

A History of George Bernard Bryant

George Bryant is a Nyack native and a World traveler. Born and raised in that beautiful river town and still living in the family home on First Avenue, renamed as "George Bryant Way" for the remainder of this year, he was educated at St. Ann's school from Kindergarten through eighth grade and graduated Nyack High School in 1956. He excelled even then, as can be attested to by the fact that he was Class Salutatorian.

In his early years he studied piano under Sr. Melissa and Sr. Agnes Cecilia at St. Ann's and under Gertrude Noll Berckmueller when he reached high school.

He started his career at the keyboards, stops, and pedals of the organ at St. Ann's in his senior year of high school under May Hanley, the Organist of St Ann's with the encouragement of Msgr. Giblin who was the Pastor at that time.

His first significant honor received was the 1956 Morning Music Club Scholarship Award. That award is now named for his teacher, Gertrude Noll Berckmueller and is awarded yearly to a Rockland County High School Senior for excellence in music.

His playing career started in earnest in the summer of 1956 when he was the St. Ann's Church replacement for Ms. Hanley for a month. This became part of George's summer ritual until 1964.

While this was going on, George applied to and was accepted at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. There he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree and a Master of Arts Degree in Piano. His teacher while at Juilliard was Irwin Freundlich.

Not one to sit back, he also began teaching piano on a limited basis while in college with the number of students expanding significantly after graduation in 1962.

In that same year George also became one of the founding members of the Rockland County Music Teacher's Guild and he has been an active member with them serving as President for many terms, as Young Peoples audition chairman, and is presently the administrative assistant.

His involvement in musical organizations has also included the Rockland Symphony where he served on the Board of Directors and was piano soloist with them on numerous occasions, the New York State Music Teacher's Association holding many State and local level positions, and as a Member of the Music Commission of the New York Archdiocese. He has not forgotten the Morning Music Club and has been an adjudicator for them on many occasions and has been soloist for several of their affairs.

In 1980 George joined with Harry Gubitza of the B'nai B'rith as one of the organizers and lead people in the "Brotherhood Through Music" concert series which has been held yearly at Rockland Community Collage. He has been a soloist with them and has brought not only the St. Ann's Church and Temple Beth Torah Choirs to the celebration but many other groups as well.

Another place he excels is in the area of judging and adjudication of music students on a national basis. He has traveled all over the United State with this effort and is widely acclaimed for his good work.

His dealings with choral groups is almost as extensive as his accomplishments at the piano and organ. In the Fall of 1966 Msgr... Campbell of St. Ann's asked George to organize a Children's Choir. Their debut was that Christmas Eve in a blizzard. In the early 70's he started a Girl's Choir and when the Adult Choir slowly faded in the mid 70's he started a Teen Choir and then resurrected the Adult Choir In 1976 May Hanley fully retired and George took over the entire music program of St. Ann's Church.

In 1978 George was asked to fill in as Organist at Temple Beth Torah in Upper Nyack as they put it, "...for a few weeks until we can get a new Organist." Needless to say, he is still there. They honored him with a dinner for his good works in 1986 and he is an established member of their community

The highlight of George's Choral endeavors to this point has been the formation of the Rockland County Catholic Choir. George had a dream of a choir large enough to do some of the more important sacred and secular works available that were out of the reach of a small church . choir. In the Spring of 1992 the group performed the first of many concerts in Rockland County and over the years they have performed works like the Faure Requiem, Saint-Saens Christmas Oratorio, Vivaldi's Gloria the Hallelujah Chorus of both Beethoven and Handel, and contemporary music such as "A Concert Celebration" by Andrew Lloyd Weber.

This group has also performed in a Choral competition in Pennsylvania, on a pilgrimage to Canada, and took a ten day concert tour of Italy at the end of 1993 singing at many of the cathedrals of Milan, Florence, Assisi, and Rome where they were the featured Choir at a Papal Audience. A Mass was sung at St. Peter's Basilica where George realized another of his dreams by playing that organ.

Over the years the Choir has performed for celebrations at many of the churches in the County as well as for various other functions.

To list all of his accomplishments would require another full book the size of this one so if something you remember was omitted, please excuse us.