



PAUL G. BUNJES (1914–1998)

Paul G. Bunjes (“Jay”) was one of the most influential Lutheran teachers and church musicians in the latter half of the 20th-century. He was born in Frankenmuth, Michigan on September 27, 1914 where his father was a teacher at St. Lorenz Lutheran Church. Paul attended Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois from 1933 until 1936, and his first assignment was Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin where he worked for fifteen years as teacher, principal, organist, and choir director. (Carl Schalk would later serve here as teacher and director of music.) While working at Zion Bunjes obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Valparaiso University in 1941 and a Master of Music degree from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1944. He was granted a Doctor of Philosophy degree in music theory from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y. in 1966. Dr. Bunjes was privileged to study for professional enrichment for six months in Germany. There he did research in the polyphonic music of the Reformation era, specifically examining among other classic monuments the urtext of Georg Rhau’s 1544 publication *Postremum vespertini officii opus --- Magnificat octo tonorum*. Bunjes’ edition of this collection of 25 *Magnificats*, 6 psalms, and 12 motets by various composers of the 15th and 16th centuries for SATB mixed chorus was co-published by Bärenreiter Verlag and Concordia Publishing House in 1970. His European experiences would be very evident years

later as he helped shape the music publishing efforts of the LCMS and influenced organ design in its churches.

As the 1950s dawned, Martin Koehneke, president of Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois wanted to build a strong music department. With that visionary goal and the able assistance of academic dean Carl Waldschmidt (a fine music professor in his own right), Paul Bunjes was brought onto the music faculty to join noted choral conductor Victor Hildner. Bunjes served as chairman of the department from 1961 until 1977. During those years the department grew to its largest size in the history of the school. He brought together an extraordinary music faculty which gained a national reputation. It was also during this time that Kretzmann Hall was built with the then unprecedented 44 practice piano rooms and 20 practice organs.

It was also during this same period that Otto Dorn, president of Concordia Publishing House wanted to establish a music division. Enlisting first the counsel of Walter Buszin, Dr. Bunjes was again sought out for vital leadership and vision. Around 1950 Edward Klammer was hired to set up the department (CPH had published some music resources prior but not as an organized effort) and a four person Music Editorial Advisory Committee (MEAC) was formed with the addition of Theodore Hoelty-Nickel. Together they reviewed manuscripts, commissioned new compositions and set forth a publication plan for music for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Dr. Bunjes also contributed himself to these efforts. His personal favorite was his arrangement of “Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” for mixed chorus and strings. One 16th-century practice in Lutheranism had been the use of alternation (choir, congregation, instruments) in the singing of hymns and chorales. A renewed effort toward composing these “concertatos” included his settings of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, “I

Know That My Redeemer Lives”, and “Built on the Rock the Church Doth Stand.” His model has been used and expanded upon greatly by composers in the last fifty years in the LCMS and in other denominations. Bunjes helped CPH through his original compositions and editions of historic choral works, all seeking to recover the vitality that was part and parcel of early Lutheranism.

Bunjes’ interest also lay in the area of liturgical music. He developed a system of formulary tones for introits and graduals and provided settings for the entire church year. This pioneering effort remains a unique part of the LCMS’ musical heritage. And in 1953 Bunjes, ever the teacher, helped put together a children’s hymnal, *Our Songs of Praise* (CPH).

His expertise and energies were also tapped by the synod at large and beyond. He served on the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, was a regular member of the synod’s Commission on Worship, and ultimately served as the music editor for *Lutheran Worship* (LSB’s predecessor) in 1982, contributing the lion’s share of hymn harmonizations under his own name and the pseudonyms of Wilhelm Quampen and George Leonard. During these years he also contributed articles to *Lutheran Education* and *Church Music* magazine, serving on the latter’s editorial board.

In the last part of his career Bunjes also gained a national reputation as an organ designer. His massive treatise *The Praetorius Organ* (CPH 1966) was the subject of his doctoral dissertation and remains a classic in the field. As important many organ committees and voters’ meetings were won over by his wisdom, practicality, and good humor. By the end his life he had designed 114 organs for various churches and universities. At least two graduate students (Mark Kirchenberg and Glenn Mahnke) have written papers exploring the tonal design ideas of Paul Bunjes. Organ builder Len Berghaus was a student of Bunjes and later a collaborator on many

designs and installations. He holds that Bunjes' unique and enduring contribution was his tireless commitment in providing organ designs that were suitable for the Lutheran liturgy and choral practice, even in congregations with a small space and limited funds.

Of course, as for any teacher, Paul Bunjes' greatest legacy lay among the countless students whom he encouraged and guided. His persistence, diligence, and uncompromising pursuit of excellence profoundly affected all who studied and sang with him during his 26 years at Concordia. (The long-discussed book of "Bunjisms" has yet to appear.) The Church is still blessed beyond its knowing by his tireless efforts and the ripple effect of his teaching will continue for many years to come.

The Church and the broader community did show their appreciation both during his life and posthumously. He received a Doctor of Letters from Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska in 1982. Two years later, Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois bestowed upon him the title of Distinguished Professor of Music. That same year he was inducted into the Chicago Senior Citizens' Hall of Fame. At the 1993 annual Lectures in Church Music at Concordia University—Chicago, many of his compositions were performed in his honor and to his memory. The Association of Lutheran Church Musicians (ALCM), under Tom Leeseberg-Lange's leadership, produced a fine series of hymn festival recordings featuring various prominent church musicians. In 2001 a CD of Bunjes' music *My Heart Rejoices* was recorded at his boyhood church of St. Lorenz in Frankenmuth, featuring the Concordia University Kapelle and the parish choirs with Dr. Charles Brown conducting and Dr. Steven Wentz (now chairman of the Concordia Music Department) leading at the organ.

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Sources and Further Reference

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Email from Steven Wente, former student & current department chair at Concordia University—Chicago, December 13, 2008.

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