

# Hannum, Harold

## Byron (1901–1985)

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### 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.

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Harold Hannum taught in four Adventist universities in a career that spanned 55 years. He exerted a profound influence on church music and became known as the “Dean of Adventist Organists.”<sup>1</sup>

### Education and Early Career

Harold was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 12, 1901, one of five children and the oldest of four sons of Byron F. and Agnes B. Cochrane Hannum.<sup>2</sup> While very young, he studied piano at nationally noted Oberlin College Conservatory of Music near Cleveland.<sup>3</sup> Following completion of high school, he attended Washington Missionary College (WMC), now Washington Adventist University, from 1919 to 1923, and completed a bachelor’s degree. While at WMC, he served as a reporter and eventually editor-in-chief of the school paper, the *Sligonian*.<sup>4</sup> He also served for a year as second vice-president of the student association.

Hannum started his teaching career at Southwestern Junior College, now Southwestern Adventist University, in 1923.<sup>5</sup> A year later, he returned to the Washington area and married Ethel Longacre in the Takoma Park Church, where her father, Charles S. Longacre, officiated in the service.<sup>6</sup> Hannum would teach at WMC for the next five years. Known as a pianist with “remarkable skill in technique and an unusually delicate touch,”<sup>7</sup> he enjoyed enthusiastic student responses to his recitals that featured performances of music by J. S. Bach, Chopin, Liszt,



Harold B. Hannum, new faculty member at Washington Missionary College.

From *Sligonian*, May 1925

Mendelssohn, and others. While at WMC, he completed a B.Mus. at the Peabody Conservatory of Music.<sup>8</sup>

## Emmanuel Missionary College Years

In 1929 Hannum accepted an invitation to teach in the music department at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC), now Andrews University. He became chair of the department in 1934 and during the next ten years strengthened the program and elevated the level of music and musicianship associated with worship services on campus. Students and colleagues respected his “consistently fine artistry on his chosen instruments” and were moved by his vesper programs of organ music with readings by his wife and others.<sup>9</sup> The EMC yearbook, the *Cardinal* (1944), observed:

It is at the organ, as recreator of vast “palaces of music” – so Browning would have it – that professor Hannum most effectively expresses himself. Master of the art and science of music, votary of the highest development of the classics, he has long been esteemed for his cultural influence on religious services and in the department he heads, as well as for his own personal achievements.<sup>10</sup>

On a personal level, Hannum was known for his genial disposition, his sly wit, and a sense of humor that on occasion led to delightful repartee. And as busy as he was during these years, he completed an M.Mus. at Northwestern University and became an Associate in the American Guild of Organists.<sup>11</sup> He would later serve as Dean of the Riverside-San Bernardino Counties Chapter in 1947.<sup>12</sup>

While at EMC, Hannum was deeply involved in developing a new hymnal for the denomination and became known as its unofficial editor.<sup>13</sup> It was criticized by some upon its release in 1941 as being too “high church,” and by others as having too many gospel songs and poor tunes. Even though it eventually gained acceptance, he regarded it as flawed, too many compromises having been made. He also thought it included material that should not have been in a modern hymnal and omitted some that should have been included.<sup>14</sup> When its replacement, the 1985 *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* was being prepared, Hannum offered advice and encouragement in its planning stages.<sup>15</sup>

## La Sierra Years

In 1944 Hannum accepted a position at La Sierra College, now La Sierra University, where he would serve as organist and chair the music program for more than two decades.<sup>16</sup> One of his first challenges was the organ used in church services, a three-manual theater organ with a “horseshoe-shaped” console from the Walt Disney Studio in Hollywood. Its strident and wobbly sounds were not suitable for worship services. Quietly and gradually, Hannum, known for his taste and high standards in music, changed the character of the instrument by revoicing it and making other changes to create a more cohesive sound. It would be replaced with other instruments, and in 1970 a 62-rank Casavant organ was installed.<sup>17</sup>

Under Hannum's leadership the department flourished as he upheld those high standards and recruited an outstanding faculty. His presence on the organ bench and influence on other organists in the Seventh-day Adventist church led to higher standards in worship music at La Sierra and at other schools and churches. In 1961, when the college yearbook was dedicated to him, the editors observed that in "wielding his power upon the organ, massive titan of sound, he ruptures the air with tone upon tone eliciting depths of latent emotion freeing the soul in release."<sup>18</sup>

## Legacy

It was his openness in dealing with music from an aesthetic and cultural perspective that made Harold B. Hannum a thoughtful and effective teacher not only in organ but also in theory and music appreciation classes. His ability to articulate his views quietly without resorting to dogmatic pronouncements also enabled him to reason in an effective and down-to-earth way about music in life and worship with those who held other views. He observed in his first book, *Music and Worship*:

The selection of music for religious services is not a matter of right and wrong. It is a matter of culture and taste. Tastes change and cultures differ. The goal is to use, as far as possible, the songs considered best in the culture in which one lives.<sup>19</sup>

The church has not only used one kind of music, but has made use of many styles in its services . . . no one kind of music meets the need of all kinds of people. According to his background, culture, and training, an individual comes to associate particular religious feelings with particular kinds of music.<sup>20</sup>

While these statements standing alone could be used to justify the idea that any kind of music can be used in worship, Hannum clarified his position in a later book, *Let the People Sing*.

The problems concerning appropriate church music would be easier to solve if we were to realize that not all styles of music, no matter what the culture, are suitable for the temple of God. Here good judgment and honest appraisal will guide in right choices. A most important principle to apply is that of association. Music that by association reminds one of questionable pleasures will not be appropriate for church.<sup>21</sup>

And in his view, making good choices in this area was a personal matter, one that required honest answers to a series of questions:

How does my choice affect my spiritual life?

Does the music exalt and glorify God?

Does it sound more like unsanctified secular music or like music that inspired religious thoughts?

Is the music primarily entertaining and pleasing to me, or does it lead me to contemplate spiritual themes?

Does the music seem appropriate to the atmosphere of the church and does it promote the worship mode?<sup>22</sup>

This reasoned approach to dealing with challenges in worship music sometimes frustrated those who wanted a simple pronouncement from someone who in his later years had become a living legend, “an authority” on worship music. Hannum’s response to those who pressed for “final answers” about appropriate worship music was to respond quietly about aesthetic and worship experiences, and to ask questions that led them beyond their own immediate reactions to music that made them uncomfortable to deal with larger, overarching issues.<sup>23</sup>

He wrote numerous articles about music for the *Review and Herald*, *Ministry*, *The Journal of True Education*, and union conference magazines, as well as three books on music and worship, drawing on his many years of experience as a thoughtful church musician, music teacher and administrator. Because his writing deals with those larger issues, they are timeless, allowing his voice to continue to live on as a quiet, but effective force in the ongoing discussion about music in worship, education, and life.<sup>24</sup>

Hannum retired in 1978. He was residing in Riverside, California, at the time of his death on January 27, 1985, at age 83. He was survived by his wife, Ethel, and two daughters, Elizabeth Fisher and Marguerite Hossler, and four grandchildren.<sup>25</sup>

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## NOTES

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4. See back issues of the *Sligonian* archived in Periodicals, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Office of Archives, Statistics and Research Online Archives, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>.
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