

# *David Drinkwater*

December 16, 1928 ~ October 14, 2021 (age 92)

## **Obituary**

David A. Drinkwater - organist, educator, choral conductor and editor - died on October 14th at his home in New Brunswick with his husband, Jonathan Mills, by his side. The cause was heart failure. He was 92.

As a professor, conductor and mentor Professor Drinkwater taught and inspired generations of students many of whom credit his as having been one of the most important influences in their lives by instilling enthusiasm for music, art, antiques, cooking, gardening, collecting, and entertaining; by his validation and enthusiastic embrace of each person's individuality; and by his example of generosity and friendship as the essential ingredients in a rich and meaningful life.

His professional accomplishments were many but he may have been best known in the region as the organist for more than 5,000 weddings over the course of forty years, most of them at the Kirkpatrick Chapel of Rutgers University, and for providing theater organ style accompaniment to annual viewings of the silent film, *The Phantom of the Opera*.

David Allan Drinkwater was born on December 16, 1928, in Kokomo, Indiana, and began playing the organ as a teenager. He went on to earn the Bachelor of Music degree in 1952 from Indiana University and that same year took second prize in the American Guild of Organists National Convention Young Artists Competition.

After service as a radar intelligence officer in the United States Air Force he began studies at the School of Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary in New York City where he received the M.S.M. degree in 1957. While at Union he was Assistant Organist/Choirmaster to Searle Wright at St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, and Assistant Organist/Choirmaster at Temple Emanu El on Fifth Avenue, holding the latter position until 1977.

In 1955 a 43-year association with Rutgers University began as he was hired to be the organist at Kirkpatrick Chapel. In 1957, he took over the direction of the Kirkpatrick Chapel Choir, succeeding F. Austin Walter. He initiated annual "Christmas in Carol and Song" services in 1958 that continue to this day and led the choir on ten performance tours abroad. He conducted the Chapel Choir until 1998.

In addition to his classroom and instrumental teaching duties at Rutgers he was appointed University Organist by President Mason W. Gross and launched a Noon-day Recital series at Kirkpatrick Chapel, performing over 250 recitals over several decades in addition to those he gave in New York City and elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad. In his early years he served as accompanist for the Rutgers University Glee Club. In 1974 he became the first Director of the newly-created Rutgers Queens Chorale. For 29 years he was Assistant Conductor of the Rutgers University Choir.

He retired from teaching in 1994 and was appointed Professor Emeritus of Rutgers. He later served as Interim Organist/Choirmaster at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Morristown, St. John on the Mountain in Bernardsville and The Presbyterian Church in Westfield.

From 1965 until 1984 Professor Drinkwater was associated with Belwin/Mills, Inc., as Chief Editor of Choral & Organ Music for J. Fischer & Co. and, starting in 1970, carrying the same title simultaneously for H.W. Gray Music. His own "Wedding Service Music" was first published by J. Fischer & Co. in 1968 and remains a valuable resource to church musicians nationwide to this day.

He was predeceased by his parents Lelah Maude Curlee and John Oscar Drinkwater and by his brother, John Curlee Drinkwater. He is survived by his husband, Jonathan Clarke Mills; his niece, Deborah Salatin, of Brighton, MI, his nephew, John B. Drinkwater, of Northville, MI, and their spouses and children; his cousins Francis Willoughby "Mac" Frost, Jennet F. Shelley and Sarah Frost; his husband's brother and sisters and their spouses, children, grandchildren and cousins; and a legion of devoted friends.

Arrangements for a memorial service are pending.