

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Paul Yoder (1908-1990), 1986 Inductee (WJU #270)

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



For many of our Windjammers Unlimited members, the name Paul Yoder is familiar, not because of any relationship to the circus or circus music, but rather as the person whose name appeared as the arranger on so many of the pieces we played in Junior and Senior High School. In fact, it would be unlikely any band student in the United States between the 1930s and the 1970s could have not experienced playing one of Yoder's arrangements or compositions. Windjammers members from the 1980s will also remember Paul as an active member of our organization, playing in the percussion section, conducting, and always providing anecdotes and humor.

Paul Van Buskirk Yoder was born October 8, 1908 in Tacoma, Washington, to Albert Henry Yoder (1866-1940) and Susan Norton (Griggs) Yoder (1869-1953), both graduates of the University of Indiana. Paul was the youngest of six children and Paul always referred to himself as the baby of the family. Early on, the family moved from Tacoma to Grand Forks, North Dakota, where his father was a member

of the university faculty. As a 6th grader, Paul began his musical career taking lessons on a drum pad. He excelled as part of the Junior and Senior High School bands and orchestra. In 1924, he was elected president of the high school's Class of 1926.



One of Paul's early income-producing enterprises was playing drums in the local theater orchestra ... for silent films! He thought he had a cool career on the horizon, until "talkies" were introduced with the release of "The Jazz Singer" in October 1927.

Paul enrolled in the University of North Dakota and was honored there by being named a Phi Beta Kappa scholar and Valedictorian of his graduating class. He received his BA degree from the University of North Dakota in 1930. While he was heavily involved in music and was the student conductor of the University's band, his degree was in Journalism. Years later, in 1958 the University conferred upon him an honorary Doctor of Music degree. He also studied at Vandercook College of Music and in 1941 he received a Master of Music degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Yoder's first job out of college was playing percussion in the Rochester (Minnesota) Park Band during the summer of 1930, under Dr. Harold Cooke. The pay was \$1 per concert. Cooke took young Yoder under his wing and gave him harmony lessons following the band rehearsals. Paul then taught instrumental music in the schools of West Aurora, Illinois and Evansville, Indiana until 1936. He then realized more-playable school band arrangements and original works were needed, so he moved to Chicago to become a full-time composer and arranger to fill that void.

Paul Yoder's first published piece for band had happened in 1933. It was a novelty number titled "Our Family Band," published by Rubank. Over the course of his career, he wrote over 1,500 original compositions and arrangements and became known as the "Dean of American band composers." He was also called the "father of bands" in Japan, and "America's musical ambassador" for his work

internationally. He composed and arranged with young bands as his primary focus. Likewise, he also developed several instrumental methods. Over time, he utilized nearly 100 different publishers. His *College Songs for School Bands* set sales records for many years.

During World War II, Yoder was a member of the U.S. Army Bands at Fort Slocum (New Rochelle) and Fort Hamilton (Brooklyn) in New York.

In the January 1952 issue of *The Instrumentalist*, Paul was featured in their "Who's Who in Music" feature. Included was this comment: "Members of the ABA were needling him about his rearrangement of the famous Sousa marches. One of the members leaned over and whispered: 'Why do you stick around and take all this criticism?' To which Paul replied: 'I enjoy this meeting because here I am insulted by some of the very best men in the business.'"

Paul had a great interest in preserving the heritage of band music, including traditional circus music. He freely shared his talents, supporting a wide variety of band causes.

In 1963 and 1964, he was president of the American Bandmasters Association and was highly supportive of the ABA Research Center at University of Maryland. That led to establishing the famed *ABA Journal of Band Research*. The Journal, published twice a year, is the world's premiere scholarly publication devoted to band music, band history, and band methodology. From 1974 to 1982, Yoder was the visiting professor of music at Troy State University.

Windjammers Hall of Fame 1992 laureate James A. Perkins had this to say about Paul: "Paul will always be remembered for all his activities (such as at the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago), from guest conducting, introducing bands, directing the reading band, clowning around on the drums, exchanging his great stories, hugging his friends, befriending new people -- especially

young students – to giving everyone he came in contact with encouragement and always a smile on his face and never a cross or mean word, but always a sharp barb or two for his closest friends."

One of Paul's favorite stories was being in a hotel lobby working on his notes prior to an ABA meeting, when Karl King came over asking "What are you doing, Paul? Working on your ad libs?"

Paul always had a love for circus music. One of his closest friends was Merle Evans. In a 1987 article about Merle in *The Instrumentalist*, Paul commented: "I became acquainted with Merle Evans during the summer of 1962 at a music camp in Colorado. I remember telling him that if he would hire me just one time to play in a circus band, I would die a happy man."

Merle's response was: "I've got a job for you. I'm going to direct the Shrine Circus in Kansas City this Fall, and you can be the drummer."

Excited, Paul continued: "Suddenly I was flying high. I put all my drums together and met Merle in Kansas City to do the job. The day before the show we rehearsed the cues and Merle told me where he wanted rolls and cymbal crashes and filled me in on what to watch for and what to do. 'The dancing horses don't follow the music', he told me. 'You have to watch the lead horse and keep the bass drum beat in time with the animal's rear end.' That was the first time I realized that dancing horses don't follow the music. When we did the show, I flubbed up a little the first time the dancing horses appeared, but I had the time of my life."

Years later, in 1986 when he was awarded the Windjammers Hall of Fame honor, Paul placed his worker's pass from the 1962 Shriner's gig in the corner of the Award, saying "Playing for that circus was the biggest thrill of my life."



After one of his many rehearsals as a percussionist in the annual Windjammers Convention Bands, Yoder in January 1983 casually mentioned to a new snare drummer that he "played pretty well" for a First of May and expressed the thought he "had good possibilities." During the next break, Yoder learned the new drummer was Buster Bailey, who had just completed 40 years with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

At left, during the 11th Annual Windjammers Unlimited Convention in 1983, Paul Yoder is captured in this photo observing percussionists Buster Bailey (playing Red Floyd's "Ringling" drum) and Ollie Zinsmeister. On Euphonium is Mike Montgomery, our current Secretary.

Photo courtesy of Barbara Bailey

On occasion, Paul used the pseudonyms Max Thomas or James A. Scott. But as Paul Yoder, over the years he was honored more times than can be counted.

The American School Band Directors Association awarded him the Edwin Franko Goldman Medal. He received the Medal of Honor from the Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra organization, the Distinguished Service Music Award from Kappa Kappa Psi, and the Academy of Wind and Percussive Arts (AWAPA) Award from the National Band Association, a group created by the editor and founder of *The Instrumentalist* magazine. Paul was also inducted into the National Band Association's Hall of Fame of Distinguished Band Conductors.

In 1985, the John Philip Sousa Foundation awarded Paul the Sudler Order of Merit.

When Paul was invited to guest-direct ten of his favorite compositions with the Chatfield Brass Band on October 12, 1983 to celebrate his 75th birthday and the 50th anniversary of his first publication, the Governor of Minnesota declared a statewide PAUL YODER DAY. Paul treasured the official proclamation certificate presented by Governor Rudy

Perpich. The Chatfield Lending Library currently includes 639 tunes composed or arranged by Paul.

Paul was married twice. On August 6, 1934, he married Maxine Fanny Thompson (1909-2011). They divorced and she remarried in 1947. On August 2, 1948, Paul married Roselyn A. (Niestraht) Pence (1911-1977). She had two children Dwight and Lynette. After Roselyn died in 1977, Paul made his home with LThynette in Hendersonville, NC.

It takes a lot of descriptors to summarize Paul, but leading ones are "gentle man" and "gentleman." Others include composer, arranger, clinician, historian, scholar, organizer, joker, emcee, teacher, drummer, musician, adjudicator, friend, humble, loveable, and storyteller.

As his health began to deteriorate, Paul had two final requests. He asked that a Dixieland band play at his funeral. Second, he asked that in lieu of flowers, his friends would donate to the musical organization of their choice that he had either directed or belonged to – especially ABA, Kappa Kappa Psi, Windjammers Unlimited, ACB, or Chatfield Lending Library. Paul Van Buskirk Yoder died April 4, 1990 in Hendersonville, NC and is buried next to Roselyn.

OLD PROS CIRCUS BAND in 1968

By Ron Keller, WJU #492

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This is the way I remember it. The phone rang on the Friday after Thanksgiving in November 1968.

I answered the phone and the voice on the other end said, "Ron, this is Paul Yoder." At first I thought it was a joke, but he continued, "We are putting together an all-star band for Merle Evans at the Midwest Band Clinic in December and we need one more tuba player. Would you like to play?"

"Wow," I said, "you bet."

"The catch is the rehearsal is at 11:00 p.m. and will last until 12:30 a.m.. Do you have a problem with that?"

"Nope", I said. "I'll be there." When I walked into the rehearsal from the rear, the percussion section was set up to my right and there was a tuba player sitting next to the bass drum. He turned around and said to me, "Young man, you sit right here." He pointed to the chair next to him. I sat down and that man on my right was none other than Bill Bell. And on my left was Harvey Phillips! My thought was what am I doing here? Well, I can tell you I never played better, for the first time the pressure was not on me as a first chair player.

We started with a *Fanfare* Merle had written, then began moving through the entire concert for the next evening. We played *Old Glory Triumphant* by Duple, *A Country Shuffle* by Holmes, *Dance of the Imps* by Karl King, *Crimson Petal*

Waltz by Fred Jewell. Then, as Merle explained how each number was used with the Circus, he said the next number was a musicians' number called *Storming of El Caney* by Russell Alexander. I can tell you the tuba section really nailed that one. So well so, Merle wanted to hear it a second time!

We followed that with *Russian Circus March*. Merle said he brought that back from Russia when Ringling-Barnum went over the previous year. Many more selections followed that Merle had used the previous season with the circus, including *Mambo Medley*, a complete music show for the Tiger Act, the *Hugarian Medley*, and then the Flying Act which included *Circus on Parade*, *Sunnyland Waltzes* and *Go Galop*. We then did *Royal Decree* by English, *Ragged Rosey* by King, *Quality Plus* by Jewell and a special arrangement by Paul Yoder dedicated to Merle called *Mr. Circus*. The program ended with Sousa's *Stars & Stripes Forever* with the tubas playing the piccolo part!

It was the most exciting musical evening of my life and still ranks up there at the top!

[Editor's note: Included in the band were these who became WJU members at some point: Byron Autry, William "Boom-Boom" Browning, Ted Buenger, Floyd Cooley, Ronald Keller, and Paul Yoder. Also notable were William Bell, Harvey Phillips and Roland Sherbundy, and many others that space doesn't permit naming.]