

Chiff Chat

The Newsletter of the Lincoln Chapter of the American Guild of Organists



October 2011

Volume 81 No. 9



In Memory of Burns Smith Davis

Burns Smith Davis, 63, Lincoln, died unexpectedly at home Sept. 8, 2011. She was born Bonnie Jill Reimer to Barney J. and Martha Louise Smith Reimer on Nov. 13, 1947 in Enid, Okla. Burns later took her first and last names from beloved and influential piano teachers. She received a Bachelor of Music and, in 1972, a Master of Library Science from the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

She held library jobs at the University of Arkansas, for the library system of Yakima, Wash., and Red Bluff, Calif. She earned an M.S. in Botany in Yakima. Burns was also a certified Nursing Home Administrator in Cupertino, Calif. where she was active with a ragtime piano group and Festival. In Los Gatos, Calif., she expanded her career to include Business Consulting and Design. Burns came to Lincoln to join the State Library Commission and developed Davis Business Systems.

In 1998, she attended the Myotherapy Institute to become a massage therapist and quickly became known for her gifted skills. Her business name, Ehaweh Arts, honored an Indian great grandmother known as a healer in Oklahoma.

Burns was an accomplished ragtime musician and presented annually at the Ragtime to Riches Festival in Omaha. She was substitute organist at St. Marks Episcopal, St. David's Episcopal, St. Paul's UMC, St. Pauls UCC, and was organist for a time at Trinity UMC. In 2000, she returned to the Central Christian Church in Enid, where she interned on the pipe organ while at Phillips U., and played a Fathers Day concert.

She was the current Dean of the Lincoln Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. She studied with Mary Murrell Faulkner and at St. Cecelia's in Omaha with Marie Rubeus Bauer on the Pasi organ. She was preparing an October concert on the pump organ at St. Pauls UMC. She sang in St. Marks on Campus choir and in the High Holy Days Choir at South Street Temple. She recently converted to Judaism and was a cantorial soloist.

Music and healing were at the core of Burns' life. She was a renaissance woman known for her wit, broad analytical intelligence, commitment to personal growth, support of many communities, dependability, kindness, love of animals and nature and all things refined and beautiful.

Survivors: sister, husband, Elaine and John Zook; nephew, wife, Jody and Louise Zook; a host of dear friends; animal companions, Simon and Peter. She was preceded in death by her parents; and her Shih-tzu companion, Ernie.



**Burns Davis, CAGO
1947-2011**



Mission Statement: The purpose of the Lincoln Chapter of the American Guild of Organists is to promote the organ in its historic and evolving roles, to encourage excellence in the performance of organ and choral music, and to provide a forum for mutual support, inspiration, education, and certification of Guild members in the city of Lincoln and surrounding areas.

—adopted January 12, 2009

Executive Committee

Dr. Stacie Lightner, AAGO –
Dean

Sinda Dux—Secretary

Bob Craig —Treasurer

J. Gordon Christensen, SPC,
CAGO, AAGO

Darrell Fluehr

Jim Hejduk

Willa Foster Jones

Tom Trenney

Newsletter Editor:
Rosemary Paul



A Note from the Dean ~ Dr. Stacie Lightner, AAGO

Next Chapter Meeting: October 10, 2011

Potluck: 6:00 p.m.

Meeting: 7:00 p.m.

Nancy Forst Williamson will offer an introduction to Alexander Technique, a method for improving our everyday activities like sitting, standing, lifting. The goal is to eliminate tension and create efficient movement, so this will surely help us with our organ technique! The method is especially beneficial to people with carpal tunnel syndrome and repetitive stress injuries. We won't be crawling around on the floor or standing on our heads or anything like that. What we will think about is how to move in a relaxed and comfortable way, whether making music or performing everyday tasks.

Please note: The 2012 meeting dates as listed in the membership directory are incorrect. Please accept our apologies for the mistake. Here are the correct dates:

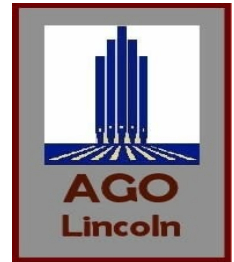
January 10 at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church: Instant Voluntaries

February 13 at Westminster Presbyterian Church: Student Recital

March 12 at First Christian Church: Intro to Italian Organ Music

April 22 at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Fremont: Choral Concert

(joint meeting with Omaha Chapter.)



Lincoln Organ Showcase

October 16, 2011

3:00 pm

Kraig Scott, Organist

College View Seventh Day Adventist Church

4801 Prescott Avenue, Lincoln

In Cooperation with Union College

Info: Chris Marks

(402) 472-2980 (402) 472-2980



Abendmusik:Lincoln

October 17, 2011

7:30 pm

**A Festival of Hymns led by
the St. Olaf Cantorei**

First-Plymouth Church

20th & D Streets, Lincoln

Info: Jeremy Bankson

(402) 476-9933 (402) 476-9933

www.agolincoln.com

AGO Education



Members of both the Lincoln and Omaha Chapters of the AGO have recently become aware of AGO chapters in Central and West Central Nebraska that have been disbanded. The purpose of this article is to brief membership on both the Central Nebraska Chapter and the North Platte Regional Chapter.

The Central Nebraska Chapter included membership representing the rather large geographic area in Central Nebraska, anchored by membership from Hastings, Grand Island, Kearney, and Holdrege. It offered remarkable influence and leadership throughout the area, an influence that continues to this day even though the chapter was disbanded in the late 1970's.

Among the strengths of the Central Nebraska Chapter was the influence of the department of music at Hastings College, chaired by Dr. Hayes M. Fuhr, director of music for five decades until his retirement in 1961. Dr. Fuhr cultivated a profound sense of the importance of quality music in worship, and developed a curriculum at Hastings College that was heartily supported by the AGO. By the late 1950's, Dr. Fuhr had assembled a remarkable music staff, including Dr. Warren Scharf and his wife, Dr. Margaret Rickard Scharf, each holding DMA degrees and Performance certificates in organ from Eastman School of Music; Dr. Elinore Louise Barber, who holds a Ph. D. in musicology from the University of Michigan, is a recognized Bach scholar, and was a personal friend of Dr. Albert Schweitzer; and Dr. James Tallis, whose remarkable skills as an organist are still discussed among those who heard him play at First Presbyterian Church.

The Central Nebraska Chapter hosted the 1963 Regional Convention of the AGO. Not surprisingly, it was headquartered in Hastings, in part because of the presence of a student chapter of the AGO present on the Hastings College campus that boasted more than a dozen student members who helped with the logistics of the convention. The convention featured several organs in the area, including three that continue to be significant and important organs that had been installed in the 1950's: a Moller in First Presbyterian Church in Grand Island; a Holtkamp in Trinity Lutheran Church in Grand Island; and an Austin in First Presbyterian Church in Hastings. Additional organs for the convention included a Reuter in Perkins Recital Hall on the Hastings College campus as well as a vintage E. M. Skinner in French Memorial Chapel, also on the Hastings campus. Unfortunately, this organ was discarded, salvaged in part by the Holdrege based Vaughan Organ Company, and a Hastings sound technician.

For years prior to the convention and following the 1963 convention, the Central Nebraska Chapter hosted many major organists in concert, including Catherine Crozier, Wilma Jensen, David Craighead, Jan Oskar Bender, and later, Clyde Holloway among others. New key leadership did not emerge in the late sixties, membership gradually declined, and the chapter was disbanded. Some memberships were transferred to the Lincoln Chapter, some to the North Platte Area Chapter, and some to the Northern Colorado Chapter, based in Fort Collins.

The North Platte area also hosted a chapter of the guild, with leadership from among parish organists, priests and pastors in the area. While small, it scheduled regular programs of value to parish musicians, and occasionally hosted workshops for area organists, hymn festivals, and recitals. It too has been disbanded, with its membership transferred to the Lincoln Chapter.



This is a word from the chapter's education chairman. Yes, this is a promotion article for members to consider earning one of the certificates offered by the American Guild of Organists. Those letters behind your name positively announce your credentials to everyone who sees them.

Uncertain about repertoire? Unsure of improvisation? Does transposition baffle you? Sight reading an issue? Intimidated by the requirement to play the exam on an otherwise unfamiliar organ? There are several ways your fellow chapter members can help you with preparation for certification by answering these questions and giving applicants guidance. The first way, mentioned in last month's news letter, is the one-on-one lesson or mentoring session. Allow me to suggest another option. Read on.

Would it be of value to anyone if the chapter scheduled a specific day, time, and site for a "workshop" deliberately focused on certification preparation, especially the SPC, CAGO and ChM requirements? Such a scheduled workshop could offer mentoring in any or all aspects of the requirement or other needs relevant to the process members may have. If this one-day mentoring "workshop" could be of value to you as you consider earning a certificate, would you email me at mrc@chase3000.com, please?

Dr. Christensen, Education Chairman

Soli Deo Gloria



In Recital...

J. Gordon Christensen, AAGO, will present an organ recital on Sunday, November 6th at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Council Bluffs. The recital will begin at 3:00 P.M. followed by a reception.

Dr. Christensen's recital is the first of a five event liturgical music series sponsored by St. Paul's Lutheran Church during the 2011-2012 season. Included in the series is a "Service of Nine Lessons and Carols" on December 18; a concert by the Des Moines based Heartland Youth Choir under the direction of Barbara Sletto on March 3, 2012; the performance of a commissioned skit "A Day in the Life of J. S. Bach" on March 21; and a series of six Lenten organ recitals presented at noon on Wednesdays during Lent, including John Friesen, Claire Roehrkasse Eason, Carla Post, Charles Cohen, and one yet to be confirmed.

Dr. Christensen's recital will include compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Dietrich Leyding, Cesar Franck, Jan Oskar Bender, and Louis Vierne. The recital and reception are free of charge open to the public.

Upcoming Events:

Abendmusik:Lincoln

November 6, 2011

4:00 p.m.

Dona Nobis Pacem: A Tribute to our Veterans

First-Plymouth Church

20th & D Streets, Lincoln

Info: Jeremy Bankson

(402) 476-9933 (402) 476-9933



Lincoln AGO Chapter

November 14, 2011

6:00 p.m. ~ Pot Luck

7:00 p.m. ~ Program

Member's Recital

Redeemer Lutheran Church

519 S. 33rd Street, Lincoln

Info: Stacie Lightner

402-223-9188 402-223-9188



Dr. Stacie Lightner, AAGO
AGO —Lincoln Chapter
1016 N. 13th Street
Beatrice, NE 68310

Eulogy for Burns Smith Davis
Rabbi Craig Lewis
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, The South Street Temple
Lincoln, NE
Wednesday, September 14, 2011

You can learn a lot about a person by the stories that people tell about them. This may be no truer of anyone than it is of Burns. She was not the kind to brag or go on talking about herself, so it is really through the stories and the praise that others bestow upon her that help us get to know the wonderful person who Burns Davis was. In the days since her untimely death, friends and family have been sharing their Burns stories. Many of them are fascinating. Some are surprising. And a few of them are just plain wild. Each and every story is uniquely Burns and is but a note in the symphony which was her life. And what a life it was.

Perhaps no story describes her better than this vignette shared by Nathaniel, one of her fellow choir members here at the Temple. He told how Burns and he used to be the only tenors, and together they lamented how Jewish music always seems to end with minor notes. He explained that the two of them shared what is known as the Piccardy third, which means in harmonizing, they determined whether a note was major or minor. Finding the string of minor note endings to be rather depressing, they took it upon themselves to rebel. Knowing that they controlled the fate of the music, committing an act that can only be described as mischief, and effectively altering the entire history of the Jewish experience, they changed many endings from minor to major.

This story is quintessential Burns. I say that because so much of her is revealed in its details. First and foremost, she enjoyed spending time with close friends, especially people who shared similar interests. As evidence of this, there was the recent Squirrel Darby, an event planned by Burns and held posthumously in her honor. At this event, it was clear that her circle of friends was as eclectic and as wonderful as she was.

Second, Burns had magnificent talent. She was skilled and knowledgeable in many facets of music. She composed, she performed, she sang, and she was a leader in the local organist guild. She was respected among the top musicians in the Lincoln area.

Third, she had a fun-loving and often daring side, and not everyone got to see this. This side of her could manifest itself in innocent mischief like the Piccardy third, and it also shone through when she insisted on trying new and adventurous forms of exercise, often risking her own health and safety in the process. Neither bicycle crash nor rollerblade spill could stop her. "It's ok. You'll fix me," she liked to say to her therapist friends. And then she would be back up on the rollerblades or even on a unicycle.

Fourth and lastly, the story of the Piccardy third is so Burns because it demonstrates how she liked to take things that were down and to lift them up. This trait was not only reserved for the depressing music of the Jewish holidays. She also applied it in her personal and professional life. Burns was a supportive and trustworthy friend, always ready to offer words of encouragement. She was a gifted healer,

constantly learning and practicing new massage therapies, in a continual effort to improve her clients' lives. She did this for the love of helping people, often giving her services pro bono or with steep discounts. She did this just because she sensed it was the right thing to do. Helping people was her ultimate reward, and in fact she was known to conclude all of her sessions by saying "Thank you" before a client could even sit up or have a chance to speak themselves. But it was not only people who benefitted from Burns's kindness and passion for helping. She was also a great friend to animals, offering them therapy with her gifted hands and supporting the local animal shelter. And, I am told, to be one of Burns' pets was to know incredible luxury receiving fresh, home cooked meals every night.

Indeed, Burns had a gift for taking the minor notes and making them major. She did this for others without blinking, but the truth is, this behavior, living in the Piccardy third was something she also did for herself. In many ways, Burns was like biblical Miriam. First and foremost, the sister of Moses was known for leading the Israelites in song and dance. But she was also involved in the first known prayer healing. When she was struck with a terrible skin infection, Moses called out, "El na refa na la. Pray God please heal her." These words which brought healing to Miriam have since been used to ask God for healing upon others. In the process of being healed herself, Miriam and all of us learned how to bring healing to others. Burns led her life in a similar fashion, treating her own pain and thus learning how to care for others.

Burns's story begins on November 13, 1947. Parents Barney J. and Martha Louise Smith Reimer welcomed daughter Bonnie Jill (that's Burns by the way) into world and into their home in Enid, Oklahoma. When Burns was very young, her father was an army airplane mechanic. Her mom, during those formative years spent her time as a homemaker. In the midst of moving from time to time as army families often do, Burns and her mother developed a very close relationship, forging a bond that was described as almost psychic. To say that Burns as a little girl was precocious is an understatement. I am told there is a photo of Burns, in diapers reaching up to the piano and actually playing it.

Beyond her musical ability, she also had natural intelligence. An aunt who was a teacher gave Burns an intelligence test. I am sure it surprises nobody that Burns tested well into the genius range. Her genius extended well beyond music and academics. She also had great emotional intelligence. The greatest beneficiary of this emotional gift was her sister Elaine. When Burns was 5, Barney and Martha brought home her baby sister. The two girls, though separated by age, became very close. They even had special nicknames. Elaine called Burns, "Sissy," and Burns returned this affection by calling her sister by the loving name, "Shorty." Elaine remembers Burns's tenderness and her magical healing touch

that she had even in her teens. One night, as adolescent Elaine was experiencing growth pains, Burns came home early from a date so she could rock her little sister to sleep. Even at this early stage of life we see the depth of caring and emotional maturity that were so natural to Burns.

This maturity and the sisters' bond would be tested as their beloved mother died young. Elaine was only 16 and Burns was away at college. Burns took her teenage sister under her wing, sticking up for her when she needed help, protecting her when she needed protection. Elaine describes with much gratitude the way her older sister looked out for her in that sad and frightening time.

Despite the loss and her responsibilities at home, Burns went on to complete her college education. And by the way, Burns was an outstanding student. I am sure that it surprises no one here that she once tested as a certified genius. She received a Bachelor's degree in music from the University of Oklahoma and continued her studies earning a masters in library science. She then embarked on a career that would take her out of Oklahoma. A few years later, Burns found herself in Yakima, Washington. While there, her thirst for knowledge was insatiable. While working for the library system, she earned a Master's degree in botany. Soon after, her life brought her to Northern California where she changed careers, finding a job that called on her wisdom, her caring, and her desire to bring comfort and healing to others. She became a certified Nursing Home Administrator. Later she would change jobs again, becoming a business consultant in Silicon Valley.

During this time, Burns maintained her passion for music, practicing as much as she could and was known to stuff pillows into her piano so she would not bother the neighbors. She was in a successful ragtime band and took part in numerous festivals. She also had a penchant for the theatrical, traveling around the Northeast, entertaining audiences with a portrayal of the poet Willa Cather. Meanwhile, Burns stayed devoted to family, finding the time to driving three days to Oklahoma to sit at her sister's bedside as she recovered from a surgery. She also worked hard, across the miles, to forge a strong relationship with her brother-in-law John and her nephew Jodie whose college graduation she made a point of attending, squeezing it in between organ playing gigs.

While Burns had met with much success and was quite accomplished in many ways. The one area of success that had eluded her was in her romantic relationships. But in her greatest act of the Piccardy third, she was able to emerge from bad relationships as a stronger woman, overcoming adversity and re-inventing herself. It was after one of these relationships that Burns was able to turn to a wonderful page in her life. She came to Lincoln, NE, and she chose a new identity adopting the surnames of two of her beloved music teachers. For the remainder of her life, she would be known as Burns Davis.

In Lincoln she returned to library work and developed her consulting business, all the while surrounding herself with good friends. Here, she also embarked on a new path. Leaving her job with the library to become a massage therapist. As I have been told, her interest in this came from treating her own pain. Learning the Alexander technique and going through therapy opened new doors, and she attacked this career with the same passion and thirst for knowledge that marked her other occupations. She completed thousands of hours of advanced training all over

the country, always wanting to stay on the cutting edge of her field. It was in the course of taking these courses that she made a great sacrifice. When Burns discovered that she could not keep her long hair away from the human brains they were studying, she chose to chop it off in the name of education. And in true Burns fashion, her hair went to a Locks of Love, a charity that supplies wigs for cancer patients. Her sacrifice and hard work paid off as she gained notoriety for her skills with Cranial-Sacral therapy, Lymphatic drainage, and therapeutic touch. She also had a knack for the challenges of treating children and infants.

Musically, Burns was a fixture around town, serving as a substitute organist at several churches and singing in the choirs of St. Marks on the Campus and the South Street Temple's. She also recently began to serve as a vocalist at the Temple, a role in which her natural gifts had only begun to shine. As further proof that she was a musician's musician, Burns had recently been elected Dean of the Lincoln chapter of the American Guild of Organists. She was truly a Renaissance woman.

The loss of Burns is a loss that is felt in many places by countless people. Our hearts go out to Elaine and her husband John who have lost their sister. We think of Jodie who has lost a beloved aunt. We think of Simon the dog and Peter the cat whose home-cooked meals will be looking for their home cooked meals in new homes. We think of the choirs who will be missing a voice, the organs who will miss the familiar hands of a skilled player, the clients who need a gifted healer. We think of the many friends who are hurting right now. Our hope is they and we may find comfort in remembering the many gifts and blessings that Burns gave to us.

Let us remember her ever-present smile, her astounding intellect, her wonderful music, her unmatched jars of pickles. Let us remember her humility, and her compassion for all living things. Let us remember her kindness and the encouragement she gave to so many. Most of all, let us remember her gift for taking minor notes and making them major.

On this day, through our grief, we wish to give thanks for the gift that was Burns Davis. But if Burns were here, we could be fairly certain she would beat us to the punch. She would say to all of us, "No, thank you for being part of my life."

May the memory, the life, the legacy, and the Piccardy third of Burns Smith Davis, Shirah Chaya Bat Avraham v'Sarah, be for all of us an eternal blessing. Zichronah livracha. Let us say, Amen.

Excerpt from Burns' statement of theology.

God is the one unifying force of which we are all a part, the source and sustenance of life and soul—of being, and is all-inclusive. God is one, central, encompassing all the many facets of being, knowing, and the unrevealed. All life is sacred, being creations of the Universal One. It is important what we do; both to ourselves in keeping faith, and to others who are influenced perhaps, by our doings. As we breathe, we live and constantly experience holiness. Therefore, it is important how present we are in our doing. We are a part of all, and all a part of the One, always into continuum.