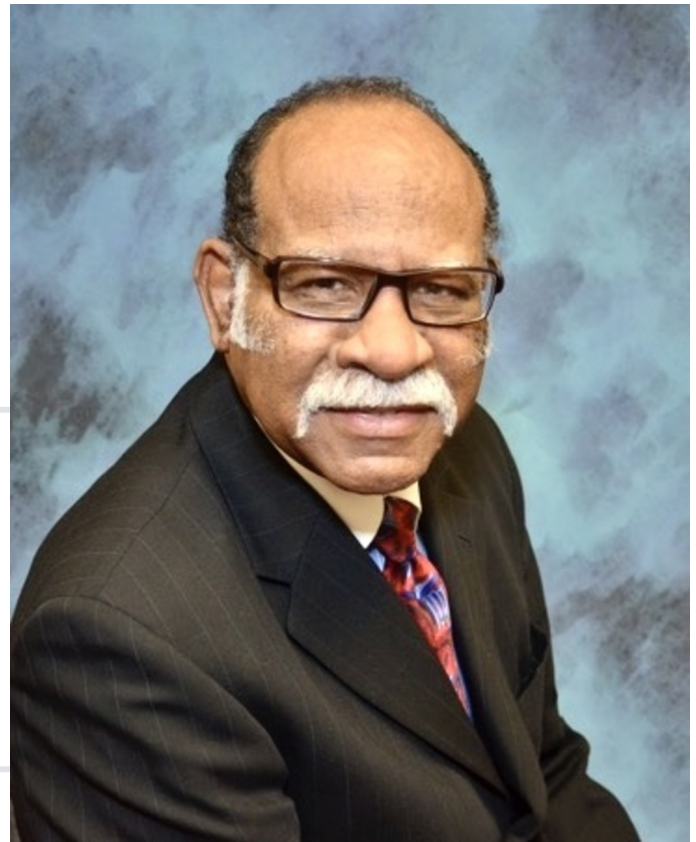


Arties, Walter Eugene III (1941–2022)

DEWITT S. WILLIAMS

DeWitt S. Williams, Ed.D. (Indiana University) lives in Maryland after 46 years of denominational service. He pastored in Oklahoma, served as a missionary in the Congo (Departmental and Field President), and Burundi/Rwanda (President, Central African Union). He served 12 years in the General Conference as Associate Director in both the Communications and Health and Temperance Departments. His last service was Director of NAD Health Ministries (1990-2010). He authored nine books and numerous articles.

A prodigious musical and recording artist, Walter Arties was founder and producer of the Breath of Life television program.



Walter E. Arties III.

From Phil Draper, *Pacific Union Recorder*, April 2011.

Family History and Early Life

Walter Eugene Arties III was born November 12, 1941, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His grandfather, Walter Eugene Arties I (1872-1952), moved his family from Wilson County, North Carolina, to Pittsburgh during the first decade of the 20th century. Walter Eugene Arties, Jr. (1914-2008) and his wife Catherine (1908-1990) had, along with Walter III, two daughters: Elvira, born in 1934; and Otyvee (Dyer), born the following year¹

Walter Arties, Jr., distinguished himself at Schenley High School in sports, as a singer and as a tuba player in the band.² He studied theology at Oakwood Junior College, Huntsville, Alabama, graduating in 1940.³ After teaching church school for two years in the New York City area he was called South where he served as a pastor, singing evangelist, and Bible worker in Tennessee and Mississippi from 1944-1949.⁴ He was ordained to the gospel ministry on Sabbath, June 12, 1948, at Oakwood College at the South Central Conference camp meeting.⁵

As a preacher's kid, Walter Arties III traveled a great deal as a youngster but the family settled down in Harlem, New York, where his father returned to teaching. Walter III attended church schools throughout his elementary years, graduating from the Brooklyn-Bethel Elementary School.⁶ He later attended Bridgeport Central High School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he sang in the choir,⁷ and Pine Forge Academy in Pennsylvania. Walter

Ill never had formal musical training and acknowledged that he must have inherited his father's outstanding musical abilities.⁸ He knew all the parts and seemed to always know a new way of arranging a spiritual or hymn. Often, he was a featured soloist at camp meetings and churches in the Allegheny Conference and formed several quartets and musical groups.

The thought of becoming a musician blossomed at Pine Forge Academy and he abandoned his original dream of a career in physical therapy. Walter sang in the various campus musical groups and the Pine Forge Academy concert choir. Two of his music teachers, Charles Jones and Harold Anthony, recognized his superior talent and encouraged him to pursue a musical career.⁹

The Walter Arties Chorale

At 19, Arties traveled west to the city of dreams, Los Angeles, where he became a member of the University Church. The Walter Arties Chorale started almost by accident in 1961 when a large group of young singers gathered to perform at a church in Riverside, California. At the end of their program, Arties was asked to conduct them in one song. Pleased with their performance under Walter's leadership, the group asked him to be their permanent director and voted to name the group the Walter Arties Chorale. The group started out with 12 members and grew to a total of 26.

Over the years the Walter Arties Chorale built a large and loyal following in Southern California through their performances in various churches in Los Angeles and San Diego. The group's acapella sound was an infusion of traditional spirituals and a modern contemporary blend, with close harmony. Most of the songs the group sang were arranged by Arties.¹⁰ One of the young ladies in the Chorale, Beverly R. DeShay of Columbus, Ohio, grew more and more interested in the talented director, and they were married on May 31, 1964.¹¹

Early Beginning of Breath of Life TV Program

The Watts uprising of August 1965 in Los Angeles sparked a dream that Arties had already been tossing around in his mind. The unjust arrest of a young African American motorist prompted six days of rioting, looting, and violence in which 34 people were killed, more than a thousand injured, and almost 4,000 arrested, with property damage upward of \$40 million. Convinced that something had to be done to bring hope and new life to Watts and African Americans in general, Arties conceived of a program of religious music and preaching that he felt could rejuvenate his troubled city.

In the early 1970s, while laying plans for implementing his vision, Arties joined the staff of KHOF, a Christian radio and television station in Glendale, California. His position brought him into contact with Bill Bright, the president of Campus Crusade for Christ International. Bright asked Arties to sing at Explo '72, a major youth evangelism and Christian music festival held in Dallas, Texas. He sang on opening night to an audience of

100,000 young people packed into the Cotton Bowl stadium before Billy Graham, the famed evangelist, delivered the key note address.¹²

Graham subsequently invited Arties to sing for his crusades. When Graham asked him what he did when not with the crusade team, Walter told him that he was a Seventh-day Adventist, trying to start a gospel program for African Americans. Graham replied, "Everywhere I go in the world, I see your hospitals, churches and schools. Your church is doing a wonderful work."¹³

Arties sang for several Billy Graham crusades and also for several conducted by Dr. Ralph Bell, a Black minister who joined the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) as associate evangelist in 1965. Arties' work with the BGEA took him to Sweden, Finland, India and the West Indies, as well as throughout the United States.¹⁴

Equipped with these broader experiences and connections, Arties developed a pilot for the proposed TV program that he had dreamed of during the Watts riot. It was approved by the leadership of the Southern California Conference. After the pilot was aired with success on KHOF in 1973, development of the program received approval from the denominational leadership and partial funding from the General Conference. Evangelist Charles D. Brooks was appointed speaker, and the first series of Breath of Life (BOL) programs was aired in 1974 (see "Breath of Life" in this article's Related Content).

Breath of Life Quartet

During the early years of Brooks' tenure as speaker, Arties organized a quartet to provide music for the program. This original quartet was composed of Arties, first tenor, who also served as program producer/coordinator; Clyde Allen, second tenor and a contractor by trade, who used his various talents to oversee the mechanics of the stage and to operate the sound system; Phillip Grayson, baritone, who stayed only for a short while; and James Kyle, M.D., bass, who also served as field services director for public relations and the Bible School. Shelton Kilby III, baritone and gifted accompanist, accepted the responsibility of directing the music and later replaced Phillip Grayson as baritone. Later, the BOL quartet consisted of Ronald Murphy, second tenor; Walter Arties, lead; Adrian Westney, baritone; and Reger Smith, bass.¹⁵ As time progressed, Reginald Robinson served as associate speaker and the membership of the quartet varied. During the 24-year period of Brooks' leadership, 13 churches bearing the name "Breath of Life" were born and more than 11,000 persons were baptized.¹⁶

Discography

Walter Arties had a unique and captivating singing style. To the delight and amazement of his audiences, Arties could hold a note for several measures—seemingly forever—and many thought he sounded like popular music recording artist Johnny Mathis. Christians of various denominations wanted to hear more of him, and he

recorded over a dozen inspirational albums.

His first recordings were with the Chorale that he directed for ten years:

1966: "James Cleveland In Hollywood with the Walter Arties Chorale" (Savoy Records).

1967: "Walter Arties Chorale sings Jewels of Faith" (Atlantic Records).

1968: "The Walter Artist Chorale—'His Name Is Wonderful'" (Atlantic Records).

His next recordings were as a soloist:

1971: "Peace" (Beegee Records and Bridge Records).

1973: "I'm Gonna Sing," with the Paul Johnson orchestra and chorus (Tempo Records of Kansas City).

In the mid-70 and 80s, Arties recorded with the Breath of Life (BOL) quartet:

1975: "Plenty Good Room" (Chapel Records).

1976: "Softly and Tenderly" (Tempo Records of Kansas City).

1977: "Spirituals Collection" (Ultimate Records), winner of a Religion in Media (RIM) Award for 1982-1983.

1979: "Ghetto Child" (Ultimate Records).

1982: "Gentle Exhortations" (Chapel Records).

1996: "Hymns Collection"—Walter Arties with BOL quartet, winner of a RIM Award.

2008: "Sincerely Yours"—Walter Arties with BOL quartet.

Singles and composite albums:

"Morning Train" single with "Amen" on reverse side (Atlantic).

"Christmas Medley"—single with "All He Wants is You" on reverse side (Atlantic).

1977: Breath of Life Take II (Chapel Records), with well-known Adventist musicians.

Beyond Breath of Life

Arties sang across much of the United States, in the Caribbean, parts of Europe, India and the former Soviet Union. He was a featured artist for Lutheran Youth Alive, the Evangelical Welfare Association, the Salvation Army, Youth for Christ, at the previously mentioned Campus Crusade for Christ's Explo '72 in Dallas, and at the 1984 Black National Religious Broadcasters fellowship breakfast addressed by presidential candidate Jesse Jackson.¹⁷

When the Adventist Media Center in Thousand Oaks, California, was reorganized in 1988 bringing all of the denominational media ministries—BOL, It Is Written, Faith For Today, Voice of Prophecy and La Voz de la

Esperanza—under a single administrative board, Arties was appointed assistant to the president, B. E. Jacobs.¹⁸ Later, under another reorganization, he became manager-treasurer of the Voice of Prophecy International Broadcast while at the same time serving as the associate pastor of the Breath of Life congregation in Los Angeles.¹⁹

Arties was ordained to the gospel ministry on Sabbath, April 24, 1982, during the annual Black convocation of the Southern California Conference at Lynwood Academy in Lynwood, California. Pastor C. D. Brooks, then field secretary of the General Conference as well as speaker for Breath of Life, preached the ordination sermon. The Breath of Life Quartet offered appropriate musical selections. Also present at the service were Catherine Arties, Elvira Arties and Otyvee Dyer—Walter’s mother and sisters.²⁰

After 31 years of denominational service, Arties retired in 2005. Many church officials, colleagues and artists attended his retirement celebration, at which the North American Division awarded him a plaque recognizing his achievement in “founding and managing the Breath of Life telecast” and his “outstanding leadership at the Adventist Media Center and the Voice of Prophecy.”

Shortly thereafter, however, the Arizona Conference invited him to serve as assistant to the president for African American Ministries, a position he held for three years. He and Beverly moved to Prescott, Arizona, in 2006, taking his father with them. Walter Arties, Jr., died in Prescott on August 29, 2008.

Walter Eugene Arties III, founder and director of Breath of Life, passed away in Phoenix, Arizona, Sunday at 11:02 a.m., June 26, 2022, from an acute neurological condition at age 80.²¹

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6. E. C. Whidbee, "Walter Arties Chorale" photo caption, *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, November 10, 1970, 13.
7. Bridgeport Central High School, 1958, *U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-2016*, Yearbook, Ancestry.com., accessed January 29, 2024.
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