



Musical Minute

A compilation of Musical Minutes
shared during the year 2023

McAllister Memorial
Presbyterian Church

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Avenue
Covington, VA 24426

Musical Minute:



By the time this newsletter arrives in your mailbox the Alleghany Highlands is forecast to be at normal or even above normal temperatures for this time of the year. Daytime temperatures in the 50s will be a far cry from what we experienced over the Christmas holiday just days ago. It was so cold McAllister's Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services were canceled out of concern for the safety and health of our congregants. The bitterly cold temperatures and biting wind were unpleasant at best and at worst, deadly for many across the country. Looking out the window at the gray, sleeping landscape over those days I found myself considering winter—its purpose, its effects—and what we can learn from it. I've always loved the winter season and find it to be a restorative time of reflection and even growth. I can hold this opinion in large part because I am blessed to spend winter in a toasty warm home. Still, after the hustle of summer and fall and the increased activity of the holidays, January's imminent, inevitable approach always feels like sinking into a cozy, favorite chair after a tiring long walk on a windy day.

The end of December brings some respite from the seemingly never-ending delivery of catalogs urging us to buy things for ourselves or others that we may not even need. Get free shipping on \$99.00, buy three tops—get one free, order before December 23 for delivery by Christmas Day! Buy, buy, buy! As December winds down, the catalog contents of the mailbox transition from Christmas merchandise and must-buy gifts to something truly valuable—seed and plant catalogs! In that respect, winter is the time to plan and scheme. Andy can tell you that when it comes to seed catalogs, my winter garden dreams are always more ambitious than the time I'm willing to spend tending the garden when the temperature and humidity soar. The colorful garden catalogs that arrive in deepest winter are always dogeared as I swoon over new plant introductions and admire tried and true garden classics. "Look at those unique cosmos! Who knew zinnias came in that color?! I've never grown those before. Do they need to be deadheaded? I wonder if they're drought tolerant? Deer resistant? (In the last decade spent gardening out Potts Creek, I've learned that the answer to that one is pretty much always a resounding 'No!'") By the time I get around to placing an order, I've usually considered whether I'm actually likely to start hundreds of tiny seeds indoors weeks before the planting season begins. At that point, I'm usually back to a few packets of my old standards, which if you've ever grown them, you know why they're old standards. Prolific annuals like cosmos, zinnias, and marigolds and hearty, stalwart perennials like peony, coneflower, and

rudbeckia are productive and varied enough to keep a gardener's vases full all summer long with ample for sharing.

I've always loved peonies and remember them fondly from mom's cutting garden when I was a child, but in recent years I've become absolutely enamored with them. Thankfully, Andy, my chief engineer of digging, also loves them and was nonplussed early this fall when I told him that I'd ordered another seven varieties. With recent purchases, I've made an effort to choose peonies with strong stems and varied bloom times so that we can enjoy their flamboyant, fragrant flowers in the garden and on the table even longer. Paired with the ones we dug from mom's garden and some which have been recommended by gardening acquaintances, we now host quite a collection. Which brings me back to the purpose of winter. I was reading in one of my gardening magazines just this afternoon that one shouldn't "overprotect" some plants in the winter garden, such as peonies and spring blooming bulbs like daffodils and tulips. They need the cold to force them into dormancy so that they can build up strength to bloom vibrantly in the spring. So this winter, I'm choosing to "think" like a daffodil. I intend to allow myself a little time of dormancy so that I might awaken stronger and more vibrant in the spring. Who knows? Maybe I'll be even more colorful come April! I'll let you know how it goes . . . I hope that you, too, might find some respite and time for regrowth and restoration in the quiet and chill of the coming months. Happy 2023!

Beth

Musical Minute:

In 1988, just 4 months shy of our first wedding anniversary, Andy was offered a job at Virginia Folding Box, a division of Westvaco. He traveled to Richmond to explore this unexpected opportunity and a week or so later, we found ourselves breaking the news of our impending move to mom, brother Nick, and my Grandmother Leitch at my birthday dinner. (Yes—there were some tears, both joyful and sad!) Things progressed quickly and we left our beloved first “together home” in Rosedale and moved to Chesterfield County in early November. While Andy got busy in his new role at VFB, I continued making the commute to Covington to finish teaching the final six weeks period of the year at Bath County High School and to play for the last couple of Sundays in December at McAllister. (I made a promise to Arnold!)



Once the move was permanent and I'd gone from having two jobs to none, it was time to start looking for work. I scanned the Richmond Times for openings and responded to anything that even remotely sounded like it might be a fit. On several occasions what looked like a solid opportunity in the advertisement turned out to be an employment agency stocking its files with future job candidates. A time or two something looked promising, but due to various reasons nothing quite worked out.

It was still winter when I found myself at a job interview at a trucking company on the outskirts of Richmond. When I think back to it now, I wonder how I even found the place before GPS! The gentleman who interviewed me was welcoming and polite, but after a quick perusal of my resumé said that he wasn't sure I was a good fit for the position. They were looking for a receptionist/dispatcher and he felt that I was “overqualified” and probably wouldn't find the job very satisfying. All of which was a very kind way of saying, “No, we're not going to hire you.” I must have looked crestfallen, because he was kind enough to engage in a few minutes of chit-chat following the interview, expressing interest in how my husband and I happened to find ourselves living in Richmond and how we were adjusting. As we talked, he flipped through my resumé once more, and suddenly inquired, “You're an organist?” I nodded affirmatively to which he replied, “Well that makes more sense. Now I know why you're here. The organist at my wife's church is planning to retire and the church is concerned about finding a replacement. Would you be interested?” Rather than leaving the interview disheartened that day, I left with fresh wind in my sails.

Within ten days, I had interviewed for the organist's position at St. Giles Presbyterian on Grove Avenue and Andy and I soon found ourselves part of a generous choir and church family. And it turned out that the retiring organist was also a professor in the Music Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. He gave me a "gentle shove" to get me started and thanks to his early encouragement I completed my Master of Music degree in Organ Performance while in Richmond. Within a month of starting at St. Giles I was introduced by a choir member to another church member, an entrepreneur with a start-up software firm catering to the wholesale food industry. He hired me as the firm's receptionist--an all-encompassing and glamorous position that incorporated all of the expected duties, but also entailed assembly of all of the IKEA furniture for our new offices! (I'm still handy with an allen wrench.) By the time I left the firm to pursue my degree, I had been named Assistant Marketing Manager.

Over the years I've thought back to that brief conversation in the trucking warehouse. That single interaction changed not only my day, but also my future. It resulted in a series of events that shaped our entire time in Richmond, not just my work life, but also the many people who would enter our lives to become supportive acquaintances and loving friends. I never saw that gentleman again and honestly; I don't think that I ever met his wife at the church. But the extra few minutes he spent with me had a lasting impact, and my guess is that he never even knew it . . . I'd love to think that I've done the same for someone. That would be the best thanks I could give him.

Beth

March 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



Looking through a stack of old photos last week, I came upon a couple of pictures from when I was in the Covington High School marching band. Judging from the other band members around me, I'm guessing I was in the eighth or ninth grade. We were dressed in Covington Cougar short-sleeved shirts and jeans or shorts instead of our usual woolen band uniforms and our cheeks were flushed, so I'm guessing the occasion was the annual Labor Day parade. We must have been approaching Casey Field as mom or dad snapped the photos. There were dozens of cars parked just off the parade route. I scanned the slightly blurry pictures and thought, "Wow. They must have had a vintage car show that day, too." Suddenly it dawned on me that those weren't vintage automobiles. They were simply the cars that people were driving in 1979 or 1980. Ouch!

Old photographs appeal to my sentimental nature and it's hard for me to throw them away. Oddly enough, the same goes for photos of people I don't even know. That means that in addition to the many pictures I have of my own family and friends, I have also collected pictures of other people's family and friends. (I told you it was odd.) There was a wonderful antique store/flea market not too far from where we lived in Austria. It was in an old mill with thick masonry walls situated on the bank of a small stream and it was owned by a lovely gentleman who, without fail, always greeted me warmly. He would ask if I needed any help and would then leave me to wander around the cavernous space for as long as I wanted. It was a good place to while away an hour or so on the weekend and I usually came out with a fun find or two—an old kitchen utensil, a candlestick—just something small. The length of my visit depended on the season as the place wasn't heated. It was refreshingly cool, even chilly, in the summer, and unbearably frigid for longer than 30 minutes in the winter.

During the years we were in Graz I picked up several small photo albums at the market. One is cloth covered and heart shaped with photos of smiling, well-dressed skiers, holidaying in the Austrian Alps. Although the images are black and white, I can see that the sun shines brilliantly in the background. Rather than thick puffer coats and nylon pants, the skiers, kept warm by their activity and the sun, don knickers, knee-high socks, ankle boots and short sleeves. One woman sports a demure, white, flouncy bow around the neck of her blouse. On the title page of the book someone carefully wrote the location of the adventure and the date, February

1936. They seem carefree and high-spirited. I have to wonder if they had any idea of what the coming years would bring. I have another album from around the same time, the Austrian backdrop stunning, as ever, and the fashionable dress equally so. The family photographs don't change too much – outdoor excursions, lakeside picnics, holiday gatherings – but as the thirties draw to a close, the men begin to appear in military attire rather than their dress suits.

Two albums from a different family feature dozens of pictures of a much adored daughter, Daisy. The earliest images are from May 1929 when Daisy was one and a half years old. The second album has photos through the summer of 1938. There's Daisy outside in the big, wooden washtub, Daisy with her beloved terrier (who ages right by her side until my glimpse into their lives ends in 1938), Daisy smelling the flowers in the garden, Daisy lakeside with her mother, and Daisy in that same big washtub in 1936. I especially adore the pictures of smiling Daisy with her little dog, proof that children across cultures, continents, and centuries have shared a timeless, loving relationship with their furry sidekicks.

One framed photograph I found shows four men in front of a barn, the snowy roof clad in scalloped terra cotta tile in typical Austrian style. They're all dressed in suits with waistcoats and three are wearing high-domed hats. All are holding what appears to be a "celebratory libation," maybe schnapps, wine, or hard cider. Any of the three would be right at home at an Austrian celebration. I have no idea the occasion and they're all wearing serious expressions, but it struck me as funny. As one leans in precariously to toast from the back of a handsome horse, one is balanced on a small keg lying horizontally on a huge upright barrel. It's somehow solemn and comical at the same time.

I don't know why I have this fondness for the photographs of strangers. But they make me consider their lives—what they were like when the images were taken, and what they became in the future—a future that is now very much in the past. Anyway, maybe this inspires you to pull out an album that you've not seen in a while and spend a few minutes with your past. See if you can throw away the pictures that are out of focus and keep only the best. That's what I'm *attempting* to do. After you're done, may I suggest that you then give it to another family member. Let them be responsible for your family history and its posterity! And whatever you do, don't start collecting other people's albums!

Take good care. Beth



April 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



When Queen Elizabeth of England passed away last September, Andy and I, like many, followed the pomp and pageantry of the multi-day events marking the death of the long-reigning monarch. As if the sheer magnitude and spectacle weren't enough, the memorial services held in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, and ultimately her state funeral in London, were packed with thoughtfully worded tributes, carefully chosen scripture selections and exquisite music. There were congregational hymns, some familiar to an American churchgoer, some more specific to the Anglican church, moving choral works, haunting laments played on the bagpipes, expressive organ selections, colorfully costumed and perfectly synchronized marching units with drums and brass, and more. We watched most of the coverage on BBC where we were occasionally treated to a little detail about why a particular piece of scripture had been chosen, why a certain piper had been asked to play the lament, what significance a hymn or anthem had either in the life of the Queen or the history of the monarchy. Anyone who watched until her final procession to St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle saw that two of her beloved Corgi pups and her pony, Emma, were there to witness her final homecoming. As an animal lover, I found this to be particularly touching.

But perhaps the most interesting tidbit to come out during the week-long coverage was the fact that the Queen's Palace beekeeper would personally deliver the news of her death to the bees inhabiting her 7 hives at Clarence House and Buckingham Palace. In a longstanding tradition in Britain and apparently in other parts of Europe, as well, the bees should be told of life changing events, such as birth, marriage and death, in the lives of their owners. Legend has it that this custom not only informs the bees but keeps them from leaving their hives and causes them to continue producing honey. According to John Chapple, Palace beekeeper, "it is traditional when someone dies that you go to the hives and say a little prayer and put a black ribbon on the hive . . . I drape the hives with black ribbon with a bow." Chapple continued, "You knock on each hive and say, 'The mistress is dead, but don't you go. Your master will be a good master to you.'" The custom has sparked art and poetry throughout the centuries in Europe and even in America. Nineteenth century American Poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote of the tradition in his heart-breaking poem "Telling the Bees." It relates the tale of a lovestruck suitor who after a month away returns with high expectations to the home of his beloved only to find the "chore-girl" singing to the bees as they "steal" in and out from the hives, "Stay at home, pretty bees, fly not hence! Mistress Mary is dead and gone!"

Purely by chance, I found out recently that one of McAllister's members is a beekeeper. I'm admittedly a tad jealous. Beekeeping has always fascinated me and before we discovered in 2014 that Andy has a dangerous bee allergy, we toyed with the idea of keeping bees when we retired. That's no longer an option for us, for obvious reasons, but the centuries long practice of keeping bees and the lore associated with it, the orderly images of stacked wooden hives and traditional woven skeps, the other-worldly attire of the beekeeper, the careful retrieval of dripping, amber honey, and the making of butterscotch-hued candles from the miraculously structured honeycomb, still captivates me. Bees are industrious, tireless in their duties, and singularly dedicated to the care and longevity of the queen bee and the hive. As the weather has warmed over the last month, many of our bee friends have made an appearance on sunny days. I feel badly for them, as there is not yet much pollen for them to collect. If they can just hold on through the temperamental spring weather, the trees will soon be in bloom, and in our own garden, we'll have catmint, salvia, mountain mint, lavender and more for them—enough for them to fill the tiny “baskets” on their back legs with pollen to take back to the hive. I suppose it's only fitting that we share with these noble insects, who unwittingly play such a critical role in the success of the human race through their pollination of both ornamental plants and edible crops, news of our fortunes, good and bad. It seems the least we can do after all they do for us. Happy spring!

Beth

May 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



Everyone from nuts.com to Macy's to the chocolate-dipped fruit people are currently reminding us on-air, on-line and in any other way imaginable that Mother's Day is just around the corner. Likewise, the Stihl company, Old Spice, and again, the chocolate-dipped fruit people are already alerting us that Father's Day follows quickly in June. More and more ads are now sensitive to the fact that many individuals were not raised in the "traditional" or ideal parent/child relationship and merchandisers are advising shoppers to remember that "certain someone" (or those someones) who may have taken on highly influential roles in their young lives. As for our lives, Nick and I couldn't have had a more "traditional" upbringing. Mom and dad were there for us from the start, as were our grandparents and great grandparents, just down the street on Lexington and around the corner on Riverside.

I remember long, idyllic days spent with our pets—dogs, the occasional kitten (until it was discovered that I'm allergic), goldfish, gerbils, hamsters, parakeets, and even rabbits (Shaun, my rabbit, named after Shaun Cassidy, the love of my young life at the time, and Inky, Nick's rabbit, named for his distinctive pitch-black coat). The rabbits arrived one year in a rare moment of parental weakness shortly following Easter. (It was no coincidence that at the time we lived directly across the street from that subversive retailer and bane of many a parent's existence, Barr's Critters, Crafts, and Cards!) In my recollection every day was one long stretch of absolute peace and harmony with two perfectly behaved children engaged in quiet, learning activities with only an occasional joyful titter disturbing the calm serenity. HA! According to recently uncovered evidence, a particular exception to that serenity occurred in July of 1969. I came across the following delightful letter, written in a blocky, angular, child's hand, a couple of weeks ago while going through an envelope of photos and other memorabilia from mom and dad's house. Since it adds to the charm, I've left punctuation and spelling exactly as it was written in the fury of the moment. It reads:

"To MOM

I hope you will be nicer some day. and I hope you know that I shoud have rights to. You are not the only one who shuld have rights. evre one has rights so I hope the Note tot you something and wrember it to.

From XXXXX"

(To protect the somewhat innocent, I won't tell you which of us wrote this indignant letter . . . I'll let you guess.)

Mom and dad must have found the letter humorous at the time and worthy of saving for posterity, because directly behind it I found a handwritten description in mom's hand detailing the day's events. Dated July 13, 1969, it reads as follows:

"We came home from vacation last p.m. late. Needless to say, we all were short-tempered and tired. After a long series of incidents with me yelling and the children saying, "I didn't do anything wrong," or "it was (his) or (her) fault," I finally sent home Nick's friend XXXXXX XXXXXX (The Joker) and sent Nick and Beth to their rooms for the evening. They are asleep now and this was lying in my room on the cedar chest at the foot of our bed. We aren't sure how we're going to explain about rights yet, but we have decided that a list of household rules for family and friends will be posted upstairs and down."

I have a vague recollection of house rules being posted during our childhood, but I'm sure this first list was only one of many over the years. In addition to making expectations about behavior crystal clear, perhaps the posting of those early statutes also aided in our both learning to spell correctly, too. (Or should I say, to?!)

Nick and I were blessed that mom and dad were usually able to find humor and joy amid the everyday bumps and rumbles of raising little human beings. Thankfully for us, that resilience was a trait they both carried into our teen and early college years. In retrospect, I'm sure it helped save their sanity.

Loving parents and a community of other responsible adults are a true gift in a child's life, and they deserve to be celebrated. To all of the parents and parental figures among you, whether you're currently in the thick of raising little ones as McAllister's young parents are, raising teenagers, or happily and contentedly in the grandparent or even great grandparent stage, Happy Mother's Day and Happy Father's Day.

Beth

July 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



This spring I've been spending some of my TV time with Magnolia Network. Its "gentle" programming spanning cooking, gardening, restoration, and home renovation is right down my alley and as Andy can tell you (or perhaps warn you), has me almost daily dreaming up new projects for our home and garden! My new favorite show is "Homegrown," a half-an-hour program featuring a young, urban gardener who farms on a little over an acre lot inside the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Not only does she grow exquisite edibles to sell at the farmer's market, she helps like-minded suburban residents convert their grassy expanses and underutilized yards into productive and beautiful oases for edibles and ornamentals. Many episodes center around young families seeking to impart a sense of self-sustainability and the wonder of nature to their growing offspring. One thing that comes up repeatedly with these beautiful families is the parents' desire to share with their children a taste of their own childhoods or their family heritage. I think it's a common desire to remember the pleasures of our childhood through food memories and to want to pass those memories on to others.

It's probably the same everywhere, but in the south, especially, we often hear about how delicious "mama's lemon pound cake" was, how melt-in-your-mouth tender "grandma's pot roast" was, and how dad made the "best cornbread ever." These childhood taste memories are forever linked, and blessedly so, with the events and people surrounding them. The smell of bacon frying will forever remind me of improbably long Saturday mornings on Lexington Avenue with dad starting the bacon long before fixing sunny-side-up eggs and biscuits for our family breakfast. If there were friends in from school, it just meant more bacon and eggs, and so much more the merrier for kids who were maybe too far from home to drop in for a weekend breakfast. For me, the aroma of cinnamon and apples baking brings back not the expected remembrances of fall and winter, but instead the summer memories of our camp on the Jackson River and mom's Apple Brown Betty bubbling away in the old camp oven. The tantalizing aroma and anticipation of good things to come energized us for a whole day of play in the river and adjacent fields. Her hot milk cake was unrivaled, and it was hard for us to wait for it to cool enough to be tipped from the pan. Whether served plain or topped with fresh fruit and a dollop of Cool Whip it was sweet heaven on a plate and will be ever linked to hazy summer days and inky nights filled with cricket song by the river. Now there's a food memory! Peach cobbler was another camp favorite as summer peaked in concert with the peach

crop. And mom's spiced peach preserves, with the sugar taking a back seat to the fresh taste of the peaches are still the best I've ever had. I thought after she passed that I'd lost her recipe forever until I found it a year or so later in the stained pages of an old Ball canning book (published in 1966 with a cover price of 35 cents!). Whole cloves, a bit of allspice and a stick of cinnamon add the subtle spiciness. Making and later tasting that recipe was like having mom back in the kitchen. The tastes of home are an invitation to a family reunion, even if some of the family members are no longer present.

The same is true for our church family. Treasured tastes bring back memories of delicious meals shared in the company of McAllister friends and loved ones. It was a treat several years ago when Pam Poague made Jr. Parker's blue cheese dressing from the long-shuttered Old Forge Restaurant. Sweet Pam brought the dressing to a Soup and Sandwich potluck and even shared the recipe with me. I treasure it and have shared it with others who loved Uncle Jr. and have memories of the restaurant—as well as those who just love a good blue cheese dressing! If I remember correctly, it was Grisilda Perry who used to bake an elegant wreath, a yeasted sweet bread, I think, each year during the Christmas season. It was always a beautiful and festive finishing touch to the packed spread on the long buffet table. Please forgive if this memory should be attributed to another extraordinary McAllister baker, but I remember it as being Mrs. Perry's special treat.

At some point, most of us hanker for a taste of our childhood. Other than the fall/winter holiday season, I find that summer awakens those yearnings most for me. So in the spirit of sharing tasty church and childhood memories, I offer the following potato salad recipe. Perfect for summer picnics and potlucks it's from former member Rose Humphreys. Rose and her husband Jerry attended McAllister during my high school years and Rose sang in the choir. This recipe was a favorite in my family and Rose generously shared the recipe with us. It requires a quick cooked dressing, and while it takes a bit of effort—frankly, all potato salads do—if you like green peppers, this is tart and sweet and a nice change from the norm. It is written in the style of an experienced cook, so while I've given the recipe exactly as it's written in mom's hand on the inside cover of an old cookbook, I've also given some quantities that mom later shared with me.

Rose's Potato Salad Dressing

2 eggs, beaten
¾ cup of sugar
¾ cup vinegar

Cook over low heat until mixture begins to thicken. Remove from heat and add a tablespoon of prepared mustard and two tablespoons of mayonnaise. Beat well. Pour over cubed, cooked potatoes, diced green pepper and pickle relish.



Quantities per mom:

- At least four pounds of potatoes and up to five
- One or two medium green peppers depending on your taste and quantity of potatoes
- Use sweet pickle relish to taste; start with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup
- Finely diced onion, optional
- Salt and pepper to taste; use white pepper if you don't want black specks

Happy picnic season! Bask in the warmth of summer memories past and get out there and make some sun-bathed new ones!

Beth

August 2023

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

Our garden, like many others from what I hear, got off to a slow start this year. I didn't harvest a single cherry tomato until the second week of July, and my pepper plants are still stubby and stubbornly pepper free. When I inspect them up close, they seem to sneer back at me with an apathetic and, frankly, contemptuous, attitude, as if to say, "You want a pepper so bad? Make it yourself." I harvested my first two cucumbers on July 21 (delicious!) and was about to give up on my rangy, rambling zucchini plant when I finally found a cute little zucchini, small and tender, hiding shyly under a big leaf. But we can't complain. We've been harvesting our own flowers since April, March, in fact, if you count the daffodils, and the spring and early summer garden has furnished us with an abundance of greens and aromatic herbs. I keep telling

myself that the summer is young and there is plenty of time for things to flourish, but this week nature has provided two jarring signs of the inevitable return of fall.

We see deer around our home pretty much every day of every season and we were treated to the presence of at least four fawns this spring and summer. It's been a delight to watch "our" spotted babies develop and mature, if not as much of a delight to see them sample every "deer resistant" plant that we're attempting to grow. But we were stunned the other day to see a handsome buck with well-developed antlers head out of the woods to the field. It seems as if the bucks had just shed their antlers following winter and now it's time to start the whole cycle again. Likewise, I looked out to our back deck just yesterday to see a squirrel contentedly munching away on a bright green hickory nut, his facile "hands" spinning the nut this way and that while his razor-sharp teeth shaved away the tough outer shell. I'm sure he left with a full belly, eager to get back to the hickory tree before his brethren discovered it. He left a sizable, little heap of nut debris for us to sweep up.

All of the stores have their back-to-school aisles stocked and parents already have in hand the lists of items required by each teacher. Children and teenagers are working through their summer "bucket lists" of fun activities, knowing that they will be back behind their desks in a matter of weeks.

All of this attests to the fact that nothing lasts forever. Which is a good thing, really. If you love the summer heat, you've still got another month or two to enjoy it. Relish the birdsong and bask in the sunshine. Heat up the grill for a cookout or head to the beach, stream, or pool for a quick cool-down. If you can't grow your own summer veggies, head to the farmers' market—or to Wiley's Garden Center on Riverside Dr. Wiley's has had great tomatoes and melons this summer! On the other hand, if you've had enough of the high temperatures and humidity, fall is just around the corner. Start planning your trip to the pumpkin patch. Dream about the first cool evenings and crisp mornings of autumn. Envision pulling out your favorite mug for a cup of hot tea or apple cider when the temperature hits that "just right" mark. We all know the old idioms, "All good things must come to an end," "Time marches onward," "Time flies," "It was as if time stood still." All of these adages make time seem a little slippery, but I think we're the fickle ones. When we're happy, we're fine if time stands still for a bit. If we're not, we're anxious to flip the pages on the calendar. Regardless, time does its own thing. So, get ready. Summer is here (for a while, at least) and fall is on the way! Enjoy!

Beth



Musical Minute:

Two of our dedicated choir members, Pearl Miller and Joe Martin, collaborated on that golden oldie, “Take the Name of Jesus with You” at McAllister on Sunday the 20th of August. Reflecting on the morning’s service later that afternoon, I marveled at the longevity of some of our favorite hymns in the Christian church. Just how many people have sung those very words or hummed its tune in the 150 or so years since the text was penned by Lydia Baxter? And why does it still have meaning for the church in 2023? According to hymnary.com, Baxter wrote numerous hymn texts, but “Take the Name” is the only one still found in contemporary hymnals—625 hymnals of various denominations, to be exact. The tune is catchy and the refrain, no doubt, is fun to sing, but it’s clear that both the tune and text are of another era. Yet still, both resonate.

As an organist, I confess that my preferred hymns are the *real* oldies. “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” was written and composed by reformer Martin Luther sometime between 1527 and 1529, but the sound of a congregation, no matter the size, singing those confident words of faith paired with that powerful tune is soul stirring. “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever!” Strong words, to be sure. The tune to the Doxology (OLD HUNDRETH) which we sing each and every Sunday is commonly attributed to Louis Bourgeois who was born in Paris in 1510, and parts of the melody may date back even further. Its effect on us is all the more meaningful because we know that for centuries before us believers have worshiped using the same tune.

McAllister Memorial has, in my lifetime at least, not only tolerated, but embraced a wealth of musical genres and eras. In the years before I went off to college I was exposed to a vast variety of sacred music from classical to gospel, to timeless spirituals and contemporary pieces. A typical Sunday in our sanctuary these days might include a prelude from 2017, a Choral Call to Worship from the 1970s, a hymn or two from the 1700 and 1800s and maybe one from 1983, a solo or anthem from the 1990s, and a baroque postlude from the late 1600s. It can all be meaningful and beautiful. Even our beloved “old” hymns were once new to someone’s ears. In fact, our oldest hymns were once new to *our* ears! Why does “Silent Night” carry such emotional weight when we sing it on Christmas Eve? Probably because many of us heard it for the first time many years ago in the hushed, expectant atmosphere of a church sanctuary surrounded by loved ones. “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna” brings back joy-filled memories of brilliantly sunny Palm Sundays as we celebrated the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. In the years since I returned to McAllister, many of you have shared with me your favorite hymns and sacred songs. Sometimes you love an old hymn because it was “mama’s favorite,” sometimes because the words spoke directly to you in a time of great joy or deep pain, sometimes because the tune makes you feel inexplicably happy. No matter where your tastes fall in the musical spectrum (and I hope that you can find a little something to enjoy in all of the music that you hear at McAllister), the music of the church speaks to all of us in unique ways, grounding us in our faith, and establishing our lineage in the history of Christianity. Our beloved, classic hymn urges us, “Come, Christians, Join to Sing.” Let’s go make some noise!

Take good care—and keep a song in your heart.

Beth



*Sing psalms and hymns and
spiritual songs among
yourselves, and make music to
the Lord in your hearts.*

Ephesians 5:19

October 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:

I don't remember precisely when "September Song" became a part of my musical soul and memory, probably when I was in my early teens and had had enough years of piano lessons that I could play it decently enough to accompany dad singing for some public event or at the private gathering of a local club. I've played and sung it with brother Nick more times than I could ever count in our living room on Lexington Avenue and my dear buddy Lisa, and I did the same in her living room on Locust Street. I'm sure I've played it in Reid's Blue Room on Maple Avenue as well as in the private dining room at the old Holiday Inn. There was never a time when I didn't know the words, it seems, and as the nights have begun to cool in the last week and a subtle change is apparent in the late afternoon slant of the sun, they've been running through my mind.

"Oh, it's a long, long while from May to December, but the days grow short, when you reach September.

When the autumn weather turns the leaves to flame, one hasn't got time for the waiting game.

*Oh, the days dwindle down to a precious few—September, November!
And these few precious days I'll spend with you—these precious days
I'll spend with you."*

With words by Maxwell Anderson and music by Kurt Weill, the piece was written for the musical "Knickerbocker Holiday" and copyrighted in 1938. The musical from which it was born is mostly relegated to history these days, but this little gem of a song has been covered in subsequent decades by dozens upon dozens of artists from Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, and Bing Crosby to Jimmy Durante and Willie Nelson.

I never saw "Knickerbocker Holiday," but even in my younger days, I knew this song was about more than the weather and the passing of the seasons. I guessed it had something to do with love and maybe missed opportunities and time wasted. Now I'm of the age, alarmingly, where I know it certainly has

something to do with all that and in fact, everything else, too. Autumn used to mean back to school, off to college, and exciting beginnings. It still does and it's probably my favorite season, but I confess that there is a wistfulness to fall that I used to not feel. We have beautiful seasons in Virginia, and I happily embrace each in its turn, but as much as I look forward to cooler days and clear blue skies, I feel some sadness as we clean the garden and empty the pots of annuals that have brought us such joy over the last months. Likewise, I sense more than ever the progression of the seasons as a metaphor for the cycle of our lives. But I take heart in "September Song." We haven't got all the time in the world to wait! Let's get on with spending "these precious days." Spend your precious hours with your sweetheart, spend them with your grandchild, spend them on a long fall walk with your pup, or on the couch with your beloved cat curled on your lap. Spend them with a good book or at an art gallery, or on the golf course if that's your thing. But remember to spend them in such a way that you remember how you lived each and every one.

Beth



November 2023

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:

The adult choir's weekly rehearsal generally takes place in the sanctuary these days. It's certainly easier on all of our "experienced" knees and hips and saves us the trip to the choir room down the steep stairs behind the organ case or from the parking lot to the lower door. But in truth, we enjoy practicing upstairs because the space is so beautiful. McAllister's small, dedicated group spreads out in the first few rows by the piano on the west side of the church where our singers can view the cross, the pulpit and the pipe organ, a vantage point that they see only briefly as they process into the sanctuary each week for Sunday morning worship.

This time of year, on a clear day the stained-glass windows on the mill side shine with fiery brilliance as the late afternoon sun slants low on the horizon. The windows themselves and the reflections they cast dance through our worship space as the

sun begins to sink. It really is an exceptional show. But just as the space is generously bathed in light and warmth while the sun still shines, the room quickly dims and cools after the sun sets. Such was the case one Tuesday in October. When I arrived early in the afternoon to prepare for choir and work on my own selections for Sunday, I decided that it might be too warm if I turned up the heat. We could probably get by without it. But seated at the piano by the windows, I could feel the temperature drop as choir members began to arrive. Pastor Jim took the initiative and turned up the heat a bit. We all relaxed as we felt the warm air issue from the registers along the wall. And we felt thankful—thankful for the heat, thankful for the pastor who thought to turn it on, thankful to be with one another in such a precious, yet familiar place, thankful to know that we were about to spend an hour or so together singing the words and stories of our shared faith set to creative and moving music.

The state of thankfulness is a remarkably happy place to be—one of contentment, gratitude, and peace. As we embark upon the approaching whirlwind known simply as “the holidays,” I hope we can all take a few minutes each day to sit still, breathe deeply, calm our hearts and inner thoughts, and feel thankful for our many blessings, large and small—one of which is our Property Committee which keeps our HVAC in good working order!

Musical Minute:

It was about this time last year that McAllister's Fellowship Hall mysteriously gifted me with an unexpected little time-capsule. It came in the form of an unassuming piece of paper that fell from the pages of one of our old burgundy hymnals as I was looking for a Christmas hymn not to be found in our current one. I could have been anywhere in the church looking for this hymnal—in the choir room where we still keep several copies, in the hallway behind the organ case where there is a small hanging bookshelf that holds a selection of hymnals from various churches and denominations, or even in the pastor's former study. But instead, I picked up this one particular hymnal in the Fellowship Hall. In it, I found a precious gem that brought back a world of Christmas memories—inky black, chilly nights filled with twinkling stars and excitement, Christmas carols sung by familiar voices, frozen fingers and feet, heavy coats, gloves and hats and the tinny sound of our church piano being played outdoors. The piece of paper, crookedly folded, about a third the size of a standard sheet of writing paper, had been hidden in the hymnal for decades. Maybe it was discovered long before I found it, but if so, the finder had the forethought to tuck it safely back into the hymnal, waiting to surprise and delight someone anew years later.

So it was that I found myself in late November 2022 holding a mimeographed copy of McAllister's program for the VFW Tree of Peace lighting from December 13, 1968. I would have been three years old that year. I don't distinctly remember this evening, of course, but I have a feeling that unless the weather was particularly bitter, I might have been there in a stroller, tightly bundled up against the cold. The celebration was a years-long tradition, held annually in front of the Court House on Main Street. It may have changed venues at some time, but in my memory this highly anticipated start to the holiday season, featuring a soaring evergreen, was always held at the Court House.

The purply-blue ink on the slip of paper, ancient, yet familiar, brought back memories of Miss Hilda Peery, always busy in the old church office. The program was ambitious, ten hymns with most of the verses, and for the finale, Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" from "The Messiah." Judging from the names of the soloists, the endeavor was a community effort. Many of the contributors were McAllister members, but not all. Names popped out on the page like long-forgotten treasures, most of the faces and their voices still deep in my memory: Dorothy Hawthorne, Lang Gilbert, Evelyn

Spurlock (Blessedly, she would become my future kindergarten teacher.), Margaret Hardy, my father (who would have been just 32 at the time), Junior Parker, and even Bill Zimmerman. The Tree of Peace lighting was no small endeavor. I'll bet that several of you reading this remember loading up the piano to get it to the venue (as well as moving it to Alleghany Memorial for the Easter Sunrise Service). Frances Rupert didn't dream small, to be sure! I remember playing for the tree lighting during my high school years, my fingers cramped with cold (a bone-chilling cold all of McAllister's musicians can recall, I'm sure) as the carols rang out through the magical night. I imagine shoppers stopping by to listen to a song or two before continuing their secret Christmas missions in the various department stores which lined Main Street.

The Vietnam War would have been ongoing that night in 1968 as the citizens of Covington celebrated Advent and the coming Christmas holiday, praying, and hoping for peace with the symbolic lighting of the tree. We find ourselves in much the same place this year, praying and yearning for peace between all nations and people. Like those who now live only in our memories and hearts, we'll light our trees at home, sing our favorite hymns and carols, and remember the magic of Christmases past while creating new memories with family and friends, all while sending up our prayers of hope and reconciliation as we celebrate the arrival of Christ, the light of the world. I wish you all a beautiful Christmas.

Beth



Dear members and friends of McAllister Memorial Presbyterian Church

This slender collection includes all of the Musical Minute messages that I wrote during the year 2023 for inclusion in the McAllister Messenger, a newsletter sent monthly to the congregation and extended family of McAllister Memorial Presbyterian Church, located in Covington, Va. Among its contents, I hope you can find a little something that speaks to you or even makes you smile. Thank you for reading! Best wishes for 2024.

Beth

Elizabeth Leitch Dreszer
Organist and Choir Director