

# Music at Avondale College

*Avondale College, located in Australia, was founded in 1897, the end result of efforts to establish a training school for converts to the Seventh-day Adventist church that had started in 1892. Known initially as the Avondale School for Christian Workers, its name was changed to Australasian Missionary College in 1911 and to Avondale College in 1964.*

Seven years after the 1885 arrival of missionaries in Australia, leaders of its newly converted 1000 members established a training school in St. Kilda, Melbourne. Because of the problems encountered in the United States by the first Seventh-day Adventist school located in the city of Battle Creek, Michigan, the school in Melbourne was regarded as temporary, pending the finding of a country site for a school.

Cooranbong, then an isolated rural village in the state of New South Wales, an unlikely choice, became that site, principally because it was what the church could afford. The goal was to create a self-sufficient institution to prepare workers for the church, one that would provide work for students who would help farm the land, grow needed produce, and sell the surplus for income to operate the school.

Although there were questions about the location, quality of the soil, and access to the area, as well as reservations on the part of church leaders in America and differing opinions within the Australian membership, the land was purchased in 1895. Two years later, the school opened after the first building was completed, a faculty had been chosen, and a curriculum was in place.

Ellen White was deeply involved in all of those formative decisions. She championed the purchase of the land, and challenged decisions about the buildings, choice of faculty, and what would be taught. She also led out in the opening ceremonies of what

was named the Avondale School for Christian Workers, a subdued event with few in attendance.

Since the curriculum had been chosen by Adventist American educators, it did not align with that taught in Australian schools. It was a compromised offering shaped by a conflict that was raging in Adventist circles in America between those who wanted to offer a traditional classical education and those who believed that classes should be practical and prepare students to serve the evangelistic mission of the church.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this uneasy beginning, music was taught from the opening of the school, the first teacher being acting-principal in the first month of school, 26-year-old Herbert Camden Lacey who had been born in England and raised in India and Tasmania, an Australian island state located off the southern coast of the mainland.

Ten years earlier, his family had joined the church while residing in Tasmania. Lacey had then traveled to the United States to study at Healdsburg College, forerunner of Pacific Union College, where he completed the ministerial program.

He next enrolled at Battle Creek College and graduated from the classical course in 1895, at age 24. BCC's classical program at that time required two years of voice study with Edwin Barnes, a highly trained musician from England. Given his training at BCC, Lacey's music teaching at the new Australian school likely consisted of giving music lessons in voice.<sup>2</sup>

Orwin Morse was hired to teach both vocal and instrumental music for the second year. Although he was trained in a Canadian conservatory in Toronto and capable of teaching instrumental and vocal music, his stay at the school was brief.

Jessie Creamer Paap, wife of a science faculty member, became music teacher in 1900. She had taught instrumental music at Healdsburg College in California for four years before meeting John Paap, a New Zealander who had come to study at HC. Following their marriage and his teaching at HC for two years, they joined the faculty at the new school in Australia.

For the next eleven years, she played an important role in establishing a respected program in keyboard and voice instruction. Additionally, she launched the beginning of a choral tradition at the school by starting and directing a Choral Society that presented an annual concert at the end of each school year.

Her husband also taught some music in addition to teaching science classes and running the farm. During the Papps' stay at the college, a band of mostly brass players was started. It is unclear whether one of the Papps or someone else started the group, which played a role in the 1904 graduation and is pictured in a photograph taken in the early years of the school.<sup>3</sup>

In 1911, the school's offerings and status began to change when it was renamed Australasian Missionary College. The primary reason for the new name appears to have been a

desire to gain greater credibility within the Australian educational system, which was being upgraded, and to raise the level of academic offerings and rigor on campus.

All of this coincided with a change in the music program. When the Papps had left at the end of the previous school year to return to California, Charles Schowe, a native Australian, was appointed to chair the music program.

A versatile and talented person who had been teaching Greek and history classes for a year, he was asked now to conduct an orchestra and choir and teach voice, piano, and violin lessons.

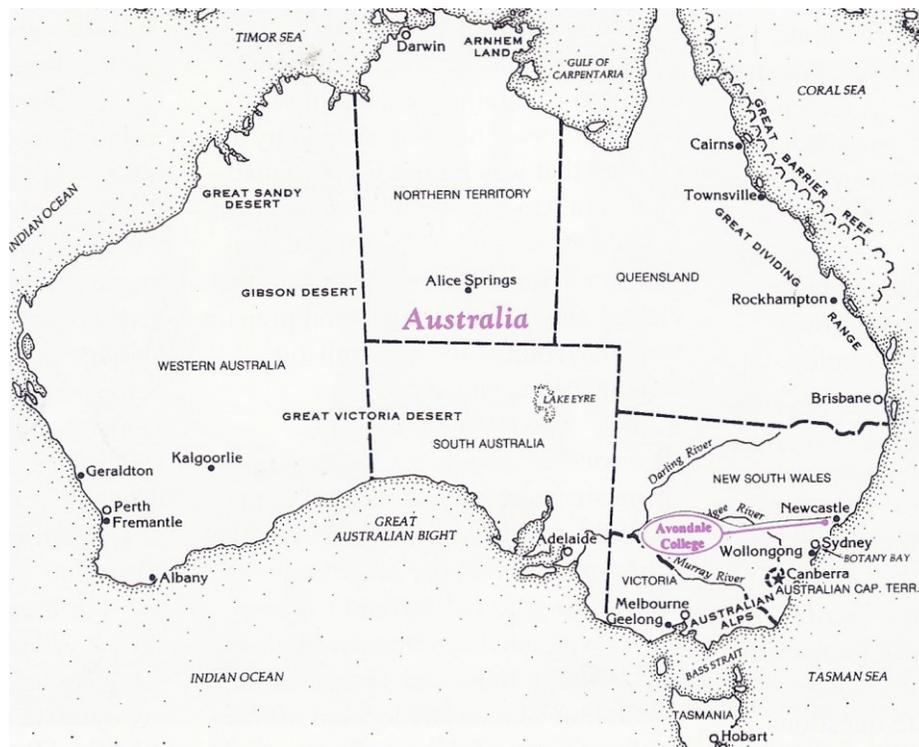
The new principal who had arrived at the time of this change, Benjamin F. Machlan, was intent on having greater control over what was happening academically. He also wanted to oversee music

activity on campus. A music committee was appointed to review and approve what musicians and groups, including the choir, orchestra, and band, could present.

Schowe, who was a violinist and had music degrees, encouraged music students to take the exams necessary to gain diplomas and certificates from Trinity College in London and the Sydney Conservatorium. With the heightened interest at the college for credibility, the success of AMC students in achieving this recognition had to be gratifying. Although Schowe also developed a four-year music program that went into effect in

1913, only four students would complete the program.<sup>4</sup>

While the second decade in the 20<sup>th</sup> century started with efforts to improve the academic program, by the time the 1920s started, standards had dramatically eroded. Several well-intentioned but poorly qualified principals, acting in concert with the board, succeeded in eviscerating the



academic program. As the decade continued, some of the better teachers left, including Schowe and his wife, who both resigned in 1918 in protest over proposed changes.

Two years earlier, Schowe's administrative responsibilities on campus had been expanded, and aspects of the music program, including lessons and the band and orchestra, were parceled out to private teachers. The Choral Society, however, had continued under his leadership. At the end of his last year at AMC, he led the choir in a presentation of portions of Handel's *Messiah*, a first for the college.<sup>5</sup>

The appointment of Lynn Wood as principal in 1922 would have far reaching implications for music. A believer in the importance of fine arts, he brought Arthur Martin to the campus in 1923 to serve as music teacher. The following year, construction was started on a music building, the first brick structure on campus, that was completed and furnished with four American made Poole pianos a year later, in 1925.<sup>6</sup>

For six years, the department, with a building of its own and Martin as its full-time music teacher, prospered. When he left at the end of the 1928 school year, he was honored for his service after he conducted the traditional cantata on graduation weekend.

In the next two years, as the effects of an economic depression spread and student enrollment dropped to below 200, music was taught on a part-

time basis by three teachers, one being former teacher Schowe, who conducted the band. Then Robert William Johnson, a talented and versatile musician, was hired.<sup>7</sup>

For a decade, Johnson provided outstanding musical leadership. He raised the performance level of the choir, band, and orchestra and expanded the curriculum to include conducting classes. He conducted the choir in presentations of major choral works such as the *Messiah* and Haydn's *Creation* and led the band in more refined performances of carefully chosen music. Both his

piano and voice students distinguished themselves in off-campus examinations.

In every way, Johnson provided outstanding and loyal service. When his use of non-Adventist soloists in choral productions was questioned and then halted, he cooperated. He personally continued to study music and improve his credentials.<sup>8</sup>

Tragically, Johnson was summarily released in 1939 when a fabricated love letter supposedly from him to his chorus pianist, which had been written and planted by two male students, was found. Years later, Milton Hook, author of the college's centennial history, wrote

Arguably, Johnson was one of the best and most versatile music teachers the college ever employed. In retrospect it seems that there was a clear lack of justice in his case, he being discarded with such undue haste.<sup>9</sup>

From then until the end of World War II in 1945, when low enrollment almost closed the school,<sup>10</sup> eight different teachers taught in the music department, the longest serving being Leonard Harvey, an alumnus of the college.

In 1947, George Greer arrived from America, following Ian Wilmoth, who had been teaching for three years. Greer was a venerated choral director who had taught at Pacific Union College and Washington Missionary College, now Columbia Union College, in Washington, D.C.

While he had enjoyed spectacular success at both schools, becoming noted for his choir tours, radio broadcasts of performances, and presentations of major choral works such as the *Messiah* and the *Elijah*, his most recent association with the Voice of Prophecy radio broadcast had been troubling.

Greer, whose wife's uncle was General Conference President J. L. McElhaney, had joined with other

choir directors in criticizing music on the broadcast. In 1943, he was sent by church leadership to the VOP to upgrade its music.

When he attempted to follow what he felt was his mandate, an intense conflict developed between Greer and H.M.S. Richards and the Voice of Prophecy quartet. In the next four years, three quartet members were fired for not supporting and cooperating with him, and Richards almost lost his job.<sup>11</sup>

The invitation in 1947 to go to Avondale Missionary College provided a gracious way to end the conflict and allow Greer to resume his choral work. After what had happened to him at the VOP, the challenge of again developing another choral program had to be invigorating.

He immediately started auditioning students when he arrived, even though school was in recess. By the end of his first school year, he had established the Avondale Symphonic Choir, a sixty-member group that was singing eight-part and twelve-part a cappella sacred music from memory. In that first year, they sang every week in church, toured, placed third in a choral competition, and made their first 78 RPM record.<sup>12</sup>

Greer also formed an Oratorio Chorus, which included his Symphonic Choir and as many as 70 additional voices, and started the tradition of performing the *Messiah* annually, along with another oratorio each school year.<sup>13</sup>

Greer had come as chair of the music program. He immediately created an expanded music program that graduated its first students in 1950 and lobbied successfully for students to be able to use music electives to satisfy degree requirements in other programs. Greer's conducting and singing classes became a requirement for ministerial students as well as music students. Within two years of his arrival, 200

## *An Australian Lexicon*

### **Seasons**

Australians, living in the Southern Hemisphere, are used to seasons that are reversed from those in the Northern Hemisphere.

### **School Year**

Because of the seasonal differences, their two-semester school year begins with the onset of autumn in late February, and ends at the end of November, in late spring. Because of this, their school year occurs within one calendar year.

### **Academic Titles & Rank**

The president of Avondale College was known for many years as the principal. The position of College Principal at Avondale College was comparable to that of college or university president in the U.S. Academic standing for teachers begins with Lecturer II and continues through Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer I and ends with Senior Lecturer II.

### **Qualifications**

#### **A.Mus.A.**

A certificate from the Australian Music Examination Board, obtained by audition after completing eight grade levels of standards. Minimum required to teach privately.

#### **Dip.Mus.**

Three- to four-year diploma program, not awarded by AC but can be earned while attending AC.

#### **Dip.Teach.**

Designated as Secondary followed by area of study, awarded by AC.

#### **B.Ed.**

Bachelor of Education, four-year degree program, listed with a specialty, such as music.

#### **B.A.**

Bachelor of Arts degree, same designation as used in the U.S.

students were enrolled in the music program.

He hired assistants to help teach instrument and voice lessons, and conduct the orchestra. One of these, Yvonne Caro Howard, a native New Zealander and accomplished pianist, was brought from Washington Missionary College, where he had worked with her earlier. Others who would assist him during his five years at the college included John Hurn; Ian Wilmoth, Greer's immediate predecessor; Yvonne Zanotti; Winsome Lambert; and Alan Thrift.<sup>14</sup>

**T**he success of the choir and increased interest in music by college students had an energizing effect on campus and in the field. Within Greer's first two years, an impressed administration and College Board responded positively to requests for a grand piano, acoustic treatment for the practice rooms, and an addition to enlarge the rehearsal room in the music building. In spite of the fact that the school was having financial difficulties, they also voted to proceed with a redesign and enlargement of the chapel, create a new stage with a concert shell, and install new theater-type seats.<sup>15</sup>

**G**reer's concept of sound had been shaped by his exposure to the sound of the noted Glasgow Orpheus Choir and the richness and close harmony of Russian choral works. He worked to obtain a rich balanced sound, paying close attention to detail, dynamics and tonal coloring. His repertoire was exclusively sacred music, including anthems, sections from oratorios and cantatas, spirituals, and arrangements of hymns and gospel songs.<sup>16</sup> By the time Greer left in 1952, the choir, with its extensive touring all over the continent and release of records that were being played on Australian radio, had gained national recognition for excellence.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, a series of four articles about those tours and one on the college in the *Youth's Instructor* in 1952, a widely read SDA magazine in America, created a mystique about Greer, the choir, and the college.<sup>18</sup> Although the choir's tours were a public relations bonanza for the school, they also created controversial debt at a time when the school was having increasing financial difficulty. Even so, when Greer suddenly left in September 1952, his accomplishments were already being viewed as legendary, a perception that persists to the present in the minds of many.

His abrupt departure before the end of the AC school year was done to facilitate acceptance of a position at Atlantic Union College in the U.S., where the school year was just beginning. Although he had enjoyed remarkable success at three Adventist colleges, his tastes in music and unwillingness to include secular music in his repertoire led to a confrontation with the president of the college during his second year at AUC. Greer left and for the next two years lived in the Washington, D.C., area. He accepted an invitation to return to PUC in 1956, where he worked with distinction until he retired four years later, at age 65, an honored faculty member and emeritus professor.<sup>19</sup>

**A**s stunning as the choir's success at AMC had been, the focus on that group and choral and vocal music had held back other aspects of the overall program. It was Greer's stated belief that "the ideal music department should stress vocal music, for through this medium souls are won . . ."<sup>20</sup>

The post-World War II years had been an opportune time for music programs in Adventist higher education to broaden their offerings to include all aspects of music. In many of the Adventist colleges, band and orchestra programs were developed

that complemented traditional choral and keyboard offerings.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, there was an increasing openness to expand the choral repertoire to include secular works and make choir participation more appealing to a larger group of students. Greer's preoccupation with the choral program and its total focus on sacred music worked against the nurturing of instrumental ensembles and developing a multi-faceted music program with depth and appeal to the expanding musical interests of the young.

In spite of this neglect, Greer's work at AMC set a standard in choral excellence and achievement that continues to the present. It was a turning point in music at the college.

**T**he transition after Greer left was facilitated by the appointment of a talented musician, Noel Clapham, AMC history and geography teacher. He served as head of the music department and director of the Symphonic Choir during the next four years. Lessons were taught by Romney King and Zelma Harris, pianists, and Jean Kilroy, a contralto and frequent soloist in campus concerts.

Other aspects of the music program improved, in spite of several changes in personnel during that period. There was renewed interest in maintaining a balance between choral and instrumental music and some of the music classes introduced by Greer were dropped to create a more focused program.

During Clapham's time as director, the first onsite LP recording of the choir was produced. The more natural sound of live acoustics, coupled with the vastly improved fidelity of the newer LP recordings yielded a more accurate and pleasing result than with previous records.<sup>22</sup>

Alan Thrift, who had assisted with piano lessons while still a student and sung in Greer's choir, was invited

to lead the department, teach piano, and direct the Symphonic Choir, beginning in 1957. It was the beginning of an association with the college by Thrift and his wife, formerly Yvonne Zanotti, also a pianist and singer, that would span more than forty years.

**T**hrift, who had completed an A.Mus.A. in piano in 1947 and Dip.Mus. while at AMC in 1951, had continued his studies and obtained two teaching certificates in the interim. He had started conducting in 1954 as an employee of the music branch of the Victoria Education Department and had distinguished himself when he led 1200 children in a well-received performance for the Governor General. More recently, he had served as Music Director of the Western Australian Conference for two years.

Within a year of his arrival, he conducted the Symphonic choir in the first telecast of a choral group in Sydney. It would be the first of several telecasts of his choral programs by the Australian Broadcasting Company.

In spite of a teaching load that included piano and organ lessons and classes in music history, theory, conducting, and music appreciation, Thrift continued and built on the choral tradition that had been started by Greer. Major choral works, including the *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, John Stainer's *The Crucifixion*, and others, were performed each year.<sup>23</sup>

Annual interstate tours by the choir in Australia were broadened to include three trips to New Zealand and two to the U.S., in 1983 and 1990. The second tour in the U.S. included performances from coast to coast, in nine states, and an appearance at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis. Critics and audiences praised the choir for its finesse and quality of sound.<sup>24</sup>

**I**n the 1960s, Thrift's first full decade at the college, a number of changes transformed both the appearance and identity of the school. A new classroom, library, and administrative classroom complex was completed in 1961. In 1964, the school's name was changed to Avondale College and a year later the entrance to the college was upgraded.

A new men's residence hall opened in 1965, followed by a new cafeteria in 1967. These new buildings were highlights in a decade filled with renovations, the building of faculty homes, and other improvements, an era that ended with an enrollment in 1969 of 547, a new high for the school.<sup>25</sup>

**T**hroughout the years, attempts had been made to validate aspects of the school's academic program by entities outside the school. At first those attempts were resisted because they ran counter to the notion prevalent in early Adventist schools that an insular program with minimal interaction with the world was best. One of the earliest attempts at AMC to do otherwise had happened in 1911, when music students had been encouraged by music teacher Schowe to gain recognition by earning diplomas and certificates from Trinity College in London.

In the 1950s, this interest in upgrading aspects of the college's program led to affiliations with Pacific Union College and the University of London. Although the affiliation with UL was short-lived, the arrangement with PUC in the granting of B.A. degrees continued in some areas until the 1990s.

In 1974, the college's first government sanctioned baccalaureate degree program was authorized, a Bachelor of Education in secondary sciences. Within a decade, degree programs for business and education in other secondary areas, including

music in 1981, had been authorized. With this change, students could now receive scholarships from the government.<sup>26</sup>

**D**uring his 41 years at the college, Thrift moved from performing only sacred choral music to including secular music. Beginning in the 1960s, he formed a smaller vocal ensemble of sixteen from within the larger choir that performed madrigals and other secular works.

This change in repertoire was more fully implemented with the full group in the next decade, in part because of the experience he had when attending Andrews University in the U.S. from 1969 to 1971. In those two years, while completing both a B.Mus. and an M.Mus., Thrift immersed himself in the AU choral program, serving as the accompanist for the University Singers, the select choir, in his final year.

Inspired by this experience, upon return home he changed the name of the Avondale Symphonic Choir to the Avondale Singers, reduced its size to facilitate travel arrangements, and started programming both sacred and secular music. This renamed ensemble took its first tour to Tasmania in September 1972.<sup>27</sup>

**I**n 1981, the choir, which had sung every week for church services since the time of Greer in the late 1940s, began to sing only as requested. Also, the tradition of the Oratorio Chorus presenting an oratorio at graduation ended midway through that decade because of an increasingly complex schedule for that weekend event.<sup>28</sup>

The campus was shaken during this decade by the residual fallout from the controversy at the end of the 1970s over the influence and theological beliefs of theology lecturer Desmond Ford, a native Australian. The finding against Ford in 1980 by the General Conference

was a crushing blow to many on campus and acted as a catalyst in accelerating the breaking down of a family-like closeness that had been a hallmark at AC for years. It seriously damaged the credibility of the theology department in the minds of some Australians and led to a sharp drop in an enrollment that had crested at 600 in 1981.<sup>29</sup>

Student attendance at music programs and other campus activities dropped dramatically throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> All of these changes, a result of rapid societal changes and shifts in students' attitudes, mirrored those also occurring in the U.S. at other Adventist schools.

In spite of these troubling developments, constructive changes in these years included an expanded degree program college-wide, an increase in library holdings, and the wearing of academic regalia by the faculty for the first time in 1983 at graduation. The campus was also given a lift with the construction of a new women's dormitory, physical education center, and an architecturally striking campus church.<sup>31</sup>

**W**hen Thrift had traveled to the U.S. to study at AU, David Clark directed the Symphonic Choir and the smaller vocal ensemble Thrift had recently started. Clark had joined the music faculty a year earlier, in 1969, to assist Thrift. A pianist and organist, he had completed a B.A., B.Mus., and Dip.Ed. at Melbourne University.

In those two years of interim leadership, Clark formed a women's choir from within the larger ensemble that won the choral championship in the city of Sydney in 1971. When Thrift returned, Clark served as accompanist for the choir and, during its tours, performed as organ soloist.

**C**Clark worked and studied abroad on several occasions. In 1972, he

served as Music Director at the New Gallery in London, where he organized its first concert series. Bevan Greive, a talented bass singer, taught voice at the college and directed a choir during that year and then, following Clark's return, for two more years, resulting in a full-time staff of three during that time.

In 1983, Clark traveled to the U.S. to attend Andrews University and complete an M.A. in music history and literature in 1984. In 1985, he went to Japan to study Suzuki pedagogy with Shinichi Suzuki and Haruko Kataoka. He founded and directed the Suzuki Piano School at AC and then served as Regional Coordinator for an annual Suzuki Professional Conference hosted by AC.<sup>32</sup>

In his 25 years at the college, Clark taught musicology, performed widely as a soloist, recitalist, and church musician, and continued to study piano and organ in Australia, London, and the U.S. Many of his students have also pursued graduate study overseas in organ performance, organ building, piano, and church music.

**I**n 1986, Barry Walmsley, a talented pianist, was hired upon graduation from AC to teach piano and theory, and accompany the Avondale Singers. He continued in that position for four years, until 1990. In that year, Thrift retired, the longest serving leader of an Adventist school music program in the church.

Ian Irvine, an experienced educator, was hired to serve as chair, direct the Singers, and teach music theory and music education. Eminently qualified, he had graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with a Dip. Mus. Ed. and completed a B.A. in philosophy at Macquarie University. He completed an M.Mus. at SCM two years after coming to AC.

While Irvine was serving as chair it was necessary to totally gut the 1925 music building, due in part to termite infestation. The subsequent renovation included refurbishing and air conditioning the choral rehearsal room and creating additional office space, although the latter necessitated decreasing the number of practice rooms.

**C**Clark was appointed music chair in 1996. Unfortunately, even though campus enrollment again had passed 600 in 1992,<sup>33</sup> there had been a drop in music enrollment and by 1996 administration proposed closing the program. Irvine and music enthusiast Howard Fisher, Chair of Humanities and geography lecturer, along with other music supporters, prepared a response that Clark presented to the AC Board of Governors, who then rejected the closure proposal. Irvine resigned the following year.<sup>34</sup>

Also, in his first year as chair, Clark, working with three former members of the Avondale Community Orchestra, facilitated the establishment of the first music scholarship at AC as a memorial to Noel Clapham. Clapham, chair of the music program following Greer's departure, had in the late 1980s and 1990s conducted the orchestra. Following his death, inactive ACO funds, plus money raised subsequently by Clark and others, were transferred to the Avondale Foundation in 2005, which now administers this award and other scholarships that enhance the music program.

**W**hen Thrift had retired in 1990, he and Clark had worked together for 21 years. This collaboration resumed in 1997 and would continue for seven more years, as Thrift came out of retirement to direct the Singers and assist in piano.

Beginning in 1998, Clark founded and directed the Avondale Chamber

Orchestra, which then toured locally and nationally and to New Zealand with the Avondale Singers. A highlight for both groups occurred in 2001 when The New England Youth Ensemble and Columbia Collegiate Chorale, conducted by Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse and James Bingham, respectively, joined forces with the AC groups and their conductors for three weeks, performing throughout Australia. Recordings of the combined groups made in St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney and at AC were preserved on a CD for the participants.

In 2003 Clark directed a second European music study tour, a repeat of one he had taken in 1997. This enhancement to the program has since been repeated as part of the curriculum.

When Clark retired and Thrift retired for a second time in 2004, they toured together with the Singers and the Chamber Orchestra to New Zealand. It was a memorable and nostalgic trip for both men and their students. They were honored for their long and distinguished service during a farewell concert on graduation weekend.

The formation of the chamber orchestra in 1998 by Clark coincided with the first real attempt to establish a concert band at AC by Sharon Tolhurst, newly hired teacher of wind and percussion instruments and lecturer in music theory, conducting, and music education. While there had been numerous brass bands in the British tradition from the earliest years at the school, Tolhurst formed the Avondale Wind Ensemble with woodwinds, brass, and percussion in ratios that conformed to a band instrumentation that had evolved internationally throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the last seven years, she has developed a feeder program in

surrounding high schools, and her college music education program that has led to an ensemble of about thirty players. She also conducts the Avondale Brass Band, a community group in the older tradition.

Recruited from De La Salle College in Melbourne, Tolhurst received her training at AC, earning a diploma in 1983 through Pacific Union College, at that time affiliated with AC. Two years later, she completed an M.Mus. in music education at Andrews University, then taught in England for two years before returning to Australia to teach at De La Salle College.

During her time at AC she has pursued a doctorate at Deakin University, scheduled to be completed this year. While doing summer graduate work, she established contacts which led to concerts at the college in 2007 by the Georgia Tech Concert Band and the New York Metropolitan Youth Orchestra.

Robb Dennis, new Head of Music, was present and introduced at the commencement ceremonies honoring Clark and Thrift in 2004. An award-winning singer with twenty years of experience, he was a 1984 graduate of Pacific Union College.

Dennis had subsequently completed a master's degree at La Sierra University in 1992 and a D.M.A. in vocal performance at Claremont Graduate University in 1998. He also took additional study in choral conducting at Arizona State University and at the University of Oregon. A conductor of professional choral groups as well as school ensembles, Dennis received a National Leadership Award in 2002 for his work with the Moreno Valley Master Chorale in California.

As he arrived on campus for the 2005 school year, Dennis in his role as music head as well as

## Avondale College The 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Howard Fisher

At the beginning of a new century, in keeping with its university status aspirations, Avondale changed some of its terminology and restructured the departments. Some departments were combined, all of the departments were renamed as faculties, and chairs or heads of departments became deans.

The music department became part of the Faculty of Arts, since it was too small to exist as a stand-alone faculty and did not award its own degree. In 2001 the music major was added to the college's government-accredited BA degree, having been available only within education degrees until that time.

The old B.Ed. degree was superseded by a double degree, the B.A./B.Tch., in which music was also available. A college-wide degree restructuring was implemented in 2005, with music available as a major and as an expanded major (termed a specialization) in both the B.A. and B.A./B.Tch. degrees.

Significant growth in music enrollment could ultimately provide a basis for the establishment of a four-year B.Mus. degree and the emergence of a separate Faculty of Music.

Howard Fisher, Ph.D., is Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and Senior Lecturer in Geography at Avondale College

conductor of the Avondale Singers and Chamber Orchestra, and Senior Lecturer in voice and conducting, initiated and completed renovations of the voice studio and the choir room. Although the Music Hall had been enlarged since it had been built 80 years earlier, and been renovated in the 1990s, it included only three teaching studios; two classrooms, one of which was also used for rehearsals and recitals; three practice rooms; and a kitchenette.

Within two years, Dennis was presiding over a music program that had grown to include more general students. That growth, coupled with the needs of over 30 majors, the result of an increase that had started with the introduction of a music degree in 2001, plus the fact that there were only three practice rooms led to problems. Practice started early in the morning and continued late into the evening, creating a cascade of unrelenting sound heard all over the campus, much to the chagrin of other teachers and students.

When Greer Hall, a building near the Music Hall, was vacated in 2006, Dennis was able to secure all of it for department use, effectively doubling the space for music. Although some of the building had been used by music in an earlier time, more recently another department had occupied it.

Renovation of the annex, completed in 2007, provided a number of new practice rooms and, for the first time, a dedicated rehearsal and storage area for the Wind Ensemble and instrumental ensembles. Later that year, a music lab was outfitted with eight flat-screen computers, Korg keyboards, and Finale 2008 software. A new practice piano was purchased, and budgeting was established to add a piano a year until that area is totally updated.

Since that original purchase of four pianos for the new music building

in 1925, a number of other keyboard resources had been added, including grand pianos in key performing areas on campus and in the music studios, as well as upright pianos for practice and classroom use. In 2002, a new state-of-the-art digital organ was installed in the college church. The instrument, a Johannus Rembrandt 3900, was made possible by a grant from Orland and Joan Ogden and other donations secured through the efforts of Senior Lecturer in mathematics Wilf Pinchin. The instrument was provided and installed by a dealer in Australia.<sup>35</sup>

In his first year, Dennis formed The Promise, an eight-member vocal ensemble that enjoyed considerable success and toured extensively. He also joined with Clark in taking another European tour similar to those taken earlier.

The People's Messiah, a community sing-a-long of the *Messiah* that included the audience, Avondale Singers, the church choir, and soloists, along with the Avondale Orchestra, introduced by Thrift in the previous decade, was also presented again that year and the next. A taping of the event led to a DVD and an airing on the Hope Channel, 3ABN, and the Anglican Network in that and the following year.

Aleta King followed Dennis in 2012 as head of the music program. A multi-talented singer, violinist, pianist, and conductor, she has continued the choral performance traditions associated with AC, while personally frequently performing. In her training and education, she has excelled, completing a Bachelor of Arts with honors in 1995 from the Queensland Conservatorium and a Post Graduate Diploma of Education and Instrumental Education (strings) from the University of Queensland the following year.

She subsequently studied violin in London and music in Hungary under scholarship at the Liszt Academy's Kodály Institute, completing a Diploma of Music Pedagogy in 2003 and an Advanced Diploma of Choral Conducting in 2004. While in Europe she became a musical Director of the London Adventist Chorale, which under her direction performed for Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee Celebrations at Buckingham Palace in 2002.

On her return to Australia, she completed a Master of Music Studies in Choral Conducting and Musicianship at the University of Queensland in 2007. She also taught there from 2005 to 2011 and received Best Teacher nominations in her final year. She is presently enrolled in a Ph.D. program at UQ.

College enrollment had started to climb at the turn of the century and by 2005 exceeded 1000 for the first time. This past year (2015) it was about 1,500. Because of the increase in the size of the student body and a corresponding growth in the music program, several full and part time teachers assist in a full spectrum of music classes and lessons as well as a variety of ensembles.

More than a century has passed since Adventist pioneers, guided by Ellen White, established a school in rural Australia near the small village of Cooranbong. Today that community is a suburb in Lake Macquarie, a city of 400,000. That isolated and struggling school of fewer than 100 is now a robust college within an hour's drive of Sydney, a city of four million that provides many cultural opportunities.

There is enthusiasm about the future for music at Avondale and a justifiable pride in its music program. Music at Avondale claims a great tradition, one that today continues to

plan and work in a progressive way to build on that legacy with an eye to the future.

Dan Shultz/2016

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This brief summary introduction of Avondale College's founding is based on Milton Hook's centennial history *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*. A significant portion of this overview of music at the college is based on his narrative, which was printed in 1998 by the Avondale Academic Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Hook, 31,38,47; Review and Herald, obituary for Lacey, 25 January 1951; 1894 *Battle Creek College Calender*; IAMA website biography for Edwin Barnes.
- <sup>3</sup> Hook, 47,48, 61, 67,69; Although Hook refers to the group as a brass band in his book, the band in the photograph, which has a bass drum with the name Avondale Students Brass Band and the date 1908, includes two woodwind players. Jessie Creamer and her dates of service, 1899-1893 are listed in a Faculty Directory published in a history of Pacific Union College, which was printed in its 1957 yearbook, *Diogenes Lantern*.
- <sup>4</sup> Hook, 91-94, 101.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, 100-110, 120, 121.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 132, 133, 138.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 152, 153, 162.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 153, 171, 172.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 172
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, 163.
- <sup>11</sup> PUC work: Melvin S. Hill, Doctoral Dissertation, *A history of Music Education in SDA Western Colleges*, 1959, 77-79. WMC work: The school paper, *The Sligonian*, and yearbook, *Golden Memories*, 1937-1943. VOP Experience: Interviews, Wayne Hooper, 10,14 February 2005; Robert E. Edwards, *H.M.S. Richards*, Review and Herald Publishing, 1998, 193-198,201-205.
- <sup>12</sup> Hook, 205,206; Louise Crosdale, A paper presented for Research Seminar in Music on the choral tradition at Avondale College, 2 September 2003, 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Crosdale, 4-6.
- <sup>14</sup> Hook, 206; A faculty listing from *Hail Washington!*, a manuscript history of WMC's first forty years by Theofield Weis shows a one year overlap for Greer and Howard.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, 207,208.
- <sup>16</sup> Crosdale, 6.
- <sup>17</sup> Hook, 208, 209; Crosdale, 6,7.
- <sup>18</sup> Hazel McElhaney Greer, "On Tour with the Avondale Symphonic Choir," *The Youth's Instructor*, 11, 18, 25 March and 8 April 1952; W. G. Murdoch, "The Australasian Missionary College," *TYI*, 1 April 1952.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview, 13 March 2003, Ellsworth Judy, chair music department, 1953-1959, Atlantic Union College; Personal Knowledge.
- <sup>20</sup> Crosdale, Interview with Greer by Ian Wilmoth, *Avondale Far and Near*, May 1947, 4.
- <sup>21</sup> Personal Knowledge.
- <sup>22</sup> Crosdale, 12.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Thrift, Personal Resume and IAMA biography prepared by Dan Shultz in consultation with Thrift in 2007; Personal Knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> Hook, 247-255

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 277; Crosdale; 10.

<sup>27</sup> Crosdale, 9

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Hook, 277, 289-296, 301-303.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 281.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 304, 305,314, 315.

<sup>32</sup> Information about David Clark is drawn primarily from an IAMA biography written jointly by Clark and Dan Shultz in 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Hook, 277.

<sup>34</sup> Howard Fisher, notes provided in response to drafts of this overview, 3, 4, 6, 11-13 February 2008; Robb Dennis, *Music at Avondale College, 1990-2007*, a chronological summary prepared by Dennis, drawn from his personal knowledge and interviews with Alan Thrift, David Clark, and Sharon Tolhurst in October 2007. This and an IAMA website biography of Dennis and Aleta King, prepared in consultation with Shultz, are the primary sources for the rest of this overview.

<sup>35</sup> *Avondale Reflections*, December 2002; "New Organ No Longer a Pipe Dream," an article from an unknown source.

## Sources

**Milton Hook**, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, college centennial book, Avondale Academic Press, 1998

**Louise Crosdale**, *The History & Development of the Choral Tradition at Avondale College and its Role in the Music Department . . . A Research Seminar paper*, David Clark, teacher, 3 September 2003.

**Robb Dennis**, *Music at Avondale College, 1990-2007*, a chronological summary drawn from his personal knowledge and interviews with Alan Thrift, David Clark, and Sharon Tolhurst in October 2007. This was an important source in preparing this historical overview.

**Hazel McElhaney Greer and Norma R. Youngberg**, *Hymns at Heaven's Gate, The story of George Greer Choirmaster*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1974.

**Robert E. Edwards**, *H.M.S. Richards*, Review and Herald Publishing, 1998

## Conversations/Interviews/Email Exchanges

Ellsworth F. Judy, 13 March 2003 and Wayne Hooper, February 2005, both with Shultz; David Clark and Alan Thrift in February 2008 with Dennis; Howard Fisher, e-mail responses to drafts, 3, 4, 6, 11-13 February 2008.

## Other Sources

Hazel McElhaney Greer, "On tour with the Avondale Symphonic Choir," *The Youth's Instructor*, 11, 18, 25, March and 8 April 1952, W. G. Murdoch, "The Australasian Missionary College," 1 April 1952. Pacific Union College yearbook, *Diogenes Lantern*; Washington Missionary College newspaper *Sligonian* Clippings;

and Atlantic Union College newspaper *Lancastrian* clippings - all as specifically notated in the endnotes. Theofield Weis, *Hail Washington!*, manuscript history of Washington Missionary College, 1944, 1946.