



*The 1949-1961 King's Heralds quartet, with Voice of Prophecy speakers E.R. Walde and H.M.S. Richards
Left to Right: Jerry Dill, E.R. Walde, Bob Seamount, Wayne Hooper, H.M.S. Richards, and Bob Edwards*

Lift Up the Trumpet . . .

Music at the Voice of Prophecy

Dan Shultz

For most Adventists living in the middle of the 20th century, listening to the Voice of Prophecy weekly broadcast was an important ritual. Central to the success of that program, which featured a message by H.M.S. Richards speaking in his quiet, yet reassuring voice, was the resonant harmony of the King's Heralds quartet and the rich contralto voice of soloist Del Delker. A pioneer in radio evangelism, Richards within a decade of his first broadcast in 1929 hired a male quartet to sing gospel music. They would become an inseparable part of the program's identity and inspire the formation of numerous male quartets in Adventist schools. Music at the VOP would become an important part of the church's musical heritage in the 20th Century.

The singing of the King's Heralds male quartet echoed through the night, ricocheting off the snow-covered hills surrounding a small Pennsylvania

town, filling the frigid air on a "cold winter's night" with the warmth and love of the Christmas spirit. People came to their doors on hearing the music or commented on its beauty when they opened them to those of

us who were soliciting money for the charitable work of the church.

A half-century later, memories of the subzero weather and the sometimes-unpleasant experiences encountered in "ingathering" have faded. Yet

the vibrancy of those recorded Christmas carols, wafting from speakers mounted on the pastor's car, survives now as a vivid memory.

I didn't know it then, but I was hearing recordings of the quartet made during its most stable period, one that spanned twelve years without a change in its members. From 1949 to 1961, the singing of this quartet in its many recordings, along with the singing of Del Delker, who had joined the program earlier, became the sounds most familiar to those of us who listened to the Voice of Prophecy broadcasts or played their records.

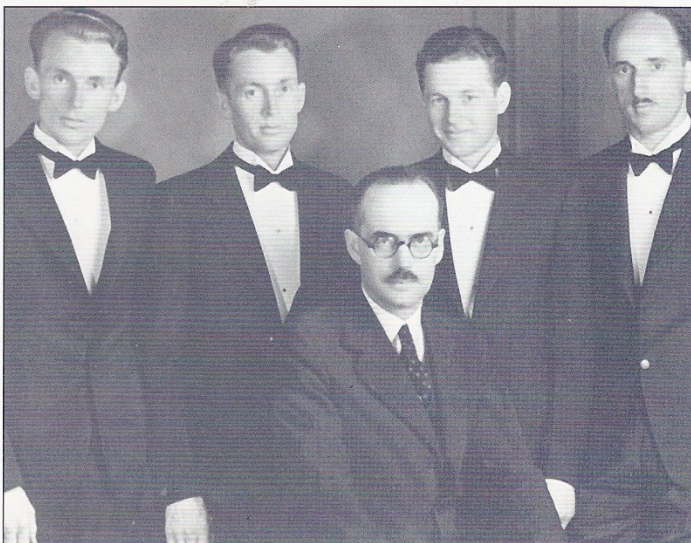
H.M.S. Richards, a successful West coast Adventist evangelist in the 1920's, began broadcasting on California radio stations in 1929, in addition to his ongoing work in tents and tabernacles. Rejecting the showy tactics of most radio evangelists of that time, he presented in his Bible Tabernacle of the Air a reasoned, biblically based message that appealed to the mind as well as the heart.

While conducting evangelistic meetings in Southern California in the following decade, Richards became acquainted with The Lone Star Four, a male quartet consisting of the three Crane brothers, Wesley, Waldo, and Louis, and Ray Turner, a basso profundo. They had formed their quartet in 1928, while students at Southwestern Junior College (now Southwestern Adventist University), in Texas, the heart of a cappella, male quartet gospel-singing.

Richards, impressed with their music and its effect on attendance

and the audiences in his meetings, hired them in 1936 to join the broadcast. The following year, he changed the program's name to the Voice of Prophecy and the quartet became The King's Heralds, a name suggested in response to an invitation to the radio audience to send in possibilities.

For many years, the broadcast opened with the quartet singing "Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring: Jesus is coming again" Hymns



The Lone Star Four and H.M.S. Richards

then continued as a major part of the presentation, interspersed throughout the program. Finally, following a reassuring encouragement by Richards to "Have faith, dear friend, in God," the quartet would sing a benediction, ending it with an amen.

Richards loved music and understood its power, often acknowledging that "Words set to music do what sermons can't." The quartet, which he affectionately referred to as "his boys," traveled with him wherever he went.

The VOP was still a West coast program as the 1940's started. In 1941, the Radio

Commission, a group formed earlier by the church's General Conference in Washington, D.C., voted at the Annual Council to have a national broadcast and chose the VOP to be that program.

Agreements were reached with the Mutual Broadcasting Company and on Sunday evening, January 4, 1942, four weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the program was heard coast to coast on 89 stations. Following the clarion call of the

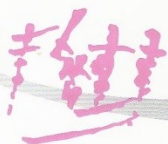
theme song by the King's Heralds, the announcer opened with, "Hello America!"

And America was ready. By the end of that year, the number of stations carrying the broadcast jumped to 225. In the month of October alone, 22,711 letters arrived at the studio. At a time of uncertainty and concern over the future, Richards' intimate, friendly voice, with its message of hope, and the impeccable singing of familiar gospel

hymns by the quartet provided reassurance when it was needed most.

In March 1943, Spanish and Portuguese versions of the program began to be broadcast in Central and South America on more than sixty stations. While speakers who were proficient in these languages replaced Richards, the quartet, with encouragement and coaching from the speakers for these programs, learned to sing in the new languages.

That linguistic versatility continued as the work of the VOP spread around the world, by the 1960's being carried on over 1300 stations in 30 languages. With use of the International Phonetic Alphabet



and assistance from language instructors, the quartet was able to sing in fifteen of these languages.

Yet another challenge

for the quartet during those years was the continuing change in quartet personnel. In 1943, the last of the Crane brothers left the group to be replaced by

Wayne Hooper. He and Bob Seamount, who had joined the group earlier, had sung in a quartet at La Sierra College (now La Sierra University) as students. Both men would become key persons in the group and in other aspects of the operation of the overall VOP program.

From the first, quartet members did more than sing. In the early years, Ray Turner, bass in the original group, for example, was unofficial manager of group. He cared for the car in their frequent travels and assisted in the studio by directing the broadcast. It was his responsibility to start and end the program on time, carefully pace it, and let Richards know how much time was left.

Seamount, who sang second tenor, had studied electronics before coming to the VOP. He introduced recording into the studio and then, in successive years, led in expanding and upgrading this aspect of the operation. When he left the quartet in 1961, 20 years after he had joined, he continued for a time as a recording technician in the studio.

Hooper, a baritone, had interrupted his studies in music to teach at

an academy in Portland, Oregon, in 1941. Two years later he became part of the quartet, continuing with them until 1947, when he left to complete a music degree at Union College.



George Greer

Beginning in 1943, the GC Radio Commission in Washington, D.C., attempted to make changes in the quartet's personnel and the music used in the broadcast. They voted to hire a trained musician who would reshape and coach the quartet and oversee its choices in music.



Lon C. Metcalfe

George Greer, an outstanding choral director at nearby Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College), who, with other trained musicians in the church had expressed concern to the commission about the VOP's heavy use of gospel music, was chosen for the task.

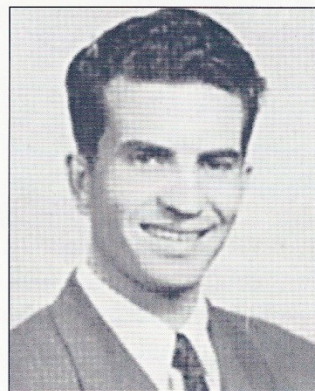
Despite the best of intentions, there were clashes from the start between Greer and the quartet and Richards. Greer believed the music should be similar to what he had used with his highly regarded choirs. Richards and the quartet believed that such a change would lessen the

broadcast's appeal to the audience they were trying to reach.

At one point, Greer, who had organized an a cappella choir on his own, succeeded in having it perform in the broadcast on two successive Sundays. The response from listeners was mixed, with half favoring the addition and half strongly opposing the change from the more intimate sound of the quartet.

From the start there were attempts to change the quartet personnel. When these changes led to conflict, the Commission became involved, criticizing the quartet and Richards for resisting Greer's suggestions in music and for personnel changes. In early 1947, they released three members of the quartet and, at one point, made a move to replace Richards because of his defense of these members.

Finally, in mid-1947, the situation became untenable and Greer left to accept a position as choir director at Avondale College in Australia. Lon Metcalfe, a highly respected choir director who had also sung in quartets, replaced him. Again, there were clashes, which led to his departure in 1949.



Wayne Hooper

Hooper, one of the three who had been released in 1947, had just completed his music degree at UC. While there as a student, he had assisted in the college program by teaching voice and

conducting some of the choral groups. He was invited to return to the VOP and agreed to do so with the understanding that he would form a new

quartet and have control over what it sang.

Hooper brought back Seamount, who had also been released in 1947, to sing second tenor, retained Bob Edwards as first tenor, moved Jerry Dill from baritone to bass, and placed himself as baritone. This ensemble, with its unique blend of voices, would sing together for the next twelve years and provide the sought-after stability.

Beyond that, their singing and choices in music, coupled with recent breakthroughs in sound recording and reproduction, would define the King's Herald sound for literally millions. The advent of long-playing vinyl records in 1948, tape recording in 1949, and, finally, stereo in 1958 enabled the quartet to release quality records which VOP listeners eagerly purchased.

Hooper would sing until 1962, when he became musical director of the broadcast. During his years with the VOP, he became famous for his composing and arranging talents. His vocal arrangements and song *We Have This Hope* are still widely used.

Del Delker, a gifted singer with a rich contralto voice, also benefited from these innovations in recording technology. Her recordings, like those of the quartet, would become part of the VOP musical image.

In 1947, two years before Hooper returned to form his quartet, Delker was invited to become part of the broadcast to work as a secretary and to sing. Although at first reluctant to accept the invitation, an offer she refused three times because she could not read music, she finally accepted.

Delker, arriving during the turmoil of the late 1940's, was not

readily accepted by the musicians and sang only infrequently. The situation was profoundly discouraging and she almost left.

Finally, Hooper, two years after he returned, began to use her regularly in the broadcasts as a soloist and with the quartet. Additionally, after the release of the quartet's first three records in 1950, she was featured on their fourth album, singing with them on two numbers and in a duet on a third. For Delker, it was a welcome



Del Delker

signal of full acceptance by the VOP musicians. She would subsequently sing on more than 70 records and CD's.

In 1953, she took a leave to complete a degree in religion. Following a year of study at Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) in Michigan, she returned to California to attend La Sierra College to be nearer VOP headquarters in nearby Glendale and occasionally record and assist in their work. She completed her degree in 1958.

From the start of her ministry at the VOP, her signature song was *The Love of God*. Both the message and the inspiring quality of her voice in

singing it have touched countless listeners.

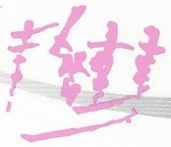
Prior to the availability of tape recording, the weekly broadcast, which had been relegated to Sunday morning by the network, was done twice, at 6:30 a.m. for the Eastern and Central time zones, and at 8:30 for states in the Mountain and Pacific zones. When a new VOP building was constructed in 1950, the studios were equipped with professional tape recorders, a recent innovation in recording technology. Even though live broadcasting continued into the 1950's, some of the program was now prerecorded.

From the beginning of his work as an evangelist, Richards had traveled extensively. This intensified as the radio program started and then flourished. He was joined in these trips by the quartet when it was added in 1936. When the program became a nationwide success, the travels widened to include the whole country, mostly during summer camp meetings.

It was a grueling schedule with long drives, last minute arrivals when delays occurred along the way, constant performing, and extended visiting following meetings. In 1957 two groups were formed to relieve some of the pressure and respond to the increasing number of requests for a visit by the VOP.

The "A" group consisted of H.M.S. Richards and the quartet. The "B" group at first included J. Orville Iverson and later H.M.S Richards, Jr., assisted by Del Delker and VOP organist and pianist Brad and Olive Braley. It was not unusual for each of these groups to travel over 12,000 miles a year.

In 1967, at the request of H.M.S.



Richards, Jr., a group of three young singers called the Wedgewood joined the "B" group, along with Delker. She would later recall the tours that summer as an enjoyable experience, noting the effectiveness of that group's bluegrass style of playing and singing in reaching the young.

Delker's travels were not just limited to the "B" group. There were also numerous performances on the road with H.M.S. Richards and the quartet.

Studio organists through the years included Irving Steinel, Elmer Digneo, Al Avilla, Beth Thurston, Bradford Braley, and Calvin Taylor. Braley and his wife, Olive, a pianist, would work a record nineteen years for the VOP. Taylor was the most highly trained of this group, having completed a master's degree in organ under full scholarship at the University of Michigan. He followed Braley and played until 1975, when he left to pursue a concert career.

His successor, Jim Teel, an accomplished pianist and skilled arranger with a master's degree in music from the University of Arizona, was a natural musician who could both read music and improvise by ear. For the next seven years he worked closely with the quartet and Delker as accompanist and also as a soloist.

Seamount was the first in the Hooper quartet to leave, to be replaced by John Thurber in 1961. The following year, when both



The "B" Group: H.M.S. Richards, Olive and Brad Braley, Del Delker

Hooper and Dill left, Jack Veazey, baritone, and Jim McClintock, bass, both of whom had sung with Thurber at Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University), joined the quartet. This group, which like its immediate predecessor was held in high esteem, sang together for the next five years.

Wayne Hooper, now serving as VOP Director of Music programming, also formed and directed a six-member group known as the Hymnsingers, which performed on the broadcast. The ensemble included the quartet, Delker, and Maurita Phillips Thornburgh, a noted soprano who resided in the area.

Additional changes in the quartet would continue until 1982, when its association with the VOP ended. By that time, Del Delker, who had worked with the King's Heralds for over 30 years, had sung with twelve different combinations in quartet personnel.

From the start of his association with the quartet in the 1940's, Hooper had quietly influenced it to expand its repertoire to include hymns as well as gospel music. When he had returned to the VOP in 1949 to form his quartet and choose and arrange its music and later, when he became musical director, that interest in choosing an eclectic sampling of sacred music continued. Following his retirement in 1980, he played a leading role in producing the new church hymnal released in 1985.

In 1969, when H.M.S. Richards had retired at age 75, his son was chosen to succeed him. An accomplished musician, the younger



The Hymnsingers: Bob Edwards, Jim McClintock, Jack Veasey, John Thurber, Del Delker, Maurita Phillips

Richards valued his musicians and often would let them fill at least half of the time allotted to the VOP group at campmeetings. On occasion he would join in the spontaneous impromptu music-making that would occur while traveling.

Unfortunately, he followed his father at a time when radio audiences were changing, due in part to the impact of television. By the late 1950's, more and more families were tuning in to this newer medium.

At the same time, the introduction of transistors made portable radios possible and improved the quality of car radios. Increasingly, persons traveling in cars were the new audience. The proliferation of radio stations and growing number of static-free stereo FM radio broadcasts created more options - and the likelihood of listeners' changing stations if a program didn't appeal to them.

By the end of the 1960's, many radio stations were targeting groups with diverse musical tastes and interests. Half-hour broadcasts with speakers and music were being relegated to religious broadcast stations, or placed at low-audience, overpriced time slots on traditional stations. Eventually, by the turn of the century, programs like the VOP were more likely to be found only on Christian broadcast networks or stations.

The need arose for 30-second and one minute spots, or two-, five-, or 15-minute programs which could state the message and not lose the audience. The younger Richards embraced this reality and moves were made in that direction, with some success. The musical requirements for this kind of programming were minimal. Also, during these same years, musical tastes were rapidly shifting to a preference for the amplified sounds of contemporary music.

Budgeting problems created by these and other changes led the Media Center Board, by now the governing group for all national Adventist media efforts, to release the quartet and Teel in 1982. While Del Delker was

retained, she was upset by the decision and protested, to no avail.

The 1982 action signaled the end of an era. The quartet continued as an independent entity, known as the Heralds. Later, when the VOP inadvertently let the copyright on the King's Heralds name expire, the quartet appropriated and used it, though they have not been affiliated with the VOP since 1982. They still perform today, appearing often at religious gatherings and conventions of the Adventist church and other denominations.

Delker continued to sing, accompanied by Hugh Martin, noted show business composer who had become an Adventist late in life, Janice Wright, Phil Draper and others. Although she and Edwards retired in 1990, she continued to sing and work on behalf of the VOP and Edwards continued to write for the broadcast. Most recently, she and Hooper traveled with VOP groups to Adventist colleges and universities in 2004 to join with campus musicians in celebrating the VOP's 75th anniversary.

As a new century begins, the VOP mission is being accomplished through spots and fifteen-minute daily and half-hour weekend programs.

Lonnie Melashenko, a talented musician, became speaker in 1992 and director of the program in 1993, when H.M.S. Richards, Jr., retired. Despite his background and support for music, today's programs are of necessity produced with a limited amount of music. A male chorus directed by

Calvin Knipschild is often featured, as well as recordings by a variety of contemporary Christian music artists.

At its peak, the Voice of Prophecy, with its skillful mix of music and message, was the church's largest and most effective outreach program. Through those and subsequent years, the radio industry has recognized both the quality of the broadcast and its music with praise and awards. As gratifying as this recognition has been, however, the program's most important accomplishment, then and now, has been its effectiveness in presenting the gospel to millions around the globe.

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