



Gerhard Krapf (1924-2008)

Gerhard Krapf, the son of a pastor, spent his formative first years navigating the totalitarianism of the Nazi state, followed by the travails of serving in the German Wehrmacht and as a prisoner of war in Russian post-war work camps, where his furtive attempts at composition were worked out on old cement bags.¹ Born on 12 December, 1924, in Meißenheim, Baden-Württemberg, in the Weimar Republic, his childhood was spent studying music, his teacher having done “. . . an excellent job of initiating [him] into the business of music making.”² He began piano study at age 12 and organ at 15, soon thereafter “adding choral conducting, music theory, acoustics, aesthetics, harmony, counterpoint, keyboard harmony, score reading, figured bass, form and analysis, ear training and sight reading” to his arsenal of musical equipment.³ Beginning in 1939, he deputized as organist at his father’s church in Offenburg, learning the art of liturgical service playing.⁴

Schooled in Greek and Latin, his classical education failed to spare him from the political turmoil brought about through life in the National Socialist state. As a participant in the increasingly-militarized Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend), Krapf noted that he “. . . would rather practice the organ than march at the command of a ‘not too smart and academically very lazy’ HJ [Hitlerjugend] leader.”⁵ Conscripted into the German Wehrmacht in 1942, his harrowing wartime experiences culminated later in the war when his general ordered him to “waste” his unit to avoid capture, a directive which Krapf bravely contradicted. (The general’s edict was nullified by another official, likely saving Krapf from the deadly consequences of his insubordination.)⁶ Krapf, captured by the Russians, spent a year at a prisoner camp at Donetsk, Ukraine, then at Iwanovo, Russia, after which he was transferred between several camps in Latvia, ending up at the Bashkiria camp in the Ural Mountains, from which he was finally released in 1948.⁷ He spent the next two years studying harpsichord, organ, and church music at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe,⁸ where he earned his degree, “Staatsexamen-Diploma.”⁹ During these years of personal development and physical healing from his war trauma, Krapf performed concerts in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris.¹⁰ He also met his future wife, Gertrude (“Trudl”) Lichti.

Gerhard Krapf traveled to the United States in 1950 under a student visa to study organ with Dr. Leslie P. Spelman and composition with Austrian-born composer and musicologist Paul Pisk at Redlands University in California; his graduate organ recital featured music of Bach, Reger, and Haydn.¹¹ Krapf “. . . so enjoyed the warmth of his reception during his fellowship year at Redlands University that he decided to stay permanently in the United States.”¹² However, with the expiration of his student visa and in order ultimately to fulfill United States’ immigration requirements, he had to return temporarily to Germany, at which time he served as a superintendent of church music in Karlsruhe, consulted on organ rebuilding projects, directed the music at a church in Liedelsheim, and served as a member of the hymnal committee developing the German national Protestant

hymnal, *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch*.¹³ He returned to the United States in 1953, teaching music at the Starr Commonwealth School for Boys in Albion, Michigan. The next year he married Trudl, who had been studying four years in London, and whose wedding gift to her new husband was a Merzdorf harpsichord.

His marriage and settlement in America provided the stability to begin his career in earnest. The Krapfs moved to Maryville, Missouri, in 1954, where he joined Missouri State College as an instructor of organ, piano, music theory, and advanced choral and instrumental conducting,¹⁴ and where he became organist at First Christian Church. The Krapfs welcomed the birth of twin daughters Gerburg Irene and Gerhild Ina in 1955.

His first recital in Maryville, in March, 1955, featured works of Lübeck, Bach, Britten, Handel, Hindemith, and Peeters, music that would demonstrate both the breadth and specialization which would mark his career. He was an exponent of the *Orgelbewegung*, the “Organ Reform Movement,” which advocated a renewed appreciation for the lucid counterpoint and clear textures of the baroque composers. Yet, he would increasingly advocate for modern, European composers, here represented by Hindemith and Peeters, who in this case were also proponents of neo-classical ideals. The reviewers, at least those in the modest Midwest towns in which Krapf found himself performing, seemed to appreciate his musical offerings, one in 1955 extolling his playing as having “. . . showed every quality of a master in the performance of a long and difficult program. He made the organ sing, he made it whisper, he made it thunder, yet he played with the restraint of a true artist, employing no cheap tricks of showmanship.”¹⁵ A recital in 1956 found Krapf playing music of Bach, Krebs, Walcha, Sweelinck, Mozart, and modern Austrian composer Hermann Grabner, the reviewer noting that Krapf’s thoughtful programming of contemporary and more traditional literature combined “. . . the baroque form of the eighteenth century with modern tonality into perfect unity.”¹⁶ Krapf no doubt was introducing his Midwest audiences to the sonorities and sonic ideals of

contemporary European composers, yet all ordered within the context of more conventional offerings. His faculty recital in September, 1956, featured Bach and Bruhns as well as living composers Paul Hindemith (who, according to the reviewer, “is a favorite of the younger element in an audience”), Johann Nepomuk David, Ernst Pepping, and Hendrik Andriessen.¹⁷ In 1957, Krapf was appointed organist at First English Lutheran Church in St. Joseph, Missouri.¹⁸

In 1958 the family left for Laramie, Wyoming, where Krapf had been appointed organist at St. Matthew’s Cathedral and to the music faculty at the University of Wyoming. The move west offered an attractive, if not unconventional, method of recruiting pupils for the new organ professor, by which he offered, starting in 1959, “. . . individual organ lessons to students and practicing Casper organists this fall. A service of the university’s extension department, the lesson program. . . is offered through the college’s facilities. . . [and] will be designed to help young students increase their facility so that they can major in organ at college, as well as to improve techniques for practicing organists. The monthly lessons will include a seminar in which organ building, registration and the history of church music and service playing are discussed.”¹⁹ Krapf had been honing his reputation as a neo-classicist, and was featured harpsichordist at the Colorado State University Fine Arts Festival in 1959, playing his own harpsichord, as well as his own setting of “Lo, How a Rose.” His pieces were fast becoming a staple of his own recital programming as more of his music was accepted for publication. Krapf offered an innovative week-long church music seminar in 1961--a “historical survey of liturgy and hymnody and a survey of choral and organ literature, as well as instruction in service playing and choir direction.”²⁰ The dearth of classical organs, as well as students, in Wyoming certainly induced him to seek another position, and in September, 1961, the University of Iowa appointed him associate professor of music, and the family moved to Iowa City.

Now at a larger state university with more resources, Krapf was better situated to create an environment favorable to the type of composition and organbuilding which he so preferred, and by

1963 he had overseen the installation of the first modern tracker instrument in Iowa, an eight-rank instrument whose neo-classical stoplist allowed for proper teaching of baroque styles of organ performance.²¹ He had become a noted composer by this time; when he was hired as minister of music at St. Paul's Lutheran Church (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) in Iowa City in 1964, the church proudly announced their new organist as "a composer whose work has been published by three publishing houses."²² In 1968, he was granted a sabbatical to "work on several commissions," illustrating the reputation as a composer he was fast garnering. In 1964, Augsburg had published his first book, *Liturgical Organ Playing*,²³ which would be followed in 1967 by his treatise *Organ Improvisation: a Practical Approach to Chorale Elaborations for the Service*. Krapf's classroom teaching inspired both volumes, for of the latter he wrote, "This book is designed to provide a systematic approach to the study and teaching of organ improvisation. It is aimed specifically at the needs of service playing, and thus it stresses the practical aspects of chorale and hymn improvisation."²⁴ The composer and Krapf's former teacher Paul Pisk also noted this pragmatic approach, observing that "This book, though scholarly and well organized, is not a text book. There are no rigid rules; rather, there are suggestions supported by a wealth of examples. . . No theories are offered. Practical orientation prevails."²⁵ Thus might summarize well Krapf's compositional approach, favoring as he did practical church music not of exceeding difficulty, of utility to the organist and choir of moderate abilities. By 1971, his published catalogue from Concordia Publishing House alone included organ partitas and chorale preludes, "chorale intradas" for brass and organ, a set of choral "rounds" for the church year, a number of choral octavos, including a unison setting of the Apostles' Creed, and eight *Gospel Motets for Unison Voices or Vocal Solos* for the Trinity season.²⁶

Krapf arguably shared a musical ethos with other European composers such as Jan Bender, Heinrich Fleischer, Ernst Pepping, Siegfried Reda, and Willi Burkhardt. He preferred a contrapuntal style, sometimes even duos or trios, avoiding thick sonic textures, but certainly not eschewing the

chromaticism which can so exemplify midcentury compositional practice. He favored hymn preludes and intonations (*Sing and Rejoice: Hymn Settings for Organ and Congregation*²⁷), alternate hymn harmonizations (*Creative Hymn Accompaniments*²⁸), pieces utilizing traditional forms such as the partita (“Partita on HERZLICH TUT MICH VERLANGEN”²⁹ or “Choral Partita on ‘The Day of Resurrection,’”³⁰), and conceived many with a thought to ease of performance on one manual (*Reformation Suite*³¹). This is not to say all his compositions were of a small scale, as he composed two Christmas cantatas (“From Heaven Above”³² and “For Unto Us”³³), the first of which employs two violins (or woodwinds) in addition to the organ and choir.

After a decade at the University of Iowa, Krapf had built an organ department consisting of two professors and forty students, straining the school’s meager teaching facilities and forcing the



Gerhard Krapf in 1971. (“Dedication for Organ on Sunday,” *The Gazette [Cedar Rapids]*, 23 October, 1971: 3.)

organ studio, in Krapf’s words, into “bumming around the local churches.”³⁴ In 1971 the program offered a BA, MA, MFA, DMA and Ph.D, and of those forty aforementioned students, nine were undergraduate organ majors, with ten graduate majors “in residence.” A new building project, within which would be included a new concert hall, allowed Krapf to indulge in designing a large tracker organ, customized to his own specifications. Krapf had long held an interest in organ design, especially as it related to composition. He had translated Hans Klotz’ 1938 *Buch von der Orgel* for publication by Concordia in 1969 as *The Organ Handbook*, a volume in which

Krapf allowed Klotz to voice the ideals of the Organ Reform Movement in cogent, persuasive, and arguably even simple English prose.³⁵ These ideals would bear fruit in the University of Iowa's Casavant Opus 3105, a three-manual, 74-rank instrument infused with modernist architectural motifs and installed in Clapp Recital Hall, an organ which Krapf claimed "fuses the heritage of the past with current artistic trends."³⁶ Krapf, along with colleague Dr. Delbert Disselhorst, dedicated the organ in the autumn of 1972. This organ would teach generations of students until silenced by a flood in 2008.



Krapf inspecting the organ installation at the University of Iowa's Clapp Recital Hall. (Jeff Charis-Carlson, "Remembering Gerhard Krapf: A History Behind St. Andrew's 'New' Organ," The Messenger of First Presbyterian Church [Iowa City, Iowa], October 2018.) 4-5.



The Casavant organ at Clapp Recital Hall at the University of Iowa.

In July, 1977, Gerhard Krapf was appointed Professor of Organ at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he again would find himself growing an organ department and overseeing the final installation of another concert organ, Casavant Opus 3358--at 51 ranks the largest tracker organ in western Canada. Krapf's interest in organ design had only burgeoned during the 1970s, in 1976 having translated Andreas Werckmeister's 1698 *Orgelprobe*, a seminal and comprehensive text dedicated to the particulars of organ building in the seventeenth century, ideals which had inspired Krapf's own design proclivities. As a teaching and performance instrument, Krapf evaluated the new organ at the University of Alberta as not ". . . built to play all styles equally well. It is not an instrument which encyclopedically offers all sound colors demanded by various periods. But it is a compromise instrument in the sense that we have stayed clear of imitation of any one period. We think that with intelligent use a player will be able to give good renditions of contemporary, romantic, and baroque literature." If this organ was not designed to be eclectic, it would certainly function that way. In 1983 he would write another instruction book, this one entitled *Bach: Improvised*

Ornamentation and Keyboard Cadenzas: An Approach to Creative Performance; of Bach Krapf would pontificate that “There is nothing about music that Bach cannot teach you. . . he wrote oceans of wonderful music, sacred and secular. Knowing Bach allows you to appreciate music more fully.”³⁷ During his decade at the University of Alberta, Krapf “contributed significantly to the development of library resources and the graduate keyboard programs. . . including the establishment of the first Doctor of Music degree in organ performance at an English-speaking Canadian university.”³⁸ Krapf retired in 1987 but continued to compose. He died on 2 July, 2010, leaving behind his wife, Trudl, three daughters, and a son.

In recognition of his service to higher education, in 1987 the University of Iowa commissioned Taylor and Boody’s Opus 13 organ for the newly-designated “Gerhard Krapf Organ Studio,”³⁹ while in 2011 the University of Alberta commissioned from James Louder the Krapf Memorial Continuo Organ, a portativ ideally suited to accompanying baroque music. It is quite appropriate that the first organ which he designed should find new life at First Presbyterian Church in Iowa City, where Krapf not only served as organist, but as an elder for many years. In 2013, the organ languishing so mutely in Clapp Recital Hall was acquired by the church, restored, and heard for the first time in its new life on Easter Sunday, 2018, the instrument now known as the “Krapf Organ.”⁴⁰ These instruments fittingly commemorate Krapf’s dual loyalties to the Church and to academia.

Although Gerhard Krapf’s legacy to academia is significant, his contribution to sacred music, and to its teaching, was arguably his most enduring legacy, a legacy guided by his Christian faith, of which his friend and teacher Paul Pisk said, “[Krapf] is not a theorist but always creative in composition and performance. . . Most important, he never loses sight of the essentials: the spiritual and religious aspects of music.”⁴¹

--*Benjamin Kolodziej*

¹ “Gerhard Krapf,” obituary from Lorenz Music, <https://lorenz.com/composers-and-authors/meet-our-composers/gerhard-krapf> (accessed 16 March, 2022).

² Konrad H. Jarausch, *Broken Lives: How Ordinary Germans Experienced the 20th Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018): 59. Gerhard’s war experiences are well-covered in this book. Krapf’s autobiography can be found in his “Recollections” of nine volumes, written in the 1990s, and kept at the University of Alberta library.

³ Edwin R. McDonald, “Organ at English Lutheran Church Played by Krapf,” *St. Joseph News-Press* (St. Joseph, MO), 8 September, 1957: 32.

⁴ Jeff Charis-Carlson, “Remembering Gerhard Krapf: A History Behind St. Andrew’s ‘New’ Organ,” *The Messenger* (newsletter of First Presbyterian Church) (Iowa City, Iowa), October 2018: 4-5.

https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/c8/c8d021d9-3301-4442-8b6a-8d8ea273c1aa/documents/organ_story_from_october_messenger.pdf (accessed 6 March, 2022)

⁵ *Broken Lives*, 84.

⁶ *Ibid*, 140.

⁷ Elvalee Donaldson, “German Couple, Long Separated, Married,” *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), 30 December, 1954: 1.

⁸ “Gerhard Krapf to Continue Organ Series,” *Redlands Daily Facts* (Redlands, CA), 21 October, 1967: 6.

⁹ Marnie Giesbrecht, “Gerhard Krapf 1924-2008,” University of Alberta Department of Music obituary. <https://www.ualberta.ca/music/about-us/news/2008/july/gerhardkrapf19242008.html> (accessed 7 March, 2022)

¹⁰ “Methodist Church Will Hear German Student at Organ,” *The San Bernadino Country Sun* (San Bernadino, CA), 25 May, 1951: 14.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² *Broken Lives*, 271.

¹³ “Gerhard Krapf to Give Public Organ Recital,” *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), 12 March, 1955: 1.

¹⁴ Edwin R. McDonald, “Organ at English Lutheran Church Played by Krapf.”

¹⁵ Mattie M. Dykes, “Gerhard Krapf Gives Fine Organ Recital at Church,” *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO)

¹⁶ Mattie M. Dykes, “Gerhard Krapf Displays His Mastery of Organ in Recital,” *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), 7 March, 1956: 9.

¹⁷ “Gerhard Krapf to Give Organ Recital Monday,” *The Maryville Daily Forum* (Maryville, MO), 21 September, 1956: 7.

¹⁸ Edwin R. McDonald, “Organ at English Lutheran Church Played by Krapf.”

¹⁹ “Organ Seminar Possible at College this Season,” *Casper Star-Tribune* (Casper, WY), 30 September, 1959: 6.

²⁰ “Special Musical Events Planned at University,” *Casper Star-Tribune* (Casper, WY), 14 March, 1961: 10.

²¹ “New Organ at SU1,” *Muscatine Journal and News-Tribune* (Muscatine, IA), 6 November, 1963: 16.

²² “Gerhard Krapf Music Minister at St Paul’s,” *Iowa City Press-Citizen* (Iowa City, IA), 21 November, 1964: 6.

²³ Gerhard Krapf, *Liturgical Organ Playing* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1964.)

²⁴ Gerhard Krapf, *Organ Improvisation: a Practical Approach to Chorale Elaborations for the Service* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1967): vi.

²⁵ *Ibid*, v.

²⁶ Gerhard Krapf, *Reformation Suite* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971.) The back cover lists all Krapf’s pieces they published at the time.

²⁷ Gerhard Krapf, *Sing and Rejoice : Hymn Settings for Organ and Congregation* (Dayton: Sacred Music Press, 1978.) SMP published six of these volumes through the mid-1980s.

²⁸ Gerhard Krapf, *Creative Hymn Accompaniments: for Organ* (Dayton: Sacred Music Press, 1992-) Four volumes.

²⁹ Gerhard Krapf, “Partita on HERZLICH THUT MICH VERLANGEN” (copy of handwritten manuscript from the library of Zion Lutheran Church, Dallas.)

³⁰ Gerhard Krapf, “Chorale Partita on ‘The Day of Resurrection’” (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983.)

³¹ Gerhard Krapf, *Reformation Suite*.

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- ³² Gerhard Krapf, *From Heaven Above: Christmas Cantata for Choir, Congregation, Organ, Violins* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969.)
- ³³ Gerhard Krapf, *For Unto Us: A Christmas Cantata for SATB and Organ* (Dayton: R. Dean Publishing, 1988.)
- ³⁴ "Iowa U. Organ Unit Finds a Home," *The Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, IA), 11 November, 1971: 5.
- ³⁵ Hans Klotz, *The Organ Handbook*, trans. Gerhard Krapf (St. Louis: Concordia, 1969.)
- ³⁶ "First Recital Set for Sept. 6—Unique UI Organ Hall Completed," *Iowa Press-Citizen* (29 June, 1972): 15.
- ³⁷ "Recognizing Research Excellent: 1984," University of Alberta Alumni Association: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/ALUMNI/history/peopleh-o/84sumkrapf.htm> (accessed 22 March, 2022).
- ³⁸ "Inauguration of Krapf Memorial Continue Organ Culminates with Exciting Performance Event," University of Alberta online press release (5 March, 2012), <https://www.ualberta.ca/music/about-us/news/2012/march/inaugurationofkrapfmemorialcontinuoorganculminateswithexcitingperformanceevent.html> (accessed 21 March, 2022).
- ³⁹ See the Organ Historical Society Pipe Organ Database for information on Taylor and Boody Opus 13, <https://pipeorgandatabase.org/organ/4448> (accessed 22 March, 2022.)
- ⁴⁰ ⁴⁰ Jeff Charis-Carlson, "Remembering Gerhard Krapf: A History Behind St. Andrew's 'New' Organ."
- ⁴¹ Krapft, *Organ Improvisation*: v.