

Minnesota Musicians of the Cultured Generation

J. Victor Bergquist
Finding Joy in Music

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J. Victor Bergquist
(Courtesy The Minneapolis Collection, Minneapolis Public Library)

J. Victor Bergquist Finding Joy in Music

I

John Victor Bergquist, composer, organist and choral director of Minnesota was born to C. F. Bergquist and Emma Appelquist Bergquist at St. Peter, 18 May 1877. His father had come from Sweden in the early 70s and built up a hardware and lumber business which he finally established in Winthrop, Minnesota.

Victor went to the Music Department of Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota. The early scattered offerings in music of the college had in 1887 been expanded into a full-fledged department.¹ Its clientele was almost completely female as was the case in those days.

Victor enrolled in 1892, at age 15, and pursued work there for three years:²

1892-93	Pipe organ Third grade piano Harmony
1893-94	Pipe organ Fourth grade piano Harmony Counterpoint and orchestration
1894-95	Pipe organ Fifth grade piano Voice culture Counterpoint and orchestration Piano tuning

He obtained the degree Bachelor of Music with honors in 1895 (at age 18) and won a gold medal in an organ contest. He must have had great talent for music to finish his work so quickly. He seemed to "speak" music as fluently as he spoke a language. This was the ease and feeling that he sought for himself and students throughout his entire life.

For the next four years he served as organist of Augustana Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and studied with Gustavus Johnson, a leading composer-pianist of the city. Johnson, a sensitive and well-trained musician from Stockholm, required students not just to play the notes but to play them with proper "touch" which would ensure dynamic gradations and linking of musical ideas into phrases and longer units. In 1898, Johnson founded the Johnson School of Music and published his *Touch Formation*. Bergquist was one of the assistant teachers at this school.³

In 1900 Bergquist went to Europe for advanced training. He entered the Berlin [Klindworth-Scharwenka] Conservatory, a private school of the finest

reputation, where he studied organ with Grunicke, composition with Wilhelm Berger⁴ and piano with Scharwenka.⁵ In 1902 he moved to Paris to study a year with Guilmant,⁶ the acknowledged greatest organist in the world at that time.

II

Bergquist returned, fully-prepared for his career, to Minneapolis in 1903 and became organist of Augustana Lutheran Church as well as principal of the piano department of Gustavus Adolphus College, director of the male chorus of United Church Seminary and organist of the Apollo Club. The church board had given him leave of absence for his European study and in January of 1903, they hired him as permanent organist at a salary of \$600 per year.⁷ He launched an ambitious program of music. By May of that year, his choir numbered thirty, none of whom paid dues except if they were consistently absent. Soon this choir was augmented with a paid quartet and in April 1904, the first major musical work, *The Seven Last Words of Christ* was performed.⁸

In November of 1904, the church installed a new organ, an Estey (cost \$4,800) which was dedicated in December with a concert by William Middleschulte⁹. Once again the choir presented a major work, *The Holy City*, with the proceeds going to the music program.¹⁰

Bergquist married Emilia Elvira Johnson, 7 June 1905. The couple had four children, Carl Elvir, Donald R., Helen-Aline (Mrs. R. K. Fawcett) and Muriel R. Bergquist.¹¹ In August, he was given permission to teach two days a week at Gustavus Adolphus College, his alma mater.

While in Germany he had seen the Passion Play, an event which gave impetus to his composition of an oratorio, *Golgotha*. He developed his ideas for this in 1904 and completed the work in November of 1905. It was presented 6 April 1906 with a chorus of 200 and the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Bergquist's manner of composing is interesting. The themes, and frequently the harmonies woven around them, come to him as a series of pictures impressed successively on the mind. Once lodged, they are worked out at the piano because of greater celerity of composition. While the whole work is intensely dramatic, musically speaking, it has been the desire of the young composer to make his work reflective and meditative as much as possible.¹²

He had before him not only the models of the great oratorios by famous composers but also the stunning success of Willard Patton's *Isaiah* in Minneapolis in 1897. Many of the local composers were producing piano music

To Mrs. Emma Varner
with the compliments of
J. Victor Bergquist.

Calgotha.

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for

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and songs. To produce a large-scale work such as an oratorio was a mark of esteem.

The Oratorio is to the Musician the exact analogy of what the Cathedral is to the Architect—the highest Art-form to the construction of which he can aspire.¹³

Bergquist continued to develop the music program at Augustana Church with a major oratorio each year, several recitals of his own works, and a number of special programs in cooperation with other choirs and childrens groups.

III

In September of 1912, Bergquist left to become head of the Music Conservatory at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. At Augustana College, Bergquist became conductor of the Handel Oratorio Society, originally founded in 1881 by Olof Olsson. The society had given at least one concert every year afterward. Bergquist's tenure, 1912-1918 was marked by performance of works not within the usual repertory, an indication of his effort to spur original thought and composition.¹⁴

- 1912 *Vision of St. John*, Coombs
- 1913 Choral Music from the 13th century to the present
Creation, Haydn
- 1914 *Isaiah*, Willard Patton (conducting)
- 1915 *Seven Last Words*, DuBois
Golgotha, Bergquist (with the Minneapolis Symphony)
- 1916 Selections from *Messiah*, *Psalms*, Wennerberg
King Olof
- 1917 *Messiah*, Handel

Bergquist and Dr. E. W. Olson were commissioned by the Augustana Synod in 1915 to produce a work for the year 1917 celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. They produced a *Reformation Cantata* which was performed at Rock Island by a chorus of 400 mixed voices and the Tri-City Symphony Orchestra.

IV

Bergquist returned to Minneapolis for the season of 1918-1919 when he became teacher of organ, piano and composition at the MacPhail School,

Assistant Supervisor of Music in the Minneapolis Public Schools and Dean of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. In his capacity with the public schools, he took over the composition classes for high school students, classes growing out of the High School Theory Classes begun by Donald Ferguson at the instigation of Thaddeus Giddings in the season of 1912-1913. As Ferguson got too busy in his position at the University of Minnesota to continue these classes, he turned them over to Gertrude Dobyns, a very gifted musician who transformed them into composition classes for the high school musicians. Bergquist continued this work with great success from this time until his death in 1935.

The *Music News* of Chicago reported on Bergquist's work in the issue of August 1920.¹⁵

J. Victor Bergquist, at one session, read his paper given before the Minnesota Music Teachers' convention on "The Right of Self-Expression." He said in part: "Of the manifold means of expression given to man music certainly stands out pre-eminent. We learn to do by doing. Music is a language and the student should be encouraged to speak that language with hands and heart. After students have made an effort toward self-expression and found joy in work they acquire an open mind for harmony and appropriate it by absorption." Mr. Bergquist has twenty-five classes, four hundred students, in the high schools of Minneapolis, and by means of self-expression he has succeeded most admirably in attaining results in helping the student to find himself.

Barbara Ferguson (Donald's daughter) reports that he used to say to a class that was becoming too stiff, "I should worry, I should care, I should marry a millionaire." He wanted natural music, a joy, above all else. Later he would publish a book on his ideas, *Theory of Self-Expression in Music*.¹⁶ His ideas on the emotional powers of music had been expressed in an earlier essay, "The Emotional Weapon in Christian Warfare"¹⁷ which concluded

Music is the handmaid of religion, the key to our hearts, the outlet of our religious feelings, the wellsprings of our devotional life. Clothed in words, it expresses for us the prayerful desires of our hearts, and lifts our souls in praise to God.

For the 1920 occasion above, Bergquist's students played the following program.

Caprice	Winnifred Reichmuth
The Spider and the Fly	
	Played by the composer
Violin—Bondage	Avner Rakov
	Played by the composer
Impromptu	Fredrikka Fjelde
Elfin Dance	Stella Lucas
Prelude	Lorraine Anderson
	Played by the composers
Songs—	
A Dirge	Celius Daugherty
The Waning Moon	
Laurel and Cypress	
	Sung by Miss Lora Lolsdorf
	Composer at the piano
Characteristic Pieces	Loleta Stout
The Frog	
The Cricket	
The Butterfly	
Vacation Days	Melva Block
The Cottage	
A Stroll in the Woods	
	Played by the composers
Violin—	
Melody in G Minor	Margaret Wigham
Melody in G Major	Lucy Crittenden
	Played by Lucy Crittenden
Number Thirteen	Harriet Levinson
Spinning Wheel	
Two Preludes	Gwendolyn Brewster
Awakening	Isabelle Zanger
Dreaming	
	Played by the composers
Songs—	
Twilight	Grace Larusson
Roadways	
	Sung by Miss Luisdorf
	Composer at the piano
Carnival of the Dolls	Dorothy Bates
Puppets Dance	
Elaine	
Tin Soldiers' Parade	
The Tea Party	
	Played by the composer

Many of these high school composers were set on a life-long pursuit of musical culture. A number became professionals: Winnifred Reichmuth, a teacher at the MacPhail School of Music who played concertos several times with the Minneapolis Symphony; Celius Dougherty, a pianist and song composer who accompanied world-renowned singers; and Margaret Wigham who was nationally known as a composer of teaching pieces. Such a project, crowned with success, offered unusual advantages to the student, the schools, the community, and to the

Minnesota Music Teachers Association. The director of the Minneapolis Symphony, Henri Verbrugghen, judged these composition contests for six years and said that "there is not a similar enterprize in the world."¹⁸

Bergquist became organist and choir master of Central Lutheran Church from 1922-1929 where he also directed the Odin Male Chorus. In 1926 his Reformation Cantata was given a gala performance with the Minneapolis Symphony and with Winifred Reichmuth, one of the students from his composition classes, playing the Schumann Piano Concerto.

Bergquist served as president of the Minnesota Music Teachers Association, 1927-1929. He conducted a major effort to get state board recognition for the work of the music teachers without, unfortunately, long-range success.¹⁹ None the less, he revitalized the association and gave it high ideals to live by.

This extraordinary career was recognized by many including his Alma Mater. At its seventieth anniversary in May, 1932, Gustavus Adolphus College recognized the merits of Bergquist's musical work by conferring upon him the degree of Doctor of Music. On the same occasion his Reformation Cantata, with libretto by Dr. Olson, was rendered by the oratorio chorus of the school under the direction of the composer.²⁰

Bergquist was one of the most prolific composers of the First School of Minnesota Composers. His works demand more attention, a separate study, than is possible here. The work list at the end of this essay shows his devotion to music for the church and music for youth. It is unfortunate that a number of his organ sonatas and his prize-winning suite for piano have not been located despite considerable search. Above all, it would be essential to resurrect the student composition programs in the files of the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Thursday Musical (which sponsored some of the concerts) or in newspapers.

Under the heavy load of work, Bergquist fell sick in 1934 and died 26 February 1935. The services were held at Messiah Lutheran Church. In memory of his ability to find joy in music and to impart that to others, his fellow musicians performed the following musical program at Central Lutheran Church. His work with high school composition classes was carried on by Harry Ranks.

PROGRAM

Sonata No. 1 in C Minor (Organ)

Allegra Maestoso

Andante

Choral and Fugue

(O, Bride of Christ Rejoice)

Played by Miss Hutchinson

(This Sonata was composed in 1902 in Berlin and dedicated to Franz Grunicke, Mr. Bergquist's teacher.)

Three Characteristic Pieces for Piano ("From the Nursery")

Peek a-boo

I don' wan'na go to bed, No! No!

I'se 'F'aid

Played by Miss Gerhard

(These compositions won the St. Erik's international prize in 1921.)

A group of Boys' Glee Club Songs

In God We Trust

Sleep Song

Blest be the Tie That Binds (an arrangement)

Solo by Russel Stith

My Creed

Sung by the Bryant Junior High Boys' Glee Club

Directed by Mrs. Angell

(These songs are from the Second Chorus Book for Boys, compiled by Ella M. Probst and Mr. Bergquist, especially arranged for junior high boys.)

From the Oratorio Golgotha

Bass Solo—Behold the Man

Sung by Mr. Busch

Tenor Solo—Father Forgive Them

Sung by Mr. Cronon

Quartette—For God So Loved the World

Sung by Westminster Quartette

(This Oratorio was given its first production April 6, 1906, in the old auditorium (now the Lyceum) with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, a chorus of 300 voices and soloists.)

Sonata No. V in D Minor (Organ)

Lento e Misterioso—Molto Allargando

(And God said, Let There Be Light)

Mestoso Molto

(He was despised and rejected of men

A Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief)

Andante Molto Espressivo

(I shall keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on me)

Finale—Allegro Moderato

(Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, yea, and
forever, Alleluia, Amen.)

Played by Mr. Goodwin

(This Sonata composed in 1932 and dedicated to Mr. Goodwin is heard for the first time in Minneapolis in this recital.)

J. Victor Bergquist

List of Works

MnM = Minneapolis Public
Library
MnGA = Gustavus Adolphus
College
MnHi=Minnesota Historical
Society
DLC = Library of Congress
C = Copyright Office

Sacred Cantatas, Choruses and Oratorios

Ms. or Print	Title	Dedication & Date Publisher	For	Location
Pr	77. Påsktoner	Lyrics by Ludvig Augustana Book Concern: Körsånger för gudstjänsten 1914	mixed choir, solo, and organ	MnGA
Pr	78. Jubilate	Lyrics by Anna Ölandr Augustana Book Concern: Körsånger för gudstjänsten 1914		MnGA
Ms	Davids II Psalm	Minneapolis, 1897 facsimile of ms. score		MnGA
Pr	Golgotha English & Swedish Text	Minneapolis, MN: Joseph E. Frank, 1908	Tenor, Bass Solos, Quartet, Chorus, Orchestra	MnM, MnGA, DLC
Ms	Golgotha	1907	Score & 24 parts	MnM
Pr	Julkantat, Christmas Cantata Text by Dr. A. Gergin. Swedish & English Texts Especially adapted for Christmas Entertainments by the Sunday Schools	Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1910	Mixed voices, Children's voices, quartet, soprano, alto, tenor, bass solo, Keyboard	MnM, MnGA, DLC
Pr	O Sacred Head, Now Wounded	Augustana Octavo Series of Church Music, 1934	A cappella for 8 voices	MnGA, DLC
Pr	Och de kommo till den plats, som kallas Getsemane Text by Carl Kraft	Augustana Book Concern, 1917	chorus	C
Pr	Reformationskantat Text Ernst W. Olson Swedish & English Texts	Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1917 (400th anniversary of the Reformation)	Soprano, Tenor, Bass Solo, Quartet, Chorus & Orchestra	MnM, MnGA, DLC
Ms	Reformationskantat		Score and 34 Parts	MnM
	Story of the Shepherd author unknown, trans. from the Spanish	pub. 1930	mixed choir	C

Pr	Year in Song, The	<i>The Chorus Book for Boys</i> G. Schirmer, 1922 Small pieces for the 12 months	boy's voices soprano, alto, 2 basses	DLC Laudon Collection
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Sacred Songs

Pr	Påsktoner, blandad kör	Augustana Book Concern, 1914	Voice and organ	C
Pr	The Bethlehem Cradle Words by Isaac Watts	New York: G. Schirmer, 1926 (plate # 32835)	Voice and piano	MnM MnHi
Pr	My Shepherd is the Living God	Minneapolis: published in the <i>Noarhwest Musical Herald</i> , December 1930 issue	Voice and piano	MnHi Univ of Mn

Hymns

Pr	From Every Stormy Wind That Blows No. 437	ibid.	SATB	MnGA
Pr	Hush, My Dear, Lie Still and Slumber	ibid.	SATB	MnGA
Pr	I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say No. 432	<i>The Hymnal and Order of Service</i> (Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod, 1925)	SATB	MnGA
Pr	Jesus, Let My Final Rest No. 605	ibid.	SATB	MnGA
Pr	O Happy Home, Where Thou Art Loved the Dearest No. 533	ibid.	SATB	MnGA

Piano Music

	Fantasia Serieuse		piano	
	Three Characteristic Pieces for Piano "From the Nursery" Peek a-boo I don' wan'na go to bed, No! No! I'se F'aid	International Prize for excellence in piano comp. by the St. Eric Society of New York City, auxiliary to the Order of Vasa	piano	

Organ Music

Ms	Organ Sonata #1 C minor <i>Allegro maestoso</i> <i>Andante</i> <i>Choral and Fugue</i> (O Bride of Christ, rejoice)	Berlin, 1902. dedicated to Franz Grunicke	Organ Solo	
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Ms	Organ Sonata #2	Berlin	Organ Solo	
Ms	Organ Sonata #3 in B-flat Minor	Minneapolis, 1930-31 Dedicated to Hamlin Hunt, Organist of Plymouth Congregational Church, Mpls.	Organ Solo	
Ms	Organ Sonata #4		Organ Solo	
	<p>Sonata # 5 in D Minor (Sacred) <i>Lento e misterioso—molto allargando</i> (And God said, Let There be Light) <i>Mestoso molto</i> (He was despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief) <i>Andante molto espressivo</i> (I shall keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me) <i>Finale</i>—<i>Allegro moderato</i> (Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, yea, and forever. Alleluia. Amen</p>	Minneapolis, 1932, dedicated to Hugo Goodwin, Organist of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Minneapolis	Organ Solo	MnM

Choral Anthologies

Pr	Körsånger för Gudstjänster & published separately: Passionsbön, No. 81 O Hufvud, Blodigt, Såradt, No.82	Rock Island, Illinois Augustana Book Concern	Chorus	
Pr	The Chorus Book for Boys	A Selection of Favorite Com- positions compiled, arranged, or composed by Ella M. Probst and J. Victor Bergquist New York: G. Schirmer 1922	Boy's voices, soprano, alto, basses I & II	Laudon collection, DLC
Pr	The Second Chorus Book for Boys	as above G. Schirmer, m 1925	Boy's voices, soprano, alto, basses I & II	DLC

College Hymn

Pr	Gustavus Adolphus Thine honored name we sing Words by Daniel Nystrom	published in <i>College Breezes</i> May 1908, also in 1924 song book	vocal melody with piano accompaniment	MnGA
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Arrangements

Pr	Mister Sandman Words & Music by Alice Lee Haegg, arr. Bergquist	Paul A. Schmitt, 1928	2-part song treble voices	C
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Books

Pr	Theory of Self Expression in Music, an Outline	Mpls: Paul A. Schmitt, 1925		
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1 Doniver A. Lund, *Gustavus Adolphus College, A Centennial History, 1862-1962* (Minneapolis, MN: Gustavus Adolphus College Press, 1963), p. 68.

2 This information supplied by Edi Thorstensson, Gustavus Adolphus archivist, and also based upon Dr. E. W. Olson, "Doctor J. Victor Bergquist Passes," *Lutheran Companion*, 9 March 1935, p. 311.

3 On Johnson, see Robert T. Laudon essay "Gustavus Johnson, Pianist-Composer of Minneapolis" in the Research Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

4 German composer and conductor (1861-1911), teacher at the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory.

5 There were two Scharwenka brothers, Ludwig Philipp (1847-1917) composer and teacher, and Franz Xaver (1850-1924), pianist and composer.

6 Alexandre Félix Guilmant (1837-1911), was the organist at Ste. Trinité, professor of organ at the Conservatoire, founder of the Schola Cantorum, brilliant improviser and editor of old masters of the organ.

7 The information here and on his career at Augustana Church is based upon the section "Music in Augustana" in Ralph Strom, *Seventy-five Years of Christian Service in Minneapolis, 1866-1941* (Minneapolis: Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1941), pp. 32-33.

8 The well-known oratorio by Théodore Dubois (1837-1924), teacher of composition at the Conservatoire of Paris.

9 Wilhelm Middelschulte (1863-1943), an eminent German organist, noted as performer and teacher in Chicago, Milwaukee and Detroit.

10 The oratorio was by Harvey Bartlett Gaul (1881-1945), another student of Guilmant who held positions in Pittsburgh.

11 Olson, "Bergquist Passes."

12 "News of the Musical World: The Opening Season," *Minneapolis Journal*, 1 October 1905 which reports on the progress of the oratorio and says that it has been copyrighted but not published although some numbers are intended for separate publication during the season of 1905-1906.

13 W. S. Rockstro, "Oratorio," *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450-1880)* ed. George Grove (Boston: Ditson, 1880) Vol. II, p. 559. See also the handbook published in Chicago by A. C. McClurg in 1893, *The Standard Oratorios* by George P. Upton which traces the history of the oratorio and also of the early development of sacred music in America.

14 Conrad Bergendoff, *One Hundred Years of Oratorio at Augustana* (Rock Island: Augustana Historical Society, 1981), Augustana Historical Society Publications No. 29, pp. 20-21, 35-36.

15 pp. 24-25, a report on the Progressive Series Normal at West High School, 6 July to 23 inclusive.

16 Put out by Schmitt of Minneapolis in 1925.

17 *The Augustana Quarterly* 7 (1928), pp. 237-246.

18 Robert T. Laudon, *Minnesota Music Teachers Association, The Profession & the Community, 1901-2000* (Eden Prairie: by the Association, 2000), p. 59. Verbrugghen's statement is found in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 13 April 1930. Among later musical leaders who began in Bergquist's program were Eunice Norton, the most famous pianist that Minnesota has produced and Paul Oberg, director of the Music Department of the University of Minnesota.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61, 66-68 (where the conflict with music educators is chronicled).

20 Dr. E. W. Olson, "Doctor J. Victor Bergquist Passes," *Lutheran Companion* 9 March 1935, p. 311.