



*Program film production in 1962, with William and Virginia Fagal and the quartet.
left to right: Larry Fillingham, Stan Schleenbaker, Herbert Hohensee, and Don Siebenlist*

The Trumpet Shall Sound . . .

Music at Faith for Today

Dan Shultz

For twenty-five years, William and Virginia Fagal produced and played leading roles in Faith for Today, the groundbreaking Seventh-day Adventist television program. Both Fagals were musical, and in the telecast's first sixteen years they featured music similar to that used on the church's successful radio broadcast The Voice of Prophecy. By the end of its first year, the program was appearing on a national hook-up, the first religious telecast to enjoy that distinction. The music and musicians in those formative years were a significant factor in the success of the program and an important part of the church's musical heritage in the 20th Century.

The countdown to the telecast was unnerving, but when the on-the-air light on the camera lit up, William and Virginia Fagal were prepared, ready to greet their viewers with a

warm welcome. By the end of the program, the Fagals were both elated and exhausted. In only six weeks they had chosen a name, decided on format and content, arranged for music, and prepared themselves for hosting and starring in a religious program on the

relatively new medium of television. In spite of their inexperience and few guidelines to follow, they had succeeded in launching a religious broadcast enterprise for the Seventh-day Adventist church that has continued in various forms for over a half-century.



Fagal, a pastor-evangelist in the New York City area since 1944, had been doing a radio program on Sundays for the past six years. In late 1949, he began a serious discussion with a leader at the General Conference about the value of having a television program, convinced this was a medium with a great future.

WABC-TV in NYC was looking for programs to fill their schedule, and when the church contacted them early in 1950 about the idea of doing a religious telecast, they responded positively. Fagal was unaware of this contact until church leaders summoned him to a meeting in a New York City hotel in April. They told him they had signed a contract earlier that day with WABC-TV for a half-hour program and wanted him to prepare one to be aired six weeks later!

The Fagals worked tirelessly in the next six weeks, seeking advice from the station staff and considering a number of options for content. Decisions were made on format and features, an organist was chosen, and a male quartet was formed.

The centerpiece of the first program was an interview with Walter Ralls, a history teacher who talked about current events in light of history and his concerns about the future.

This conversation led naturally into remarks by Fagal and observations about Daniel 2. Music by the quartet was interspersed throughout the program and at the end, after Virginia had invited listeners to send for a free Bible course.

While the telecast's initial and evolving format, with its shared hosting by the Fagals, interviews, discussions, dramatic skits, and commentaries differed from the church's well-established and highly successful Voice of Prophecy radio broadcast, its use of a male quartet and organist reflected the influence of the VOP.

The success of the telecast in its first year led the General Conference Radio/TV Committee to ask the VOP to develop a West Coast version which would not feature drama but be more like an evangelistic meeting. Although the program was developed and presented, it was withdrawn within a year of its debut, to the relief of those at VOP who felt that it was impossible to do both a broadcast and telecast effectively.

Because of the rushed start for the East Coast telecast, the quartet singing on the first program was an interim group that included James Littlefield and Norman Round, students from Atlantic Union College, singing first tenor

and bass; Walter Isensee, a friend of the Fagals, as second tenor; and a student from Westminster Choir College singing baritone. When school resumed at the end of the summer, the three students left the quartet.

Herbert Hohensee, a music teacher from Union College who was on a graduate study leave at Westminster, joined the quartet as baritone in October on a part-time basis until February, when he was hired to sing full-time. Two non-Adventist professionals were paid to sing during the year until the summer of 1951, when Harold Lickey, first tenor, and Lyle Jewell, bass, were hired to form what is now regarded as the first Faith for Today Quartet. This group remained intact for the next three years.¹

Singing in the quartet was demanding and time consuming work. The pressures on the members and their young families, along with the stress of living in or commuting to New York City, led to several quartet personnel changes during its sixteen years of existence. Stan Schleenbaker, who sang in the quartet in its final years, recalled singing in five different quartets in his seven years with the group. Hohensee would become the member with the longest tenure, serving as group leader for thirteen years, until 1963.²

		1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956
Faith For Today	ORGAN	RETTA VALERIO/ROBERT QUADE		MELVIN WEST		MARJORIE HOHENSEE		
		QUARTET						
Musicians	1 ST TENOR	JAMES LITTLEFIELD		HAROLD LICKEY			ROGER MCNEILY	
	2 ND TENOR	WALTER ISENSEE						
	BARITONE		HERBERT HOHENSEE					
	1950 to 1966	BASS	NORMAN ROUND		LYLE JEWELL			TOM STUDLEY



The first organist, Retta Rippey Valerio, was a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music and organist in the Washington Avenue SDA Church in Brooklyn, where Fagal was pastor. A friend of the Fagal family, having also worked with them in evangelistic meetings, Valerio, along with Robert Quade, served as organist on Faith for Today in its first two years.

She was followed in 1952 by Melvin West, who had just graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College, now Andrews University. He played for one year before accepting a teaching position at Atlantic Union College.

Marjorie Hohensee, Herbert's wife, and Mary Bidwell Haloviak then played organ as needed until 1963, when Van Knauss, a recent graduate from Union College and the University of Nebraska became organist. He continued in that position until the spring of 1967.

While the quartet and organist provided the musical base for the program, other singers and groups also performed. One of these, a women's trio from Southern Missionary College, later Southern Adventist University, that included Frances Bumby, Marilyn Dillow (later Cotton),

and Mary Ellen Garden (later Byrd), was added to the program in 1952. They took a year off from school and sang as a regular feature through the autumn of 1953.

E laine Giddings joined the FFT staff in 1951. A gifted writer and producer, she helped create and prepare professional quality fifteen-minute dramatic skits, a



The first Faith for Today quartet, Melvin West, organist, and Girl's Trio with William and Virginia Fagal in 1952.

Standing, left to right: Herbert Hohensee, Frances Bumby, Walter Isensee, Marilyn Cotton, Harld Lickey, Mary Ellen Byrd, Melvin West, and Lyle Jewell

key part of the program.

The use of drama, however, created a firestorm in conservative Adventist circles, where it was regarded as an inappropriate part of an outreach program associated with the SDA church. After two years of operation, feelings about this issue

and the increasing costs led to a confrontation at the 1952 Autumn Council of the church, an annual meeting of church leaders.

Impassioned speeches were made against the use of drama, the program, and its spiraling cost. When the chair called for a vote, only two persons out of over 150 voted to continue funding the telecast.

The chair refused to declare the vote, asking the group if they indeed did not want a television program sponsored by the church. Fagal was invited to speak and pointed out how God had blessed the program and talked about its successful soul winning efforts. After two other leaders also spoke in defense of continuing the program, another vote was taken. The previous action was repudiated by the same margin that had led to its earlier passage.³

As the program format continued to evolve and the production became more complex, there were some harrowing moments, since the telecast was being presented live. A significant production step was taken in 1955, when filming the program in black and white began, creating what were known as kinescopes. In 1962, filming

1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966
MARJORIE HOHENSEE				MARY Bidwell HALOVIak			VAN KNAUSS		
ROGER McNeily			STAN SCHLEENBAKER						
WALTER ISENSEE				LARRY FillingHAM					
HERBERT HOHENSEE						Jim Ripley			
TOM Studley			VICTOR HilBERT			DON SiebenLIST			

in color began, an innovative and visionary practice which predated the introduction of color telecasts.

With the introduction of pre-recording, other features could be incorporated into the program. Fagal produced at least three documentaries, in 1958, 1962, and 1966, of trips he had taken to Israel, Japan and Korea, and the Middle East, respectively.

The use of film and audio recordings eased the pressure on the musicians, who until this time were performing live with no margin for error. Numerous audio retakes were possible now and when the program was finally filmed, the quartet sang along with the audio recording, off mike, so that their physical effort in singing looked natural. When a piano was used, the player simply played along on a silent piano to previously recorded music.⁴

From his first year at FFT, quartet member Hohensee was involved with other aspects of the program. He had established the first in-house offset printing press, helped organize tracking

records for those who contributed and requested materials, and was in charge of the audio aspects of mixing and production. In that position, he oversaw post-production work on the show, including the creation of the sound track used with the film.

Stan Schleenbaker, who had joined the quartet in 1959, became

SDA college campuses. In a typical year, the quartet and organist were on the road for as many as 150 days, traveling as much as 40,000 miles.

By the middle of the 1960s, the pressure of this schedule, plus the desire on the part of some of the quartet members to pursue other careers, led to a dissolution of the quartet in the fall of 1966. Fagal was also feeling financial pressures with dramatically increasing production costs at a time when the church was phasing out its financial support of the program. This also became a factor in deciding whether to continue with the quartet. Organist Van Knauss continued until the following spring, when he accepted a music teaching position at

Columbia Union College.⁵

The quartet's final appearance was in June 1966 at the General Conference Session held at Cobo Hall in Detroit, Michigan. On this occasion they sang alone as a quartet and jointly with the VOP quartet, the King's Heralds, a collaboration that had happened several times previously.⁶



Roger McNeily, Tom Studley, Walter Isensee, Herbert Hohensee with the Fagals in the 1950s

highly skilled as the recording technician and editor for the audio recordings of the quartet and was able to produce a polished, professional final product. The work done by Schleenbaker and Hohensee meant that the program could continue when the organist and quartet were away or performing at camp meetings and on

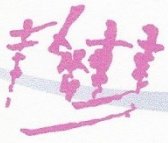


Stan Schleenbaker, Herbert Hohensee, Victor Hilbert, and Walter Isensee 1960



Left: Don Siebenlist, Herbert Hohensee, Larry Fillingham, and Stan Schleenbaker; Right: Don Siebenlist, Jim Ripley, Larry Fillingham, and Stan Schleenbaker; Foreground left, Mary Bidwell Haloviak; right, Van Knauss, organists





Quartet members were informed of the decision to discontinue the group at the end of the meetings in Detroit. They returned to New York and filmed 200 numbers that were then used for some time following their departure. Viewers were unaware that the quartet had been disbanded.

The quartet's filmed recordings, along with those of guest soloists, music ensembles, and school groups, which were also recorded ahead of time, were used as needed. This flexibility was facilitated by increasingly sophisticated recording, filming, and production methods.

Six years later, in 1972, when Faith for Today moved from New York to Thousand Oaks, California, the original format and subsequent variations which had relied on music were discarded in favor of a weekly dramatic series titled *Westbrook Hospital*.⁷ It was an immediate success and received numerous awards during the years it aired.

Hohensee moved with the program to the West Coast, where he worked as Director for Film and Video Services for the Adventist Media Center, which included Faith for Today and other Adventist outreach programs, until his retirement in 1982.

Other projects, such as the production of an hour-long film about the life of John Hus, filmed in 1975; specials, such as *The Harvest*; and a variety of programs have followed and will continue to be introduced as the viewing audience's interests and approaches to

A Day with the Faith for Today Quartet

Stan Schleenbaker

The following is paraphrased and condensed from an article originally published in the Youth's Instructor in 1966

The day begins for us with worship in the Bible school for everyone at 8:00. After worship we care for miscellaneous responsibilities until 9:00, when we begin to rehearse new songs and prepare a song for recording.

At 10:30 we go into the main studio and begin recording on tape. Following a noon-hour lunch break, we rehearse again and then do more recording and care for other assignments. If we are recording a more lengthy or difficult number, however, we stay until it is finished. Besides singing, members of the quartet and our organist have other responsibilities. One of our members serves as the librarian of our music: filing the music, cataloguing our books, updating our list of taped songs, and filing our tapes. Another searches for new music and has our music in place for us at the beginning of rehearsals.

A third member coordinates our overall activity by working with Mrs. Fagal on music choices for the programs, and with the filming studio, preparing cue and lyric sheets. The latter are typed with one-inch letters and placed around the studio. The fourth member edits the recording tapes, splicing the parts of a recording to create the best possible result. This happens to be my job, along with answering letters about our music or us. Our organist, Van Knauss, cares for copyright clearances and also produces arrangements for the quartet.

About once every two weeks, we go to the film studio and "shoot" from three to six songs. Make-up is applied to each of us to create evenness of skin tones. We will be illuminated by as much as 50,000 watts. We also sometimes do on-location filming in natural settings.

We film 13 to 26 weeks in advance of our release date. You can imagine how hard it is to get into the mood of singing *Silent Night* in July.



This recording by The Faith for Today and King's Herald's Quartets was the end result of joint appearances that started when their paths crossed at a Calgary, Canada, camp meeting.