

# Martin, Jr., Hugh

## (1914–2011)

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.

Hugh Martin, Jr., composer and lyricist for Broadway musicals from the 1930s through the 1980s, became a Seventh-day Adventist in 1979 and worked at the Voice of Prophecy accompanying Del Delker from 1982 to 1986. He is best known for his Christmas song “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.”

### Broadway Composer

Hugh was born on August 11, 1914, in Birmingham, Alabama, one of three children of Ellie Gordon Robinson and Hugh Martin.<sup>1</sup> His father was an architect and his mother a musician who started teaching her son piano when he was four. Midway through a second year of studying classical music at Birmingham Southern College he went to New York City. There, at 23, he performed in and arranged music for the Broadway show *Hooray for What?*, along with Ralph Blane.<sup>2</sup> While the show was still running, Martin formed a male quartet, The Martins, which included Blane as one of its members. They sang on Steve Allen’s radio program and were also featured in Irving Berlin’s musical *Louisiana Purchase*.<sup>3</sup>

Blane and Martin also collaborated in composing songs of their own. In 1941, Richard Rodgers and George Abbot chose them to write the songs for the show *Best Foot Forward*. In 1944 they wrote the original music for the Hollywood musical *Meet Me in St. Louis*, starring Judy Garland. “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” was



**Hugh Martin**  
Music Accompanist  
Voice of Prophecy

Hugh Martin, Jr.

From *Canadian Union Messenger*, May 1988.

one of its songs. Following the closing of that musical, Martin served in the U. S. Army, entertaining the troops. The Martin-Blane partnership continued until Blane's death in 1995.<sup>4</sup>

Martin's success with Broadway shows also continued. He co-produced *High Spirits* (1964) and was musical director of *Sugar Babies* (1979). He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1983.<sup>5</sup>

## Voice of Prophecy Accompanist

Though not active in any religion, Martin believed God answered his prayer of desperation during a crisis of illness and anxiety he experienced while working in London in 1960. Several years later, while listening to the radio, he heard Del Delker<sup>6</sup> sing on the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) broadcast. He would later observe that her voice captivated him, and he felt a strong desire to be her accompanist. Though he was not ready for sermons or Bible study, he tuned in to the broadcast regularly just to hear her sing.<sup>7</sup>

During a hospital stay in 1979, Martin shared a room with William Lester, a Seventh-day Adventist minister who shared his faith and studied the Bible with him, leading to Martin's baptism.<sup>8</sup> Within a year he shared with Delker his wish to someday accompany her. In 1980 he moved to Newbury Park, near the VOP headquarters in the Adventist Media Center, hoping that his dream would materialize. It would be more than two years until there was an opening and he was invited to join the VOP as Delker's accompanist and arranger.<sup>9</sup>

She described that experience in her autobiography, observing that because he was older and somewhat frail, he couldn't go on extended trips. They did, however, travel together to camp meetings and other church gatherings from 1982 to 1986, he accompanying her and sharing his testimony about how he became a Christian and joined the church.<sup>10</sup>

After he retired in 1986, they remained close friends, and when she taped her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary video, *Del and Friends*, in 2002, Martin accompanied her as she sang "Have Yourself a Blessed Little Christmas," a revision of his Christmas classic with lyrics that Delker and John Fricke had helped him rewrite in 2001.<sup>11</sup>

Martin was living in Encinitas, California, at the time of his death on March 11, 2011, at age 96.<sup>12</sup> His autobiography, *Hugh Martin: The Boy Next Door*, had just been completed and published in October of the previous year. He was survived by his brother, Gordon.

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### SOURCES

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## NOTES

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2. Richard Corliss, "A Merry Little Christmas': Songwriter Hugh Martin Dies at 96," *Time*, March 12, 2011, accessed September 2, 2022, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2059612,00.html>.
3. Ibid.
4. Claire Noland, "High Martin dies at 96; Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas songwriter," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2011.
5. "Hugh Martin, Jr.," *Find a Grave*, Memorial ID 66792028, March 11, 2011, accessed September 2, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/66792028/hugh-martin>.
6. Dan Shultz, "Delker, Ardella Vernell (Del) (1924–2018)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 29, 2020, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=AG0G>.
7. Del Delker and Ken Wade, *Del Delker: Her Story as told to Ken Wade* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 138-140.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid; Corliss, "A Merry Little Christmas': Songwriter Hugh Martin Dies at 96."
12. "Hugh Martin, Jr.," *Find a Grave*.

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