



Left to right: Paul Hamel, Oliver S. Beltz, and C. Warren Becker at a convention of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Musicians' Guild.

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Musicians' Guild

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During its two decades as an organization (1970-1989), the Seventh-day Adventist Church Musicians' Guild (CMG) sought to foster understanding of the role of music in worship and advance informed interchange between musicians and pastors about critical issues involving music in the life of the church.

Emergence

The CMG officially started in 1970, growing out of a choir camp for the Loma Linda University church and White Memorial (Los Angeles) church choirs, first held in California in 1957. Oliver S. Beltz and Albert E. Mayes, Jr., respective directors of those choirs and close friends, continued the camp for several years.

In 1970, when Beltz announced his retirement from this activity, attendees voted to establish a group that would continue the camp and expand its work of promoting the best in church music, and Mayes was elected president. While Beltz, with his knowledge of and passion for promoting the best in sacred music, would subsequently be given credit for founding the CMG, the idea was developed jointly with Mayes, whose vision and dedicated effort were indispensable to making it a reality.

For the next six years Mayes spent countless hours visiting with musicians and pastors, drawing up a constitution, soliciting funds, and recruiting members. As the group expanded to include other like-minded musicians on the West Coast, the idea of becoming a national organization gained momentum¹

A National Guild

Finally, in the summer of 1976, during a workshop for North American Division college and university teachers at Andrews University, the CMG was established as a national group and held its first meeting. It was an exciting time as those in attendance discussed the potential for this organization to create unity among Adventist church musicians and to improve the quality of music in worship.

Mayes was elected first president of the national Guild. A fine tenor and insightful conductor, he was also a diligent worker and an effective communicator who would listen carefully to those with differing viewpoints and then respond in a reasoned yet never condescending manner. Mayes took vigorous action to place the national Guild on a solid footing. Despite the debilitating effect of progressive kidney failure, he battled on, exuding an enthusiasm that belied the sobering personal reality he was facing. Even after reluctantly stepping down as president in 1980, he continued to work on behalf of the organization until his untimely death in 1984²

Four persons would lead the Guild in the next ten years. Mayes' immediate successor, Gladys Benfield, had worked closely with him, was mindful of his vision, and led the organization with the same goals in mind. During her four years of service, she met with the board of a proposed new organization, the International Adventist Musicians Association, in the fall of 1983.

There was concern that IAMA would be in direct competition with the CMG. At that meeting reassurances were made that IAMA was for all Adventist musicians and that it would support the CMG in their work in church music. IAMA, which would consist of subdivisions (keyboard, vocal/choral, band, orchestra, etc.), had purposely not created one for church music, not wanting to detract from the work of the Guild. IAMA would subsequently provide support for the Guild by buying and placing advertisements in its publications.³

John Read, Benfield's successor, led the Guild for two years. One of the few Adventists in a full-time Seventh-day Adventist church music position, he brought with him an enthusiasm and a practical perspective about the realities of working with worship music issues in churches and with conference leaders. He represented the Guild when it attempted to establish a Department of Church Music at the General Conference level.⁴

Read was followed by Douglas Macomber, who, during his two years as president, placed the Guild on a more solid basis by establishing a centralized address, obtaining a bulk mailing permit, and getting it incorporated as a nonprofit organization. Additionally, the Guild, which had been organized around the idea of local chapters, sought to create new ones across the nation. In spite of these changes, however, a decline in members continued.⁵

CMG Periodicals

A magazine for the Guild, *The Score*, first published in 1973, was written, edited, and produced by Carol Mayes until 1979. At first an inexpensive duplicated newsletter of four pages, it evolved into a printed eight-page magazine by the time Mayes left.

Her successor as editor, Douglas Macomber, changed the format two years later and increased the size of the magazine. When it was renamed *Adventist Musician* in 1984, it had twelve pages and a readership of 500. Two years later, when Macomber was elected CMG president, Joylin Campbell-Yukl became editor, and the magazine was renamed the *Journal of Music Ministry*.

National Conventions and Promotional Endeavors

A series of national conventions were held at intervals following the initial one at Andrews University. While these meetings proved to be rewarding experiences for attendees, they often left the Guild in debt.

At the 1988 convention, held at Atlantic Union College, concerns were expressed over declining membership, spiraling costs, and financial losses. To generate greater support, the board decided to publish a "Friendship Issue" of its magazine for mailing to all Adventist pastors and musicians in the North American Division. A 28-page issue dated January-March 1989 was prepared with a view toward broad-ranging appeal. It included articles on multiculturalism, developing music programs in Adventist churches in which musicians and pastors could work together to develop dynamic services, and understanding music prevalent in the worship experience

of racial minorities. Other articles described the new organ recently installed in the Central church in San Francisco, reviewed the *Companion to the New Church Hymnal*, authored by Wayne Hooper and Edward E. White, and presented a pastor's experience in establishing and working with a church worship committee.

The mailing, subsidized by the General Conference, included a return membership and donation card, as well as a registration form for a national convention (referred to as conference) to be held in Portland, Oregon, that summer. It was hoped that this convention, which was heavily promoted and included a variety of offerings, would attract a significant number of attendees and give a boost to the Guild.⁶

The response was disappointing on all fronts. Following the convention, Guild president William Ness observed in the July-December 1989 issue of the journal:

During this year, our statistics and financial health have not improved in membership and the necessary subsidies. Membership has been a lingering problem with this organization for more than several years now and is mournfully low as I write this message! . . . With the dedicated efforts of the board and the General Conference, we were able to present to the Adventist population of North America, a "Friendship Issue" of *Music Ministry*. . . . The result in subscriptions, and response to the board was an underwhelming disappointment!

However, we came back from that disappointment with the news of a fine conference being planned in Portland. This conference, despite stressing variety, and thorough planning and publicity, did not attract members from as wide a scope as we had envisioned either.

. . . Our funds are entirely depleted from the[se] truly serious efforts to turn the Guild into a viable entity?⁷

In that same issue, Campbell-Yukl announced her resignation as editor of the magazine. She had tried to broaden its appeal and that of the Guild, she explained, by creating "a resource for creative ideas in 'worship,' not limited to music or musicians," but insufficient funding and membership growth made this "broader scope" impossible.⁸

This would be the final issue of the magazine, and the effective end of Guild activities, except for one, a project that would prove to be an important legacy for the future of worship music in the Adventist church.

The Oliver S. Beltz Chair in Sacred Music

The special "Friendship Issue" had also provided a progress report on a Chair of Sacred Music at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. This endowed position, launched by a significant donation by Oliver S. Beltz and his wife at the time of the CMG's first national convention in 1976, had become a special project of the organization, especially after the death of Beltz in 1978.

Over the years, Guild fundraising efforts increased the endowment, which was renamed the Oliver S. Beltz Chair of Sacred Music. Proceeds from the endowment help fund the salary of a person who teaches a required class

in sacred music at the seminary.⁹

While the Guild's work was affected by a lack of financial support and a declining interest on the part of pastors and musicians, particularly those in music education, there may have been larger issues at play. In the fifteen years since its demise, a revolution has taken place in church music that was already underway in the final years of the Guild.

While the Guild started its work dealing with worship music from the perspective of the classically trained musician, it had hoped to be heard by both musicians and pastors. The problem was the lack of both a longstanding tradition in church-supported music ministry in the Adventist church and of musically informed ministers and trained church musicians. Though its goal from the start was to appeal to both musicians and pastors, it at times did not, and consequently it failed to create a broader base of support. By the time that valiant attempts were made to broaden the organization's base by expanding its focus and mission, it was too late.

Legacy

Despite the organization coming to an end, the often heroic efforts of Guild leaders on behalf of Adventist worship music made a difference. The CMG created a greater awareness in the lives of many musicians and pastors of the importance of music in worship and the need for dialogue between those who minister through music and through the spoken word. Additionally, through its work in helping fund the Oliver S. Beltz Chair in Sacred Music, students at the denomination's central theological seminary are made aware of the issues in, and the importance of, music in worship.

Presidents

Albert E. Mayes, Jr. (1970-1980); Gladys Benfield (1980-1984); John Read (1984-1986); Douglas Macomber (1986-1988); William Ness (1988-1989).

Periodicals and editors

The Score editors: Carol Mayes (1973-1979); Douglas Macomber (1979-1984)

Adventist Musician editor: Douglas Macomber (1984-1986)

Journal of Music Ministry editor: Joylin Campbell-Yukl (1986-1989)

SOURCES

Articles from the organization's periodicals listed above.

Mayes, Carol and John Read. "Adventist Musicians' Guild scores noteworthy gains." *ARH*, June 13, 1985.

Shultz, Dan. *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*. Walla Walla: Color Press, 2014.

Shultz, Dan. International Adventist Musicians Association *Notes*, Winter-Spring 2004.

NOTES

1. *The Score*, April 1973, 1; author's interviews and conversations with Carol Hallock Mayes, 2003-2007; Richard Hammond, "A Tribute" and editorial comment, both in *The Score*, April 1974, and preserved in Dan Shultz, *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource* (Walla Walla: Color Press, 2014), 527-528.
2. Interviews and correspondence with Carol Mayes, 2003-2007; Carol Hallock Mayes, "My life in music with Albert Mayes," (2007) in Shultz, 529,-530; Carol Mayes and John Read, "Adventist Musicians' Guild scores noteworthy gains," *ARH*, June 13, 1985, 11-12.
3. Author's personal knowledge as president of International Adventist Musicians Association.
4. Unknown interviewer, "John Read, an interview," February 1982, pgs. 9,10; John Read, interview by author, September 24, 2007.
5. Douglas Macomber, "Guild Prepares to Grow!" *Journal of Music Ministry*, July-September 1986, 7; information provided to author by Douglas Macomber, 2004, and August 2012.
6. William Ness, "President's Message," *Journal of Music Ministry* (Friendship Issue), January-March 1989, 2.
7. William Ness, "President's Message," *Journal of Music Ministry*, July-December, 1989, 3.
8. Joylin Campbell-Yukl, "Changes to take place," *Journal of Music Ministry*, July-December, 1989, 2.
9. C. Warren Becker, "Sacred Music at Andrews University," *Journal of Music Ministry*, January-March, 1989, 11.

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