years saw the membership triple, necessitating acquisition of a new church facility.³ Ordained in 1960,⁴ he was chosen to serve as principal of Pine Forge Institute in Pennsylvania.⁵ In 1963 he became superintendent of education/Sabbath school director in the Allegheny Conference and then from 1970 to 1975 served as director of the Sabbath School and Religious Liberty departments of the Southern Union. While in that Union he formed the Southern Society of Adventist Attorneys. His success in such independent venture opened doors for other African-Americans for organization and service outside the regional black conferences.⁶

In 1975 Brooks was elected associate director of the General Conference Church Ministries Department. In that role, he led out in establishing the Office of Church Music and then became its chair, working to create an awareness of music as an important part of worship. He chaired the Church Hymnal Committee with nineteen pastors, laymen, and musicians who worked with him from 1982 to 1985 to produce the first new hymnal for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in forty years. The last months of his life were spent in overseeing preparations for the music to be used at the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.⁷

Charles started singing publicly at age four. A tenor, he sang at countless evangelistic meetings throughout his career as a minister and then administrator in the church. Called the "Sweet singer of Israel," he enjoyed singing hymns that spoke to the heart. Although church members around the world knew him as a singer in evangelistic meetings, he also had a knowledge of and an interest in classical music.⁸

In the early 1970s, a serious health problem caused Charles to lose his ability to speak and sing for nearly a year and left him with a voice that was barely more than a whisper. At an Allegheny East Conference camp meeting, where he had been asked to "whisper" the benediction at the close of a service, he experienced a marvelous touch that he described as miraculous:

I'll never forget it. Charles Bradford was making an appeal when suddenly I felt a peculiar sensation on the left side of my neck. In fact, it literally shook me. I leaned over to mention it to the preacher next to me. What I said came out loud. When I got up to pronounce the benediction, I instead asked the organist to play "Until Then," and for the first time in more than seven months I sang!⁹

Throughout this struggle with cancer in the final years of his life, Brooks worked unstintingly in his leadership roles and continued to sing. He died in Columbia, Maryland, following a twelve-year struggle with cancer. His

funeral service in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, on December 27, 1989 was a musical celebration of his life featuring performances of his favorite hymns.¹⁰

SOURCES

"Charles L. Brooks Dies." *Adventist Review*, January 11, 1990.

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Pinkney, A.V. "New Principal Chosen for Pine Forge Institute," *Columbia Union Visitor*, April 20, 1961.

"Two Pastors Ordained at Camp Meeting." *Columbia Union Visitor*, September 8, 1960.

NOTES

1. 1940 U.S. Federal Census and Boston-Knowles Family Tree, Ancestry.com; Barbara Jackson-Hall, "Charles L. Brooks Sings, Smiles, Prays," *Adventist Review*, December 28, 1989, 8-9.
2. Ron Graybill, "Brooks joins union communication staff," *Columbia Union Visitor*, December 1, 1985, 11; Norma Sahlin, "Dreams for the '90s," a listing of women's ministries conference directors; *Columbia Union Visitor*, October 15, 1993, 6.
3. "Life Sketch," *North American Regional Voice*, February 1990, 10.
4. "Two Pastors ordained at Camp Meeting," *Columbia Union Visitor*, September 8, 1960, 4.
5. A.V. Pinkney, "New Principal Chosen for Pine Forge Institute," *Columbia Union Visitor*, April 20, 1961, 4.
6. "Charles L. Brooks Obituary," *Southern Tidings*, February 1990, pg. 9; see citation in endnote 3.
7. Ibid.
8. Jackson-Hall, 8-9.
9. Ibid.
10. "Charles L. Brooks obituary," *Southern Tidings*, February 1990, 9; "Charles L. Brooks Dies," *Adventist Review*, January 11, 1990, 6.

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