

George Lynn Centenary Celebration

Written by Christina Lynn-Craig, D.M.A.

“Who can speak of the extent to which one man can influence so many young men and women? Who can measure the challenge given by an individual for whom satisfaction is the symptom of stagnation and intellectual death? Who can measure the respect commanded by one who always expects us to be better than our best? And who can presume to find words sufficient to fully express our thanks—for everything—to Dr. George Lynn.”

Quote from the 1969 “Quadrangle” WCC Yearbook

Hearing Westminster Choir was a life changing experience for George Lynn. The lessons he learned from Dr. John Finley Williamson and the experiences he had as a student at Westminster Choir College informed the rest of his life as an organist, conductor, teacher and composer. The Westminster “sound” was something he took with him and was the way he built his choirs wherever he went. Returning to Westminster to become the music director was a huge responsibility and a great honor. Those of you who were his students in the 1960s helped him to fulfill the promises he made to Dr. Williamson: to awaken a passion for choral music in others and to thrill audiences all across the country.

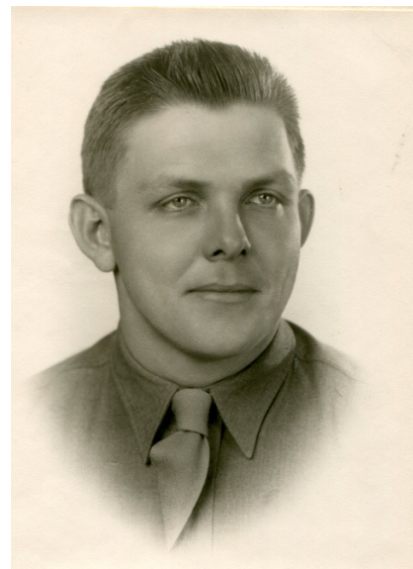
George Lynn (1915-1989) was born near Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania to parents who emigrated from Sweden. He was the eighth of eight children which made him an uncle at the time of his birth, something he always found amusing. He grew up listening to Swedish folksongs that his mother sang as she accompanied herself on the guitar, and the music he heard at the Swedish Lutheran Church. At age twelve he became the organist at that church and liked to tell the story about learning to transpose so that he could play the hymns in whatever key his father was singing them on a given Sunday. He studied piano and organ at the Wyoming Seminary in Wilkes-Barre.



George, Anna and Charles Lynn



George Lynn in 1933



George Lynn in 1944

He graduated from Carson Long Military Academy in 1933 and enrolled in Mansfield State Teachers College. After hearing Westminster Choir, he decided to transfer to Westminster Choir College so that he could learn from John Finley Williamson. While there he studied composition with Roy Harris, organ with Carl Weinrich and conducting with Paul Boepple and Dr. Williamson. He received the Bachelor of Music degree in 1938. The commencement program from that year lists only nineteen members in the graduating class and five receiving Masters of Music. That same year he won second prize in a competition at the World's Fair for his original work "Hem and Haw".

While a student at Westminster, he was appointed minister of music at the Presbyterian Church of Upper Montclair. He founded two community choirs and was very active in the musical life of the community. He continued to compose and had his works performed on Works Project Administration (WPA) programs in New York City.

He accepted the minister of music position at First Methodist Church in Pasadena California in January of 1940. The church boasted a choir of ninety voices, church membership of 4,000 and a four manual organ. He was responsible for preparation and conducting of large works. During this time he invited Dr. Williamson to adjudicate mass choir festivals and engaged Carl Weinrich to perform recitals at the church. A series of fifteen vesper services took place every other week from October 1941 – May 1942. They were designed for worship through music and included a wide variety of music, from recitals to cantatas.

It was an exciting time which included many modern music concerts in which his compositions were heard. "The Gettysburg Address" was premiered in May of 1942 in a piano/organ version. The work was later orchestrated and performed by the American Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski, and the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy and other orchestras.

Private George Lynn continued to be a minister of music during his service in the Army during WWII. He was sent to the 42nd Artillery Division at Camp Gruber in Oklahoma, where he organized and directed a GI chorus of eighty voices which rehearsed after duty hours. It was a morale builder for recruits who liked to sing and to the audience as well. The "Rainbow Division" Artillery went to the European theater in January of 1945. He was assigned to the chaplain's corps. A fellow chaplain's assistant, Jim Magee, said that, "The work of the chaplain was visiting the many units spread throughout Austria and ministering to their spiritual needs. George often found a piano and played for the men. In every town we passed through George would check the church organ. It was always a pleasure to be with George. He was ready to talk on any musical subject from German lieder to Mother MacCree. I think he really liked to hear me sing the Irish songs."

Here is an excerpt from an article previewing a program to be presented on January 25, 1944 in Muskogee, Oklahoma:

"The choir is the outgrowth of four or five men in artillery headquarters who used to meet now and then to growl out some old favorites. Their barracks mates invited them to sing elsewhere, and the choir moved to the chapel. Since then it has grown into an organization of more than 80 members. The men sing without accompaniment. Organized early in October, 1943, the leader of the group is Private George Lynn, who before entering the army was a chorus master in Pasadena, California. Lynn is six feet tall, weighs 230 pounds, a Swede who looks it, and otherwise looks like someone who should be carrying a football rather than a baton."



42nd Artillery "Rainbow" Division Choir in Oklahoma. 1944

After the war, he took advantage of the GI Bill and returned to New Jersey to study composition with Randall Thompson at Princeton University. He taught and conducted at Colorado College in the summer of 1947 after receiving his MFA in Music from Princeton in June of 1947. He returned to Westminster in the fall of 1947 as a member of the voice faculty, conductor of the 70-voice Chapel Choir and head of the conducting department.



*John Finley Williamson and George Lynn in white jackets.
Other luminaries including William Schuman, Aaron Copland and Roy Harris.*

He collaborated with Joseph Kerman, a fellow graduate student at Princeton, to present what is believed to be the first all-Schütz concert in the United States on May 5, 1948, with George Lynn conducting the Chapel Choir.

In 1950, he moved to Colorado and taught at the University of Colorado-Boulder for two years, conducting the University and Modern Choirs, and team-teaching a Freshman Humanities course. After this, he served as minister of music for some of the largest churches in Denver, composed and maintained a large private voice studio. He met people who would become lifelong friends and important collaborators, including the children's poet Aileen Fisher, classics professor Donald Sutherland and composer Cecil Effinger. He renewed his friendship with Saul Caston, the former principal trumpet with the Philadelphia Orchestra who became the conductor of the Denver Symphony. Maestro Caston programmed several of Lynn's large works and collaborated with him on works which required a chorus. In 1959 he received an honorary L.L.D. from Harding College upon the occasion of the premiere of his "Sacred Symphony" for unaccompanied voices.

In 1962, George Lynn and his friend Thomas Zook (1931-1971) founded Golden Music to publish music for John Finley Williamson's summer school at Denver University in 1963. The company was run successfully by the Lynn family for 28 years and gave life to over one hundred choral selections, two organ pieces and one vocal solo. The high quality of the music published was a source of pride to Lynn. He published compositions by colleagues at Westminster Choir College including Paul Boepple, Lee Hastings Bristol, Jr., Roy Harris, David Hugh Jones, Warren Martin, Mathilde McKinney, Gilbert Martin, Carl Weinrich and David Stanley York, and by Colorado composers including Max DiJulio, Cecil Effinger, and Normand Lockwood. Lynn's compositions, arrangements and editions were also published by Theodore Presser, G. Schirmer, and several others.

In 1990, Lucile Lynn sold Golden Music Publishers. It has gone through several companies, with publications now available through Fred Bock Publishers under the auspices of Hal Leonard. Some choral pieces that have gone out of print may be republished by Legacy Music Publishers along with organ music, chamber music and music for solo voice.

In 1963 he returned to Westminster Choir College to become Music Director of the college. Under his direction, the Westminster Choir appeared in concerts across the United States with Columbia Artist Management, and the Symphonic Choir appeared with the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the American Symphony under such conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Ormandy, Herbert von Karajan and Sir Arthur Bliss.



WCC publicity photo



Lorna, Lucile, George and Christina Lynn



WCC publicity photo

While his tenure at Westminster was not as long as that of many other directors, his connection with the school was extraordinary. He graduated from the school, and taught in the voice, conducting, and organ departments. He served as assistant to John Finley Williamson when Dr. Williamson was president of the school. He conducted the Chapel, Symphonic, Westminster, Graduate and Oratorio choirs. He was a presence on the campus in the 1930s, the 1940s and the 1960s.



With Leopold Stokowski



With Leonard Bernstein

In 1969 Lynn returned to Denver, Colorado, in order to devote more time to composition. He was Visiting Composer in Residence at the University of New Mexico in 1971, and was the choral conductor at the Colorado School of Mines and at Loretto Heights College (where he also taught voice and organ) from 1971 to 1986. He continued to serve as a minister of music at First Plymouth Congregational Church and the Broadmoor Community Church and to maintain a large private voice studio.

He carried on the Westminster tradition of Summer Vocal Camps from 1970-1979 by establishing a program at Ghost Ranch (in Abiquiu, New Mexico). Choir directors and the high school singers they brought with them loved the beautiful surroundings and the excitement of becoming a great choir in only two weeks. He was delighted when WCC alums and colleagues would come by to see him in Colorado or reconnect at Ghost Ranch. He was so proud of all of “his kids” from WCC and enjoyed receiving letters and church bulletins from them. Being commissioned to compose a piece for his former students’ choirs and then coming out to conduct the work was both an honor and a joy.



With Kenneth Davis, Jr.



With Robert Carwithen

He couldn't seem to stay retired. He accepted the position as Visiting Professor of Choral Music at Rice University in Houston Texas for the academic year 1986-87. From May 1987 until March 1989 he was finally able to enjoy being retired and having the freedom to compose at least five hours a day. He literally composed until the day he died. He is survived by his children Eric Lynn, Christina Lynn-Craig and Lorna Lynn; his grandchildren Courtney Lynn Kelly, Anna and Jacob Lynn-Palevsky; and his great-grandchildren Chloe and Molly Kelly.

His wife Lucile kept wonderful records of correspondence and organized his many compositions. She made sure that all of his compositions would be preserved for future generations to explore. She catalogued them and donated them to the American Music Research Center (AMRC) at the University of Colorado on the Boulder Campus. The complete listing is available online. Work is being done to make the process of searching through the archive easier, and the George Lynn webpage associated with the archive is being expanded in advance of the Lynn Centenary Celebration at CU-Boulder this October.

His works include approximately 800 choral works, (over 200 of these were published), 4 masses, 3 sacred symphonies, and 23 extended choral compositions. He also wrote 283 songs, approximately 300 organ pieces, 4 piano sonatas, 16 extended piano suites, 196 piano pieces, 3 symphonies, a symphonic suite, 2 overtures, 2 operas, 3 choral-orchestral works, works for chamber orchestra, 5 string quartets and other chamber music. His orchestral works have been performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the American Symphony, the Denver Symphony, the Ft. Collins Symphony, the Madison Chamber Orchestra, and the Manila Symphony. George Lynn was a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), and from 1960 on was an annual recipient of their Standard Music Award

Help keep his music and his teaching alive by performing one of his works this year. The Centenary Challenge Flyer contains information you need to be a part of this event. Please contact the AMRC so that your performance will be counted toward the goal of 100 performances in 2015. Everything counts: recitals, anthems in worship services, or pieces performed in community choral concerts.



Rehearsal at Lincoln Center 1968

"What we are holding in our hands is just paper and ink...it is NOT MUSIC! Music is what we make together."

George Lynn

Thank you for giving George Lynn better than your best during your years at Westminster Choir College and for remembering the challenge that he gave you to venture out and become the wonderful musicians, teachers and people that you became.

George Lynn's legacy is his music.



Chimney Rock at Ghost Ranch