

Delker, Ardella Vernell "Del" (1924–2018)

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Del Delker.

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Adventists Archives.

Ardella Vernell¹ Delker, a vocal soloist and recording artist known professionally as Del Delker, was

associated with the Voice of Prophecy radio broadcast and evangelistic ministry for more than fifty years.

Early Life

Del Delker was born in Java, South Dakota, on October 21, 1924, the younger of two children born to Andrew and Martha Hartmann Delker.² Her parents divorced before she was born. With the coming of the Great Depression, Martha Delker and her two children, along with her two sisters and a brother-in-law, embarked for California in 1931. When the money saved for the trip ran out in Yakima, Washington, the family worked in a cannery until they had earned enough money to continue to Oakland, California, where they settled.³

Martha Delker was a Seventh-day Adventist, and Del Delker attended church school for four years. Upset by the rules in the church school and the legalism she had noted in some members of the church, Delker persuaded her mother to let her attend public high school. After graduating, she worked for the Pacific Greyhound Bus company.⁴

A musical child from her earliest years, Delker loved to sing. When she was three, Delker wandered off on her own, much to the alarm of her mother who frantically began an unsuccessful search for her. At the height of despair, Martha Delker received a call from the manager of the local bank who asked her whether she was

missing something. When she responded in the affirmative, he reportedly said, "Well, she's down here, standing in front of the bank, singing for a living, and people are putting money in her hot little fists!"⁵

As she reached her teenage years Delker aspired to sing with a dance band, an ultimate experience for a singer of popular music in that era. Although that dream was not realized, she did enjoy singing popular music as part of a women's group that performed occasionally in local United Service Organizations (USO) clubs during World War II, entertaining men in the armed forces.⁶

From the Quiet Hour to the Voice of Prophecy

Delker did not join the Seventh-day Adventist church until March 1947 when she was converted in meetings held by J. L. Tucker of the Quiet Hour radio ministry. She began to sing for the Quiet Hour evangelistic meetings and broadcast. At a camp meeting held in Lodi, California, that summer, she sang "The Love of God," a piece that especially resonated with her spiritual experience. The attention and praise she received from those in attendance caused her to become concerned about her ego. At an evening visit to a vineyard near the camp meeting, she prayed about it and gained a sense that God would help her remain humble.⁷

Shortly after that camp meeting, the Voice of Prophecy (VOP), located in Los Angeles, California, invited Delker to join the ministry as a secretary and to sing occasionally.⁸ Reluctant due to her lack of formal musical training, she refused the offer three times before finally accepting. Initially, she was asked to sing for the broadcast so infrequently that she considered leaving. At the time of her arrival in September 1947, the VOP music department was in the middle of a turmoil that had started four years earlier and had just led to the release of three quartet members that summer. It was not until 1950, after the hiring of Wayne Hooper as music coordinator for the broadcast in 1949, that Delker began singing regularly. In 1951, she was included for the first time on a record with the VOP King's Heralds quartet.⁹

While Delker had natural talent, she could not read music and relied totally on her ear and memory for singing and making harmony. Hooper became her first music teacher and helped her become a knowledgeable musician and capable sight reader, able to be a meaningful participant in ensemble singing. Near the end of his career she became his assistant and secretary.¹⁰

Furthered Education

In 1951, Leona Glidden Running, who had become acquainted with Delker while working in the Foreign Language Department of the VOP, invited Delker to travel with her for a five-week trip to Europe that would include visits in seven countries, including an Adventist Youth Congress in Paris in July. At first, she was thrilled with the invitation, but upon reflection she realized she did not have enough money for the trip. H.M.S. Richards and his wife, Mabel, had become concerned over the heavy commitments Delker was keeping and the need for

a break. Aware of her financial need, they quietly raised money from her associates and friends so that she could make the trip.¹¹

It proved to be a marvelous experience for both Running and Delker, one that Running wrote about in the popular book, *36 Days and a Dream*, a 1953 Senior MV Book Club selection. An excerpt was also printed in the *Youth's Instructor* of February 3, 1953.¹²

In 1953, Delker entered Emmanuel Missionary College, now Andrews University, in Michigan to pursue a degree in religion.¹³ Her absence from the program and the VOP's desire to have her closer to the studio led her to transfer to La Sierra College (now La Sierra University) in Riverside, about sixty miles west of Los Angeles, in 1954. As her studies continued, she also maintained a busy performance schedule, often singing for the broadcast, in churches, and other venues on weekends, and at camp meetings during the summers. She completed her studies and graduated with a B.A. in religion in 1958.¹⁴

The VOP, Evangelism, and Camp Meetings

Because of the popularity of the broadcast and many invitations for the VOP to present programs at summer camp meetings, two groups were created: an A group that included H.M.S Richards and the King's Herald's quartet, and a B group that initially included J. Orville Iversen, Delker, and organists Brad and Olive Braley. H.M.S. Richards, Jr., later replaced Iversen and, in the summer of 1967, invited the Wedgwood Trio, a bluegrass-style group from Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) to join him and Delker on their camp meeting tours. While this decision proved to be very controversial with some of their hosts, Delker recalled that summer's travels as an enjoyable experience, noting the trio's effectiveness in reaching the young.¹⁵

During Delker's many years with the VOP she traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, by road and air, in the U.S. and abroad, singing on behalf of the VOP, and "most importantly, the Lord," as she often observed. Along the way, she sang and recorded music in fifteen different languages, appeared on the Faith for Today television broadcast, and learned to face the challenges that come with being a celebrity.¹⁶

Although Delker's earliest wish was to marry a minister and assist in his ministry, her success and celebrity became impediments. The problem revealed itself after she first started working at the VOP, when, in her role as a secretary, she developed a close relationship with another worker that abruptly ended when her singing increased in frequency and she became more than a secretary. He was more interested in marrying a secretary than a celebrity. Over the years her visibility led to a cascade of letters, notes, and poems, some sent by well-meaning persons who were convinced that she was the answer to their prayers. Many more were of dubious nature and quickly discarded.¹⁷

Later Career

In 1982, when the VOP music department was disbanded and the quartet released, a move she protested, Delker was invited to continue as part of the broadcast.¹⁸ At that time, she approached Hugh Martin, nationally famous popular composer and songwriter from an earlier era who had recently joined the church, to serve as her accompanist. They worked together in evangelism for most of the 1980s. In 1999, he accompanied her for a recording of a rewrite of his signature song, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," changing "Merry" to "Blessed."¹⁹

Beginning in 1969, Delker had a series of operations over three decades for problems related to her hips and knees that made walking and travel painful. While the operations were not fully successful, she continued to perform beyond her retirement, despite ongoing physical challenges.²⁰

Although she officially retired in January 1990, Delker occasionally continued to sing and travel until 2007. On June 30, 2002, she was honored for her 55 years of service when she joined with many of her friends from over the years to tape a video program called *Del and Friends*. It was a fitting tribute to her and to her ability to work with so many other friends and musicians in selfless Christian ministry.

Delker and Wayne Hooper traveled with VOP groups to Adventist colleges and universities in 2004 to join with campus musicians in celebrating the VOP's 75th anniversary.²¹ For over fifty years she had performed many of Hooper's arrangements, and her last public performance was at his funeral in 2007.²² Del was residing in Porterville, California, when she died on January 31, 2018, at age 93.²³

Legacy

In her decades of ministry with the Voice of Prophecy, and through more than forty albums of recorded music,²⁴ Del Delker inspired listeners with her rich contralto voice. "The Love of God," her signature song from the start at the VOP, perhaps best epitomized both the message of her music and the heart-touching quality with which she sang it.

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