

MUSIC AT OAKWOOD

Lucile C. Lacy and Eurydice V. Osterman



IN the early history of our nation, it was the songs of the slaves that sustained them through their hour of trial. From that day to the present, music has been the medium through which this experience has been passed on from generation to generation. "Music," says the 1919-20 *Oakwood Junior College Bulletin*, "is one of the most potent factors in gospel work. It is one of God's best gifts to man, and when consecrated to Him will prove of inestimable value to the Christian worker."¹ This statement expresses a conviction of importance to Oakwood from its very beginning.

The record shows that as early as 1902 music lessons in organ and voice (for \$0.25 each) were offered not only to help students learn to read music readily and acquire a taste for that which is elevating and substantial,² but to teach them to function in worship services as well. By 1906, lessons were listed in the *Bulletin* under the "Sacred Music Course," and an organ rental fee of \$0.25 per week was assessed.

In 1912, the Sacred Music Course was expanded to include piano,

organ, voice, and harmony. By 1920, choir, band, violin, and orchestra were added to the curriculum. Inflation brought about an increase in lessons and rental fees from \$0.25 to \$4.00 per term for piano rental and lessons, and \$2 for organ.

In 1934 the curriculum was again expanded to include theory, history, harmonic analysis, and form and analysis; then lessons in wind instruments (1936) and conducting (1938), as well as a bachelor's degree in music (1946), were offered. The curriculum basically remained the same until the early 1980s, when a Music Education course was added. Today, the Music Department offers three degrees in music: the Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science (Music Education and Music Business), and Bachelor of Music.

In the early days, teachers at Oakwood wore many hats. Thus those who were talented in music became the music teachers. In 1919, F.L. Peterson became the first head of the Music Department, assisted by Jennie Stratton. In 1924, others who assisted with the Music Department were J. Wagner, C.W.

Salisbury, and C.E. Moseley. In 1930, Otis B. Edwards became head of the Music Department and taught piano, voice, conducting, and orchestra. In her Music Appreciation class, one of his colleagues stressed the evil of jazz, lauded the inspiring strains of the classics, honored the sentiments of the spirituals.³ Other instructors were Joseph F. Dent (voice), Calvin E. Moseley (director of the choir), and Owen Troy (violin and director of the male chorus). Ruby Bontemps-Troy taught piano and theory, and directed the glee club. In 1946, Inez Booth (piano and organ), Eva B. Dykes (College Choir and Aeolians), Anne Galley (piano), Harvey Huggins (voice), and Samuel C. Jackson (College Choir) joined the music faculty.

From 1951-1968, Inez Booth headed the Music Department and taught piano and organ. She also taught pastoral musicianship. Serving under her were John Dennison (academy choir director), Eva Dykes (choral), Evelyn Jackson (piano), C.E. Moseley (male chorus), Allene Dumas Lee (voice), and Joni Robinson-Pierre-Louis (voice). From 1968-1970, Jon Robertson served

as chair of the department, piano teacher, and director of the group, *Ars Nova*. It was during this time that the words and music to the Oakwood school song, *To Thee, Our Dear Oakwood*, were written by Harold Anthony and Otis B. Edwards.

Harold Anthony briefly chaired the department from 1970-2. He taught

Osterman (College Choir, organ, piano, theory), and Marcus Thompson and Stanley Ware (voice).

From 1983 to 1987 John Dennison became head of the department; he taught voice and directed the Chamber Singers, and eventually the Aeolians. Serving under him were



Oakwood's first orchestra (1917), directed by Frank L. Peterson and Jennie Stratton.

theory courses, organ, piano, voice, and was the director of the College Choir and the Aeolians. Under his leadership

Shirley Beary (piano and history), Alma Blackmon (Aeolians, voice, piano, and theory), Lucile Lacy (music appreciation, music education), and Eurydice Osterman (College Choir, organ, piano, theory).

In 1987 Lucille Lacy became chair of the department, teaching music appreciation and music education courses. She was the first department chair who also served as Minister of Music for the campus church. Others in the department were Shirley Beary (piano and history), Ricky Little (voice and Aeolians), and Eurydice Osterman (piano, organ, theory, College Choir). In 1994 Eurydice Osterman became head of the depart-

ment, teaching theory courses and directing the Aeolians. Those serving under her leadership are Ginger Beazley (voice), Audley Chambers (history and piano), Beatrice Renee Collins-Williams (piano, orchestra), and Lucile Lacy (music education, music appreciation).

As enrollment increased, so did the need for adjunct faculty. One of the first people to serve in this capacity was Henry Bradford (1967), former chair of the Department of Music at Alabama A&M University. Those currently on the adjunct faculty are Michele Cleveland (College Choir and voice), Doris Hall (band and woodwinds), Peter Lott (brass), Katherine Nevins (voice), Marx Pales (strings), and Arthur Wesley (percussion).

Music plays a very prominent part in campus life at Oakwood. The first and last comment of many visitors and students is, "Oh how I enjoy the good singing at Oakwood."⁴ These words are as current today as when they were first penned almost 60 years ago. The plethora of extracurricular quartets and other musical groups can be traced from the early days to the present. Some of these groups were:

1924-29: Jubilee Quartet; Nightingales; Male Chorus (C.E. Moseley, Director)

1930-39: The Quartet; A Capella Choir (J.F. Dent, Director); Male Quartet; Female Quartet; Academic Octet (J.F. Dent, Director); Vibratones (M. Murphy, Director); Alabama Singers (O. Troy, Director); Lyric Club (O. Troy, Director); Male Chorus (O. Troy, Director)



The Male Chorus Reunion Concert, directed by C. E. Moseley, 1974.

were Inez Booth (organ and piano), Lucile Lacy (music appreciation), and Stanley Ware (voice). From 1972 to 1983 Inez Booth once again led the department. Serving during this time were Harold Anthony (voice, piano, College Choir), Alma Blackmon (Aeolians, theory, voice, piano), Lucile Lacy (music appreciation, theory, piano), Eurydice



The Oakwood Male Chorus, under the direction of C. E. Moseley (1951).

1940-49: Summertones; The Aeolians (E.B. Dykes, Director); Alabama Singers (Male Chorus) (C.E. Moseley, Director); Echoes of Harmony

1950-59: Girls Chorus (E.B. Dykes, Director); Madregaleans/Academy Choir (J. Pierre-Louis, Director); The Cathedral Quartet; Vibratones; Chordsmen; Quadrachords

1960-69: Girls Chorus (G. Winston-Foster, Director); Evangeleers (J. Dennison, Director)

1970-79: Mellophonics; Capella Choral (C. Wilson, Director); Remnant (J. Wilson, Director); Way Back When (quartet, and, later, choir); Distinctive Friends of Jesus

1980-Present: Blessed Peace; Step Up to Happiness; Royal Sous of Sound; Alliance (later, Take 6); A Special Blend; Unity; Revelation 14; Dynamic Praise; Voices of Triumph

It is interesting to note the dominance of quartets and small groups up to the 1970s. After the emergence of Edwin Hawkins family gospel choir, student-led choirs ranging from 25 to 200 members have become the trend. However, in spite of all of the groups that have come and gone with time, there are

ensembles.

It was in 1946 that the Aeolians (a nucleus formed from the College Choir) was formed by Dr. Eva B. Dykes. Since 1978 each has become a separate choir, and these groups have become a tool for recruitment, touching many through their ministry throughout the United States, Canada, Bermuda, the Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Romania, England, Scotland, and Wales.

Under the leadership of Dr. Dykes (1946-56); Mrs. Joni Robinson Pierre-Louis (1957-65); Mr. Harold Anthony (1965-68); Jon Robertson (1968-71, who named his group *Ars Nova*); Mr. Marcus Thompson; Mrs. Alma Blackmon (1973-85); Dr. Ricky Little (1988-93); and Dr. Eurydice Ostermann (since 1994), the Aeolians have given memorable performances at New York's Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Operation PUSH in Chicago, the World's Fair in 1964, 1982 and 1984; and at three sessions of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The Aeolians have performed before two United States Presidents, with

in New York City, under the direction Ricky Little.

Several audio records have been



Angelique Clay, Aeolian soloist.

produced through the years. The Aeolians have appeared on state and national television, performing on Alabama PBS, *Breath of Life* telecasts, ABC's *Good Morning America*, and CBS *Good Morning*.

Although Oakwood College is dedicated to academic excellence, the social and cultural areas of campus life have not been neglected. Lyceum programs were a part of campus activities not only to provide entertainment and social interaction, but to help cultivate and develop appreciation for good music.

According to the 1940 *Acorn*, noted artist Bohumir Kryl and his Symphony Orchestra appeared in concert on December 4, at 8:15 PM. Kryl, the famous virtuoso and conductor, had been called the most remarkable cornetist in the world, and had also been referred to as a

director without peer. During a period of thirty-six consecutive seasons, Kryl had presented over 12,500 concerts and appeared at more than 100 colleges and



The Aeolians of 1994, under the direction of Ricky Little.

only two that have remained constant throughout, the College Choir and the Aeolians, which are part of the music curriculum, and are the official school

the most recent performance having occurred in March of 1994 when they performed for President Clinton at the UNCF 50th Anniversary Board Dinner

universities annually. His performance at Oakwood was an outstanding event of the school.

During the 1945-46 school year, a Lyceum course was offered to further cultural development among the students. The course included a series of lectures, concerts, and pictures. The following artists appeared in the Lyceum course series: the Hallelujah Quartet; Margaret Montgomery, contralto; Louia Vaughn Johnes, violinist; Hazel Harrison, pianist; Harvey Huggins, baritone; and Elizabeth Mayle, soprano.



The Aeolians of 1976, directed by Alma Blackman.

Aeolians, a double octet of eight men and eight women, who gave concerts on

campus and at nearby college and churches. Handel's *Messiah* was an annual event attended by hundreds of townspeople and music lovers from around the state. Leading Aeolian soloists included Joni Mae Robinson (Pierre-Louis), Minneola Dabney (Dixon), Lois Bookhardt, and Russel Bates. At these programs a variety of music was used, including Negro spirituals, hymns, and work songs. Traditional favorites included "Italian Street Song" and "You'll Never Walk Alone."

During this era, two of the many outstanding quartets that shared the gift of music with the Oakwood community were the Echoes of Harmony (Milton Young, William DeShay, Russell Bates and Leland Mitchell), and The Summertones (Lyle Folette, Donald Blake, Julian Williams and Clarence Goldbourne).

According to the 1953 *Acorn*, the historic *Messiah* program, which began with a candlelight procession and

concluded with the majestic Hallelujah Chorus, was directed by Samuel C. Jackson, head of the Music Department. This was Mr. Jackson's fourth year of directing the *Messiah*. The sixty-voice choir drew talents of six students in solo roles. The female soloists were: Pearl Harvey, soprano; Ruby Smith, contralto, freshman music major from North Carolina; Hanna Clarke, junior music major from Portland, Oregon. The male soloists were Elbert Shepperd, William Scales, and James Edgecomb, all religion majors. Assisting the Columbia and New York University-trained director were pianists: Ernestine Owens, freshman; Edward Daniels, one of the college's many Latin-American students; Kathryn Wilson from Nashville, Tennessee; and Mrs. Inez Booth, organ, faculty member in the Music Department.

Before a packed auditorium of music lovers, the 75-voice Oakwood College Choir sang a major oratorio, *The Messiah*, for the first time under the direction of Mrs. Joni Mae Robinson Pierre-Louis on Sunday, December 18,



In 1946-47, the Lyceum Course artists were Rosa Lee Jones, soprano; George Walker, pianist; Edgar C. Raine, lecturer; Omega King, dramatic soprano; and Marjorie Moffett, dramatic reader. During the years 1947-51, the college demonstrated fervent devotion to music performances. Dr. Eva Dykes directed the College Choir and the

Eastman Brass

"Elegant agility"

New York Times



1955, in the College Auditorium. Dressed in maroon and white robes, the choir preceded the oratorio with the traditional Christmas time candlelight procession, entering a darkened auditorium with lighted tapers caroling *Adeste*

Fideles on their way to the auditorium stage.

The 1955 *Messiah* soloists were Dorothy Dorsett and Hannah Clarke, soprano, music majors; Vivian Steele, contralto; E. Wayne Shepperd, tenor; William C. Scales, baritone; and James Edgcomb, bass, religion majors.



the New York Harp Ensemble

Accompanists were Kathryn Wilson, piano; Lucille Herron and Mrs. Inez Booth, organ, music faculty.

On December 16, 1956, the traditional presentation of *The Messiah* by the 80-voice choir and six soloists directed by Mrs. Pierre-Louis highlighted the holiday season. Soloists were Willie Lothan, bass; Josephine Phillips, contralto; Ruby Smith, soprano, Alfred Boyce,

Rivers and Marcellus Breach were the pianists and Mrs. Booth was the organist for the majestic performance.

On February 18, 1956, Earl Calloway, tenor, a former Oakwood student, drew a large crowd from the Oakwood circle, as well as Huntsville and Birmingham communities, when he presented a concert during the Black History month.

On April 8, 1956, Mrs. Allynne Dumas Lee, internationally-famous concert artist and an Oakwood alum, swept the Oakwood audience with her vocal appeal as she sang dynamically in concert.

Oakwood was stirred and awed by Mrs. Lee's lovely voice. The audience was thrilled with her appealing dramatization of *Scandalize My Name* and *Old Woman*. The German selections were superb, and she concluded with an oriental bow that swept the floor.

Each year, the College Choir followed the tradition of presenting Handel's *Messiah*. In 1967 the choir, accompanied by the Huntsville Ensemble, under the director of Professor Harold Anthony, gave two renditions. Soprano soloists were Brenda Spraggins and Andrea Bradford; Raymond Humphrey, baritone; and Helvius Thompson, trumpet.

As usual the audience came from surrounding cities to hear the Oakwood Choir sing *The Messiah*. Each year the choir sang to a large, standing-room-only audience. This tradition grew until it was necessary to do two performances each year, which continued until the College changed from the semester to the quarter system. The Oakwood community, as well as the Huntsville and neighboring communities, looks forward to returning each year to hear *The Messiah*.

The 1975-76 Lyceum Series, under the leadership of Lucile Lacy,

commenced on October 12, 1975, with Herndon Sillman, organist, who performed on the Rodger Concert Touring Organ. Spillman, a native of Huntsville, and a frequent recitalist in France, made the first recording of the complete works of Maurice Durufle. On February 29, 1976, under the direction of Jon Robertson, the twenty-five members of the New England Sinfonia gave one of the most exciting performances on the concert scene that year.

The Aeolians presented a concert in Ashby Auditorium on March 28, 1976. (During the Spring of 1973 the choir had made a five-week tour of the west coast, and thereafter completed a twelve-week concert tour that took them to eleven major cities including Boston, New York, and Washington, DC, where they performed at the embassy of Sierra Leone. As a result, an invitation was extended to the Aeolians to tour several West African countries. The 1975-76 Lyceum season ended on April 11, 1975, with Frances Walker, pianist, who performed published and unpublished works by Black composers, both historic and contemporary.

Alma Blackmon served as the chair of the Lyceum Committee during the years 1973 to 1975. During this time some of the artists who visited the campus were: The New England Orchestra, directed by Jon Robertson; McHenry Boatwright, vocalist from the Ohio State University School of Music; The Brothers of Washington, DC; and Virgil



Harvi Griffin

baritone; Allen Reid, tenor; and David Green, tenor. Mrs. Anne Galley, Winifred



Leona Mitchell

