

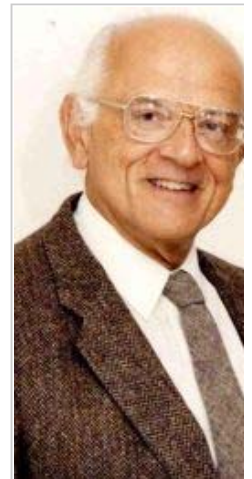
# Franklin E. Perkins: Minister of music and head of Burroughs Music Department

By Gloria S. Ross, Special to the Beacon

**Posted 3:09 p.m. Tues. Aug. 11** - For more than four decades, Franklin Elwood Perkins served as the minister of music at local churches or as the director of the John Burroughs School Music Department, or both.

"My dad usually had two jobs," said the Rev. David Perkins, Mr. Perkins' middle son. "He was one of the great organists of the St. Louis area in his prime and a great teacher."

Mr. Perkins (right), who died Thursday of kidney failure at St. Luke's Hospital, was a renowned organist, pianist, choir director, singer, music teacher and composer, so the music that will be played at his memorial service on Thursday will need to be just perfect. It's what Mr. Perkins, who was 80, strived for his entire life.



Mr. Perkins was born one step ahead of the Great Depression on March 30, 1929, in Delanco, N.J., a township on the Delaware River just north of Philadelphia. He became a great teacher and musician by learning from great teachers and musicians.

He was a student of Alec Wyton, a Londoner who has been credited by *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* with "bringing together English church music, American church music and music from outside the churches." Wyton worked briefly in St. Louis in the 1950s.

During summer sessions in the 1960s, Mr. Perkins also studied with Austrian organist and composer Anton Heiller in Haarlem, Holland, and at Washington University, where he received his Ph.D.

In a tribute to Heiller, Mr. Perkins wrote, "I felt that these sessions were giving me a direct link into the performance practices of the Classical period, and I cherish those special insights from the man who was from the Vienna of Haydn and Mozart."

Earlier, Mr. Perkins had attended Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa., then earned a Master of Sacred Music degree alongside his wife-to-be, Aline Ruple, from Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1951, the year they were married.

Following graduation, he immediately began his career as a church musician, beginning in Bloomsburg, Pa., then moving to Springfield, Ill., where he served at First United Methodist Church. That is also where he began teaching one of his most famous students, 16-year-old Marilyn Keiser, who became a virtuoso concert organist and recently retired as Chancellor's

Professor of Music in the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University.

In 1959, Mr. Perkins and his family moved to the St. Louis area, where he served as minister music at Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church for 25 years and subsequently at Ferguson Presbyterian Church for more than a decade.

While serving as the minister of music at churches, Mr. Perkins headed the music department John Burroughs School from 1972 until 1997.

"Frank was very partial to young people," said Aline Perkins. "He liked watching them go from seventh grade through high school in all areas of music: choir, orchestra, band."

Keith Shahan, John Burroughs' recently retired head of school, called Mr. Perkins "a whirlwind." "He had hair going all over the place and he'd be conducting with tremendous élan," Shahan laughed. "And he was convinced he could teach any child to sing, so he had the largest choirs. He believed in them and produced wonderful concerts. He was a very popular teacher who had lots and lots of kids who loved him.

"He was also an excellent musician and writer who understood music. Sometimes, he composed his own work. He was a musician's musician, as well as being a popular teacher."

Caring for and teaching young people were also a family affair for Mr. Perkins.

"Both of my parents were ministers of music and growing up, I spent a lot of time with my dad at the church," said Rev. Perkins, who also plays piano. "My little brother, who developed juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, had to have considerable care; my dad did much of that. And later he helped care for (our grandmother) his mother-in-law. He taught us to be independent."

In "retirement," Mr. Perkins spent more time on composing music and served as interim organist and choir director at his and Aline's home church for the past decade, First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood.

## **MUSIC WAS HIS VOCATION AND AVOCATION**

Despite failing health, until this year, he attended most performances of the Opera Theatre of St. Louis. In the 1980s, he served on a national committee that oversaw the creation of the current Presbyterian hymnal. He was a career-long member of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Guild of Organists and participated in the Pipes Spectacular, a 2000 concert performed by Guild members nationwide. The concert supported the national Guild's educational and community outreach programs.

Participating alongside Mr. Perkins in the Pipes Spectacular was organist and Washington University instructor Barbara Raedeke, who said she was saddened to hear of Mr. Perkins' death.

"He was a wonderful musician and colleague, and I will miss his presence in the St. Louis music community," Raedeke said. "He was a very kind person who had a great deal of enthusiasm for the profession. Several years ago, he wrote a Christmas carol arrangement and he composed an organ arrangement of the piece for me."

Always, music was his life

"His music was just part of him," Aline Perkins said. "We enjoyed it to the 'nth' degree."

Mr. Perkins' youngest son, Philip, died of heart disease in 1990. He was also preceded in death by his parents, George and Agnes Perkins.

In addition to his son David of Highland Park, Ill., and his wife Aline (nee Ruple) of Creve Coeu Mr. Perkins is survived by his brother and sister-in-law, Wesley and Esther Perkins of Delmont Pa., and his oldest son and daughter-in-law, Wesley and Karen Perkins, and their sons, Stephe and Wesley, all of St. Louis. He is also survived by David's children: David, Oksana, Victoria a Dmitri.

A memorial service will be at 2 p.m. on Thursday at First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood, 10 E. Adams Ave. Interment will be private.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the National Kidney Foundation, the American Heart Association, John Burroughs School or First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood.

Condolences may be shared at <http://www.schrader.com/> .

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