

Biography of Alfred H. Bartles

Life

Alfred Howell Bartles was born to Paul and Martha Howell Bartles on November 10, 1930, and was raised in a family that had been in Nashville since the early 1800s. His maternal grandparents were both considered very musical, as were his parents. When Alfred was five, his father died from the aftereffects of poison gas in World War I. Thereafter, he and his mother lived with his mother's younger sister, Isabel Howell, who took on being a father to Alfred in many respects.

From an early age, he showed remarkable musical talent, first on the piano. To supplement the family's very modest income, he began playing low-wage dance-band jobs before he was old enough to join the musicians' union. Some years later in the Hillsboro High School band, he taught himself to play cornet, later switching to baritone. He spent the summer of 1949 in New York City studying with the prominent jazz pianist Lennie Tristano.

Bartles entered Vanderbilt University in the fall of 1949 with the intention of pursuing a premedical curriculum. However, the next year his plans changed, and he transferred to Peabody College to study composition with Roy Harris. With the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, the Army Reserve band in which Bartles played trombone and served as arranger-pianist was called into active duty. This experience proved influential for his growth as a composer, and connections with others within the group led him to transfer to the University of Mississippi following his release from military duty.

In Oxford, Mississippi, he developed a new interest in the cello through an introductory string class. Despite his late start with the instrument, his conscious, adult dedication toward mastering the technique enhanced his later interest in string pedagogy.

Also at the University of Mississippi, he met Claus Adam, cellist with the New Music Quartet. The quartet had been in Oxford for a week or so and had played one of Bartles's compositions written for them. Bartles also met Martha Jean Smith, a piano student from Newton, Mississippi. She was in the class a year ahead of him and was headed off to graduate school the next year at Ohio University. In anticipation of joining her, Bartles took a heavy load of courses, passed exemption exams, marshaled credits for his Army experience and took additional courses during the summer. In the fall of 1953, they summarily moved to Athens, Ohio, and were married January 31, 1954. At Ohio University, Alfred studied composition with Karl Ahrendt and graduated by the end of the summer of 1954.

In the fall of that same year, Alfred and Martha moved to New York City where Alfred studied music theory with Felix Salzer at the Mannes School of Music, despite not being a formally enrolled student at the time. Bartles was also accepted as a cello student of Claus Adam, and also carefully studied the works of the Croatian cello pedagogue Rudolf Matz. This direction received further focus with his subsequent study with the cellist Luigi Silva, whose pedagogical technique Bartles later attempted to codify through a series of scale books and pieces.

Additional connections were fostered during this initial period in New York with the Rudolf Steiner School in Manhattan. Martha Bartles was hired there to play for eurythmy, while Alfred gave private cello lessons. The two of them also joined a group studying the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, which remained a sustaining focus for them in future years.

After a mandatory three-month residence in New York, Bartles joined the musicians' union and began

playing as a jazz pianist in clubs in and around New York City as well as on the road with big bands. At the same time, he gradually moved over to free-lance cello work, playing in the orchestras for thirteen Broadway shows in Radio City Music Hall, in the Little Orchestra Society, in Mantovani's orchestra, in the Springfield Symphony, and, for a year, with the St. Louis Symphony. Through his connection with Claus Adam, he and Martha were able to spend a summer at Aspen and another at Blue Hill. During these years, his two daughters, Isabel and Julia, were born.

In 1969, Bartles received a grant from a small private foundation to study the teaching of music in Waldorf Schools in Germany and to have time to compose. The following year, the grant was renewed, but he began teaching at Schiller-College in Bönningheim and at its sister campus in Heidelberg. Here he taught music history and theory and conducted the chorus.

In 1973, both Alfred and Martha returned to the United States to accept positions at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Alfred in music theory and cello, and Martha in piano. During this period, Alfred also played cello with the Nashville Symphony.

In 1978, both Alfred and Martha were each offered full-time positions at the Eurythmeum in Stuttgart. This institution was home to both a school of eurythmy and a professional performing group. Martha played and Alfred taught music theory to the students, also teaching cello at the Stuttgarter Musikschule. After about four years, Alfred concentrated entirely on teaching cello, and Martha migrated to the Waldorf School, then to the Stuttgart Music School, then to an adjunct position at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart. In 1980, she accepted a full-time position at the Pädagogische Hochschule Ludwigsburg. They continued in these positions until mandatory retirement in 1996 for Alfred and 1997 for Martha.

They later returned to Nashville permanently. Alfred took on teaching positions first at Murray State University in Kentucky and then at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville and Tennessee Technological University. He also built up a private cello teaching practice and was an active freelance cellist. Martha in turn became an adjunct piano teacher at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt.

Alfred Bartles died in Nashville on December 28, 2006 of colon cancer.

Compositions and arrangements

Alfred Bartles's output varies in genre and texture. He considered himself among the first in a generation of composers equally at home in the Classical and jazz spheres. Indeed, both genres are evident from his early compositions onward. Later works exhibit particular strengths in jazz ensemble writing, solo and chamber works, large ensemble works for orchestra and concert band, a series of jazz tunes written in collaboration with lyricist Bryan Lindsay, and pedagogical works for cello.

Some of Bartles's works began to be published in the mid-1960s by the Brass Press, Sam Fox Music Publishers, and Boosey & Hawkes. A major accomplishment during this time was the *Music for Symphony Orchestra and Jazz Ensemble*, a 1966 commission from the Nashville Symphony, and now in the catalog of MJQ music publishers.

A large fraction of his writing remained—as is usual with composers—unpublished yet still performed during his lifetime. While in Germany during the years 1969-73, he wrote a piano sonata, an orchestral overture, a woodwind quintet, and *Excalibur* for symphonic band. His years at Tennessee Technological University saw several pieces for tuba through the influence of fellow faculty member

R. Winston Morris. After returning to Germany, he composed music for various eurythmy performances, such as *Nanabush and the Chickadees*. His *Ballad for Fluegel Horn and Jazz Ensemble* was recorded at Süddeutscher Rundfunk by Erwin Lehn. Yair Kless, an Israeli violinist, commissioned the *Lyric Poem* for violin and piano and premiered the work with pianist Shoshana Rudiakov in the Liederhalle in Stuttgart. The *Duo for Violin and Violoncello* was premiered at the Sewanee Music Festival. In 1976, *When Tubas Waltz* was first published by Kendor Music Publishers and saw various adaptations over the next few decades, becoming one of his best-known works.

Arrangements and adaptations have also figured somewhat prominently within Bartles's oeuvre. In 1985, his orchestration of Alban Berg's *Piano Sonata, Opus 1* for chamber orchestra was premiered by the Alban Berg Foundation as part of the 50th- and 100th-year Berg Festival in Vienna, and later recorded at Süddeutscher Rundfunk by the Koechlin Ensemble. In 1988, he adapted the orchestration of Bartók's *First Rhapsody for Violin* to conform to Bartók's cello transcription of this work. This was premiered at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in 2003.

In 1994, he completed two new cello volumes entitled *Etudes and Recital Pieces for the Advanced Beginning 'Cellist*. Later, he adapted Bartók's *Roumanian Dances* for brass quintet, and wrote a duo for cello and bassoon entitled *Three for Two* which was premiered in 1996 in Manchester, Vermont. In 1998-99 the Tennessee Chapter of the National Association of Music Teachers named him "Composer of the Year" and commissioned him to write *Epidaurus* for brass ensemble and percussion, which was performed at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in 1999.

In 2001, *Yardbird Suite* by Charlie Parker and *Out of this World* by Arlen and Mercer were arranged for large jazz ensemble and premiered in Nashville, and *Tubossa* for solo tuba and symphonic band was completed, performed, and recorded in 2002. During this period, Bartles also directed much energy on the drafts for his six-part *Pedagogical Approach to Technique on the Violoncello through Scales*. At the time of his death, he was working on a piece for saxophone commissioned by Neal Ramsay.

His papers and compositions were donated to Vanderbilt University beginning in 2008.

— contributed by Alfred Bartles's first cousin Clopper Almon, and further edited by Jacob Schaub