



C. Warren Becker at 1970 General Conference, Atlantic City, NJ.

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

Becker, C. Warren (1923–2004)

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.

Cecil Warren Becker was professor of organ and church organist at Andrews University (AU) from 1959 to 1995. He was chosen Teacher of the Year at AU in 1970, awarded the Charles E. Weniger and J. N. Andrews Medallions in 1982, and given the AU Faculty Award for Teaching Excellence in 1986. In addition to his organ responsibilities at AU, Becker taught music theory, music literature and history, and church music. He also directed the seminary chorus on occasion and chaired the department during the 1985-1986 school year.¹

Becker was born in St. Maries, Idaho, on May 25, 1923, the third of four children of Alvin Charles and Beatrice Jones Becker.² From his earliest years, he played the piano by ear, able to play anything he heard.³ He first heard an organ when he accompanied his mother at the age of six to a series of evangelistic meetings that featured a reed pump organ, or harmonium.

He was fascinated by the instrument and when given the chance to play it, discovered his legs were too short to pump the bellows. After a solution was improvised, he played the instrument, and when his mother joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, served as the organist at the small church in St. Maries, where his mother and another woman did the preaching.⁴

Becker started music study by taking piano lessons and enrolling in a correspondence course in music from the Sherwood Music School (SMS) in Chicago. Although he was offered a scholarship to SMS when he graduated from high school, he instead attended Walla Walla College (WWC), now University.⁵ Following his graduation from WWC in 1945, he married Sophie Louise Andross on May 31. She had graduated from WWC with a B.A. in music a year earlier and then taught piano at La Sierra College, now University, for a year.⁶ They adopted Linda Louise (Shelby) and would have two sons, Steven Warren and Harold Andross.

Becker began his career as a teacher at Pacific Union College. He would teach there for fourteen years, serving as chair for three of those years, from 1956 to 1959. During that time he completed a master's degree in organ in 1951 at Eastman School of Music (ESM). In 1963, four years after accepting a position at Andrews University, he completed a D.M.A. in organ performance and pedagogy at ESM.⁷

Becker was known for his creativity as an organist in leading the congregation in the singing of hymns and in the teaching of numerous students. He was responsible for the placement of a 75-rank Casavant pipe organ in the Pioneer Memorial Church in 1966; it was refurbished and expanded to 78 ranks in 2001.⁸

In 1979 Harold Gleason, noted musicologist and organ scholar, invited Becker to be the co-author of the well-known five-volume *Music History Outlines*. A grant enabled him to spend two years in California, and during that time he also prepared the sixth edition of Gleason's *Method of Organ Playing* for publication.⁹

Becker was named a WWC Honored Alumnus in 1985, at the time of his official retirement at AU. He then continued at AU as chair of the music department for the 1986-1987 school year and for a decade as organist of the university church, a tenure at AU that spanned 36 years.¹⁰ The Beckers retired to northern California in 1997, to be closer to their two sons, Stephen and Harold, and their families. They were visiting with one of his sons

when Becker died as the result of an accident on November 23, 2004, at age 81.¹

SOURCES

1940 U.S. Federal Census Records, Ancestry.com.

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Becker, Warren. "Organs and their Masters in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Adventist Heritage*, Spring 1991, 5, 6, reprinted in International Adventist Musicians Association *Notes*, Winter/Spring 2003.

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May, Michele. "A Life of Music." *The Herald-Palladium*, June 22, 1991.

"New Teachers added to the College Faculty (La Sierra College)," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 7, 1944.

Obituary of Warren Becker. *Andrews University Focus*, Winter 2005.

NOTES

1. Linda Wildman Mack, "C. Warren Becker," program notes for memorial service; "Praise to the Lord, A Celebration in Remembrance," October 1, 2005; Obituary, *Andrews University Focus*, Winter 2005, 34. These references are major sources for this biography. Sources in addition to those cited in the text and notes: 1930, 1940 U.S. Federal Census; Obituary for Beatrice Becker, North Pacific Union Conference *Gleaner*, January 19, 1981, 25; Ancestry.com, One World Tree, Alvin Charles Becker, Ancestry.com; Linda Wildman Mack, "A Tribute to C. Warren Becker," *The International Adventist Musicians Association Journal*, Summer 1989, 17, 18; Email from Lyle Hamel, November 26, 2004 (circumstances of Warren Becker's death).
2. 1940 U.S. Federal Census Records, Ancestry.com.
3. Michele May, "A Life of Music," *The Herald-Palladium*, June 22, 1991, 1, 2C.
4. Warren Becker, "Organs and their Masters in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Adventist Heritage*, Spring 1991, 5, 6, reprinted in International Adventist Musicians Association *Notes*, Winter/Spring 2003, pg. 3, updated by Dan Shultz in consultation with Becker.
5. Mack; Obituary, *Andrews University Focus*.

6. "New Teachers added to the College Faculty (La Sierra College)," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 7, 1944, 2.
 7. Obituary, *Andrews University Focus*.
 8. Madeline Steel Johnstone, "Variations on a Theme: Retirements from the Music Department," Variation II, C. Warren Becker, *Andrews University Focus*, Fall 1995, 6-8, 65; Becker/Shultz, *IAMA Notes*, 5.
 9. Mack, "C. Warren Becker."
 10. Johnstone.
 11. U.S. Social Security Death Index, Ancestry.com.
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