



Alan Thrift

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

## Thrift, Alan George (1932–2016) and Yvonne June (Zanotti) (1930–1996)

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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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Alan Thrift, a singer and conductor, and his wife Yvonne Zanotti Thrift, a pianist, singer, and conductor, were associated with the music program at Australasian Missionary College (AMC), later Avondale College of Higher Education (Avondale), for over forty years. He served as Senior Lecturer and Senior Lecturer II, choir director for forty years, and chair of the department for 34 years—a record in music department leadership at Avondale. Yvonne assisted in the program as a singer, keyboard and voice teacher, and accompanist.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Life

Alan Thrift was born in Quirindi, New South Wales, Australia, on June 14, 1932. He entered AMC in 1946 and completed an Associate in Music degree in 1947 and a Diploma of Music in 1951. While attending AMC, he met and married Yvonne June Zanotti, a singer and pianist, who had been born on June 20, 1930, in Tasmania, an Australian island state off the southern coast. She also completed a Diploma of Music in 1951. Following their marriage on February 9 of that year, Alan Thrift continued his education, receiving a Trained Primary Teacher Certificate at Melbourne Teacher's College in 1952 and a Singing Teacher Primary Certificate from the Victorian Education Department in 1953. The Thrifts had two children, Karen and Michael.

## Music Career

In 1954, Alan started his music conducting career as an employee of the Victoria Education Department. He distinguished himself during that first teaching experience when he prepared and led 1200 children in a performance for the Governor General when he visited Ballarat, Victoria. Thrift then served as music director of the Western Australian Seventh-day Adventist Conference from 1955 to 1956. He started teaching at AMC in 1957, and although he retired in 1990, he returned to conduct the Avondale Singers again for seven years, from 1998 to 2004.<sup>2</sup>

While still students at AMC, Alan and Yvonne Thrift both assisted with piano lessons and sang in George Greer's choir. When Alan Thrift returned to chair the music program in 1957, Yvonne Thrift assisted by teaching piano and voice. They both taught at the college for the next four decades. In 1976, the Avondale annual, *Jacaranda*, was dedicated to the Thrifts, who were praised for their music ministry as well as their leadership, friendliness, and untiring devotion.

Within a year of his arrival at the school as music director and teacher, Thrift conducted the AMC choir in the first telecast of a choral program in Sydney. It was the first of several telecasts of his choral programs over the years by the Australian Broadcasting Company. Thrift continued to build on the tradition of choral excellence and touring at AMC that had started with Greer in the previous decade.<sup>3</sup> He would take acclaimed tours with its choral groups throughout Australia as well as to New Zealand and the United States. Two tours were taken to the U.S., in 1983 and 1990; the latter included performances from coast to coast, in nine states, and an appearance at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana.

During his 41 years at the college, Thrift moved from performing only sacred choral music, reflecting Greer's influence, to including secular music. Beginning in the 1960s, he formed a smaller group from within the choir that performed madrigals and other secular works.<sup>4</sup>

This change was more fully implemented with the full group in the next decade, in part because of the experience he had when attending Andrews University (AU) in the United States (US) from 1969 to 1971. In those two years, while completing both Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees, Thrift immersed himself in the AU choral program, directing The Good News Singers, a male chorus, and, in his final year, serving as the accompanist for the University Singers, the select choir.<sup>5</sup>

Inspired by this experience, upon returning home, Thrift changed the name of the Avondale Symphonic Choir to the Avondale Singers, reduced its size to facilitate travel arrangements, and started programming both sacred and secular music. This renamed ensemble took its first tour, to Tasmania, in September 1972. Thrift and his choirs worked closely with David Clark, an organist who had started teaching at Avondale in 1969 when Thrift was in the US. After Thrift's return, Clark traveled with the choir, accompanying and playing as a soloist. They toured throughout Australia and internationally until Thrift retired for the first time in 1990.

Yvonne Thrift started the Avondale Memorial Church Choir in 1991 and then directed and toured with it until her death on July 27, 1996. Her husband assumed leadership of the group and directed it until shortly before his death twenty years later.

When Thrift returned to direct the Avondale choir in 1998, he again worked with Clark, until his final retirement in 2004. Both men were honored at the time of the school's centennial in 1997 with centenary gold medals for their service in music. During their final year at Avondale, they toured to New Zealand with the Singers and a chamber orchestra conducted by Clark. Both men were honored for their service during a farewell concert presented by these groups during the 2004 graduation weekend.<sup>6</sup> Avondale Alumni named Thrift its Alumnus of the Year in 2011, and in 2015 he was honored with the title Master of the College.<sup>7</sup>

## Later Years

While still teaching at AC, Thrift founded the Lake Macquarie Municipal Choir, later the Macquarie City Ladies Choir, in 1981, a group he conducted until 2009. At the time of his first retirement in 1990, he was invited to become musical director of the Sydney Male Choir, a noted ensemble with an extensive and varied repertoire that was founded in 1913. The SMC, now a group of over seventy members, under his direction performed before enthusiastic audiences in Australia, toured with acclaim in New Zealand in 1992, and England, Ireland, and Wales in 1998. In 2005, they took a highly-praised tour to Tasmania, singing before sold-out crowds. After retiring from this position in 2010, following leading the choir for twenty years, Thrift continued in an advisory capacity as emeritus conductor.

Thrift was living in Morisset when he died on November 11, 2016, at age 86. An overflow crowd attended a memorial service held a week later at Avondale College.<sup>8</sup> He was praised for his ability to produce highly accomplished performances of a broad range of music and for the mentoring of musicians who have achieved at a significant level. James Bingham, a member of Thrift's choir and later chairman of the music department and director of choirs at Washington Adventist University, observed in a recorded tribute that "Alan changed the direction of my life. While his music was great, his friendship was even greater."<sup>9</sup>

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## SOURCES

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## NOTES

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2. "Alan Thrift-Master of the College Award;" Milton Hook, *Avondale; Experiment on the Dora* (Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia: Avondale Academic Press, 1998), 233, 234, 316.
3. "Alan Thrift-Master of the College Award."

4. Dan Shultz, "Music at Avondale College," International Adventist Musician Association *Notes*, Winter/Spring, 15-23, accessed on November 7, 2017, [www.iamaonline.com](http://www.iamaonline.com); Howard Fisher, Dean of Arts, email to the author, February 11-13, 2008.
5. Hook, 235; Research and interviews by Robb Dennis in 2008 provided important details about music at Avondale, the Thrifts, and other teachers. Alan Thrift, interview by Robb Dennis, October 2007, personal collection of the author.
6. Brenton Stacey, "Graduation Firsts at Avondale," *Record*, January 29, 2005, 7; Avondale Icons finish on High Note," Faculty and Staff, 2004 Avondale College publication, 12.
7. Brenton Stacey, "Record Number of Graduates at Avondale College," *Record*, January 23, 2106, 9.
8. Brenton Stacey, "Hundreds Attend Funeral Service for Alan Thrift," accessible at <https://record.adventistchurch.com/2016/11/16/adventist-music-legend-alan-thrift-dies-aged-86/>; "In Memory of Alan Thrift," Avondale College Church video, accessed November 7, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE3pkzoeRwQ> .
9. Ibid.

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