

# *Music and the New Voice*

## CHAPTER XVIII

When Bishop Barnwell decided to open the junior college in 1932 he realized that such a college should have a department of music. It was a natural thing for him to turn to St. Michael's Cathedral since he had an outstanding man, James L. Strachan, as organist and director of the choir of that cathedral.

Strachan had received his Bachelor of Music degree at Oberlin College, an institution that had always excelled in the field of music. He had also had experience as a college instructor at a Friends college in Iowa. Naturally, he was elated when Bishop Barnwell asked him to consider forming a music department and to teach music theory, organ and piano.

In Mrs. Lucille Forter, voice, and Miss Kathryn Eckhardt, violin, the embryo college had strength in areas where Strachan felt it was needed. Each had had a great deal of instruction in her special field and most of it had been acquired recently at the time the College opened its doors.

Mrs. Forter had studied at Brenau College Conservatory in Georgia and in the Chicago Music College. She had been a special student of Herbert Witherspoon and other outstanding

instructors, both in the United States and London. She possessed an ability to work with young people and instill her own enthusiasm in voice development along with an ease in performing before groups. This eventually caught on in even the most timid and stage-frightened student. In addition to this she gave graciously of herself and insisted that her students do likewise.

Mrs. Forter's private students naturally formed the base for early ensembles and small operas. The latter sometimes had as many as 30 participants in them. This was true of the first one—"Faust" by Gounod. It was presented twice; the first time on March 1, 1935 and the second time on the last evening of Music Week, May 24, 1935.<sup>1</sup> These same students were to be the backbone of the glee clubs and A Cappella Choir composed of 31 voices. This latter group had its own distinctive robes and made its first appearance in what was to become an annual tradition—a Christmas Candlelight service. Mrs. Forter continued for many years as director of vocal ensembles which were usually double quartets.

Kathryn Eckhardt had just returned as a pupil of violin under Franz Mairecher in Vienna after having studied at the Institute of Musical Art in New York City when she joined the College faculty in 1932. She was not only a fine violinist herself, but had the qualities that made her an excellent teacher to the many who were to be her students in the years to come. In fact, in the years from 1932 to 1965 she was the chief source of trained violinists for the orchestra not only of Boise Junior College but of the College of Idaho and the high schools in the Boise Valley. Although there were other good teachers in the area, the principal source was Mrs. Mitchell's \* studios at Boise Junior College and in her home.

Mrs. Mitchell organized the first orchestra at Boise Junior College which necessitated getting the assistance of the best instrumental performers in the city since there were not enough in a small college of 100 students with a wide enough range of abilities to form an excellent orchestra. She was able, through

her stimulating personality and her enthusiasm for orchestra, to start out with an unusually strong college orchestra when one considers all of the problems that existed in 1937.

The following year there was no orchestra; a string ensemble took its place. With the first year of the public junior college, 1939-40, there were more than twice as many students in attendance and the orchestra was again in existence, this time directed by Mr. Strachan.

With the coming of the war, music was so pushed into the background that the development of instrumental music was materially affected. Orchestra, and to a substantial degree, violin, were seriously thwarted. Mr. Strachan, in fact, found so little demand for his work at the College that for some two years, at the request of the Board of Trustees and acting President Conan Mathews, he sought a position with the Boise Public Schools.

Between 1936 and the years immediately preceding the war, a number of cello instructors were added to the Music Department. An outstanding one in what she did for students and the orchestra was Miss Rosamond Salisbury \*\* (1937-1940), later the mother of an outstanding organ student, David Runner, a graduate of Boise State College in 1969 and a national organist winner.

A fine contribution was made by Adelaide Anderson when she joined the faculty as a teacher of piano in the fall of 1939. She had headed her own school for a number of years in Pocatello and moved to Boise a few years prior to joining the College faculty. During these years she had been a private piano instructor. She remained with the College until 1949 when she again returned to her status as a private music instructor. For the next 17 years she continued as a private teacher. Her outstanding work and her desire to return to the College resulted in her rejoining the faculty in 1966. Her work with young people in the field of piano has always been outstanding.

No other additions were made to the music department until after the war. At that time, so many returning G.I.'s desired piano instruction that the need for a second person in this particular course was responsible for bringing Eleanor Snodgrass to the College in 1946. Miss Snodgrass had received her Bachelor of Music degree from Bethany College in Kansas and her Master of Music degree from the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. She was an experienced college teacher and added real strength to the piano department during the 12 years she was in Boise.

Another excellent piano instructor to join the faculty was Mr. Carroll Meyer in 1948. He had received his Bachelor's Degree in Music at the University of Michigan where he was Phi Beta Kappa, and in 1967 received his Master's Degree from the University of Iowa. Mr. Meyer is a fine teacher and an excellent performer and requires the same high performance standards from his students; he drives toward perfection.

As stated previously, the number of students desiring music courses rose immediately after the war. It was necessary to release Mrs. Mitchell from the position of director of the orchestra to enable her to concentrate solely on violin instruction. A man who could fill the position of orchestra director was found in the person of Mr. John H. Best. In addition, Mr. Best directed the College band and taught music theory and cello. In his 22 years with the College, Mr. Best has proved to be an excellent teacher and a fine orchestra director. He has built the Boise College Symphony Orchestra into a strong organization and this, as a result, has provided a vehicle of experience for instrumental students at the College who plan to enter the music profession.

During all the years the Boise college has existed since 1932, the Music Department has always been headed by an outstanding musician in the field of organ, yet during the first 21 years of the College's existence there was no fitting instrument on which such a person could perform and what was even

more important, none on which his students could perform adequately.

In the growth of any institution, success in one field leads to success in another. In the case of the first outstanding pipe organ to be installed in Idaho at Boise Junior College, two things gave direct rise to securing this organ; one was the demanding interest of C. Griffith Bratt—it was his primary field in music—and the other was the building of the first dormitories, Morrison and Driscoll Halls.

In 1946, James L. Strachan accepted the position of organist and choir director at Trinity Church in Portland, Oregon. A successor who could fit into the position that Mr. Strachan had held as organist and music director of St. Michael's Cathedral and as head of the College's Music Department was needed. The man who best fitted that need was C. Griffith Bratt. He was a graduate of Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore where he received the Artist's Diploma and Music Major in Organ. He knew Boise because his wife had lived here before their marriage and he was interested in coming to live in this city.

Mr. Bratt had just finished a stretch with the United States Navy in World War II and indicated his interest in the college position to the president in April of 1946. At the time of the interview, President Chaffee indicated that while no organ existed at the College at the present time, he would get one that would satisfy the needs of the College and the desire of Mr. Bratt for a superior instrument as soon as possible. This was done in a partial way when a Baldwin Electronic organ was secured in 1948. This, however, did not satisfy Mr. Bratt or his students.

Mr. Bratt's zeal to have a quality pipe organ at the College was constant and intense. As a result, the Boise Tuesday Musicales Chorus (subsequently known as the Boise Choristers), set about raising money for such an instrument. Its leaders were aware of the difficulty of raising such a fund, but persisted over

the years sparked by the outstanding efforts of Mrs. Eli (Hazel) Weston who made this a primary goal.

For many years, Mrs. Weston has been interested in the welfare of the College and of music in Boise and she made it her particular responsibility to see that the young organist who had just come to this city should have an instrument worthy of his mettle. Her efforts resulted in raising \$4,000. However, the actual gift came from another source.

A Boisean whose parents had occupied a foremost position in building the city became interested in the College and its growth—Mrs. Laura Moore Cunningham. The College president knew of Mrs. Cunningham's interest in the College through conversations he had had with her at different social functions that they were attending. A citizen of the city, Walter L. Peterson, Vice President of the bank Mrs. Cunningham's father had founded, also spoke to the president of her interest in Boise Junior College.

When the two dormitories, Morrison and Driscoll Halls, were opened for inspection in 1951, Mrs. Cunningham had not been able to attend. President Chaffee, aware of her interest, asked her if she would like to have a conducted tour of these two buildings and she indicated she would. While they sat in the lounge on the second floor of Driscoll Hall looking westward down the river into Julia Davis Park, Mrs. Cunningham expressed her enthusiasm for the new buildings and also the cultural contribution that the College was making to the city in which she was born. She queried, "Are there other things you need in this growing College?" The president replied, "We have an outstanding organist in this institution who is discouraged because he lacks an instrument on which he can perform to the credit of his education and professional position. He has been with us now for five years, but there are no organs in this section of the country that satisfy his desire to create the beautiful music of which he is capable." "How much would such an instrument cost?" asked Mrs. Cunningham. "Between

\$35,000 and \$40,000," replied the president. "That is a lot of money," stated Mrs. Cunningham, to which the president agreed as the conversation ended. It was apparent that her interest was aroused.

At that moment, Mrs. Cunningham indicated her desire to visit her nephew, Mr. Laurence Bettis, who was recuperating in St. Luke's Hospital. She was taken to that location and after a conversation with Mr. Bettis, called President Chaffee and said, "Can you come over and see me?" He replied, "Yes, any time," to which she replied, "Come over immediately!"

Mrs. Cunningham was never one to dawdle with anything she had an interest in and said, "I discussed this with my nephew and also with my business advisor Dick Cornell, and they approved of my wish to give the College an organ. You and Mr. Bratt go ahead with the selection; I am arranging to have it financed over a period of the next three years."

Griff Bratt was overjoyed by the sudden realization that a fine instrument was to become a reality. Immediately, contacts were made with the leading organ manufacturers in the United States—some four or five in fact. Each company had a prize installation that it wanted to show. There were two such instruments in Portland, one in Seattle, and three in the San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley area. The others were located in the eastern part of the United States—one in Yale University and one in the Cleveland Museum. The latter was highly praised by critics because it was the first modern organ to possess a Positiv.

The news that Boise Junior College was in the market for a pipe organ spread like wild-fire to every major organ manufacturer in the nation. Letters came from their western representatives, most of whom visited the campus and conferred with Mr. Bratt and President Chaffee. Within a month after it was announced that a pipe organ would be presented to the College, telegrams such as the following were received: "Leaving for Boise, will phone for appointment on arrival." This came from a representative of a company in Hagerstown, Maryland. An-

other came from the president of a company in Ohio: "Reservations cleared to Salt Lake for arrival early morning of the 17th with hopeful assurance of clearing to Boise. You shall hear from me again soon."

By the last week of October 1951, Bratt and Chaffee had seen organs regarded as exceptional in the eastern part of the country and had visited factories in Maryland, Connecticut, and Ohio.

It was soon apparent that the Austin Organ Company in Hartford, Connecticut, had the instrument that would satisfy the College and the community. By the first of November, that company's representative, Mr. J. B. Jamison, was on his way to Boise to wind up the search for an instrument. By the third of November, a contract was signed by the business manager of the College, Clyde Potter, for \$35,500, which stated that by February 3, 1953, the new organ would be finished. Since good organs must be custom built, this meant that it would take at least another 15 months to have the instrument installed.

During this period, President Chaffee was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Committee of Accreditation and had to make numerous trips to represent the Northwest in national accrediting. These meetings were held in New York City and were accompanied by side trips to Hartford to round out any problems that Mr. Bratt felt existed in building the Austin Organ.

Praise for the instrument was lavish as witnessed by a letter to Mr. Bratt from Mr. Jamison. "You have no doubt seen the layout sent to President Chaffee and we would welcome your comments on it. You will be only a few feet from the open Great and the open Positiv. A regular tonal bath."<sup>2</sup>

By the end of January 1952, Mr. Bratt was adding a pipe here and a pipe there as he assessed the future needs and uses of the organ. At the time the original designs were drawn up, preparation was made to install additional pipes at a later date if they were required. The actual woodwork of the console was

of course constructed in Hartford, but the surrounding woodwork in the area immediately adjacent to the console was constructed of matching oak by the woodworking class of Boise Junior College under the direction of their instructor, Vernon Beckwith. The surface finishing of the console and the surrounding woodwork was done by Mr. Beckwith. The auditorium itself was "... re-decorated and refurnished, with pews replacing folding chairs, to suit the atmosphere of the music chapel."<sup>3</sup> The Board of Trustees approved the purchase and installation of these pews from \$10,000 of surplus funds.<sup>4</sup>

The organ was finally completed and placed in the auditorium in the Music Building at Boise Junior College in late April of 1953 and its dedication took place on May 7. The auditorium was packed by the many well-wishers of Mrs. Cunningham and Mr. Bratt. In his dedicatory speech President Chaffee said:

It is particularly fitting that a citizen of our city should want to emphasize our tradition of the beautiful and make possible not only to the College, but to the people of our chosen valley, a beauty that only music can give and express.

Today, then, we gather to dedicate this great organ. It is a symbol of the spiritual; an example of man's finer impulses; an instrument the equal of any in the nation in its ability to express the yearnings and emotions of mankind.

We must, therefore, express our deep gratitude to our benefactor for this gift of beauty; a gift of fine music to be heard and created. May I pay tribute to a friend and patron of our college for the gift that provides for this and future generations, music that can only ennoble and beautify.

For the dedicatory concert, Mr. Bratt chose a number of selections which showed the powerful tonal resources the organ possessed. He finished with impromptu compositions, while at the keyboard, from themes tossed his way from the audience.

The organ was given in honor of the late Mr. J. W. Cunningham, husband of Laura Moore Cunningham. The donor at first remained anonymous at Mrs. Cunningham's request. When it became obvious that such a gift could not remain anonymous for long in a city the size of Boise, a plaque indicat-

ing the donor and the one honored was placed on the oak cabinet that encased the organ and its many pipes.

This was one of the more important gifts given to the city. It was to be the prelude to many fine gifts and organs to other colleges and universities in the state as well as to churches in the city of Boise. It did, in fact, set the standard for all of those which followed and was truly the first classic design instrument in the Northwest.

In addition to giving the J. W. Cunningham Memorial Organ, in the latter years of her life Mrs. Cunningham gave liberally to scholarship funds for the College. After her passing a few years ago, her nephew increased the scholarship giving through the Laura Moore Cunningham Scholarship Foundation providing "... \$500 scholarships to outstanding worthy students of Boise. The awards are made to three members of each freshman class and may be continued after first issuance, depending upon scholastic achievement."<sup>6</sup> This results in a total of 12 scholarships—three students from each of the four classes.

The organ of course meant more than merely the satisfaction of a desire of the Music Department. It meant that outstanding young people would come to Boise Junior College and become excellent organists and thus spread this cultural gift over the nation. It meant that the people of the Boise region could hear excellent music from principal organists and composers of this state and could bring in such notables as E. Power Biggs, Marie Claire Alain, Carl Weinrich, and Germani—the Vatican organist—over the years. Particularly, it meant that for a period of five to six years immediately after installation, music from this fine instrument could be broadcast by radio to every home that wished to hear fine organ music. These concerts were played by Mr. Bratt. Mr. J. Roy Schwartz of the College's English Department acted as commentator, explaining the nature of each composition and interesting facts concerning the various composers.

This was one of Mr. Schwartz' many services to the College during his thirty years in Boise. In addition, he readily assumed duties in radio and speech, but always returned to his chief discipline of English whenever freed from the other studies. In 1965 he was appointed Chairman of the English Department, but resigned that position some three years later for health reasons. He has given generously of himself to the students in their extra curricular activities. This has been particularly true in dramatics, broadcasting of Bronco football games, and the general professional interests of an active faculty member.

After the organ had been completed and in use for some eight months, Mrs. Cunningham asked President Chaffee if all was well with it. He replied that it was a wonderful organ, but Mr. Bratt desired a few additions to it. Mrs. Cunningham asked the president to get some estimates on these additions and she would see what could be arranged.

On December 8, 1953, President Chaffee wrote to the Austin Organ representative:

I have just received word from the donor of our organ that she wishes to consider completing the organ by presenting the pipes for which we made preparation at the time the organ was installed. The missing pipes are the Koppel Flute and 8' on the Positiv. I would like to find out what the cost would be on a Zimbelstern since it is possible that she might present us with the Koppel Flute and a Zimbelstern.

On February 4, 1954, price estimates of \$825.00 for the Koppel Flute and \$100.00 for the Zimbelstern were received. After conferring with Mrs. Cunningham, President Chaffee authorized the purchase of these items a few days later and they were completed and installed in December of that year.

What of the fund that was started by Mrs. Eli Weston and the Boise Choristers? This was generously added to by leading businessmen of the city, prodded occasionally by Mrs. Weston, and has been the source of many scholarships given to aspiring young organists. There have been many recipients of these

scholarships including Charles Naylor, a regional student winner in the National Federation of Music Clubs, Student Competition; Tom Robin Harris, a national and regional winner of the N.F.M.C. Competition; Norma Jean Stevlingson who was a regional winner in the American Guild of Organists Competition, a recipient of a French government travel scholarship to study in Paris, and in July of 1969 placed second in organ in an outstanding recital in England; James Anderson and Larry Bennett who have attained their M.A. degrees and entered the church music profession, receiving their theological ordination also. Other recipients of the organ scholarships have been Dennis Law, William Dresser, Tom Holter, and Pamela Tilghman.

In the 1968-69 school year, David Runner, a senior at Boise State College was awarded this scholarship and placed second among organists from all over the nation in the Fort Wayne, Indiana National Contest for the year 1968. He won the Northwest Regional Student Competition of the American Guild of Organists and the National Federation of Music Clubs Organists' Competition in the Regional Competitions in 1967. On February 25, 1969, after competing against other finalists in the National Organ Playing Competition at Worcester, Massachusetts, he won the coveted award—first in the nation. This was followed by a trip to England where he competed with some of the best students in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup>*Les Bois*, 1935. p.48.

\*Miss Eckhardt was married to Yale Mitchell in 1935.

\*\*Mrs. Herbert W. Runner

<sup>2</sup>Letter of December 19, 1951 from Mr. J. B. Jamison to Mr. C. Griffith Bratt.

<sup>3</sup>*Idaho Daily Statesman*, May 8, 1953.

<sup>4</sup>Board of Trustees Meeting, Boise Junior College District. Minutes, November 13, 1952.

<sup>5</sup>*Boise State College Catalog*, 1968-69.