

MILDRED ANDREWS

Proponents of the heredity-always-wins-out-over environment school are always intrigued with the career of Mildred Andrews, internationally known instructor of organ at the University of Oklahoma.

Her father, George Andrews, was an early day Oklahoma banker and cattleman and a very positive personality. An acquaintance he had not seen in some months, running across him in the street one morning, asked how he made out financially on a herd of cattle George had been fattening for market. "Well," said George, "we finally managed to sell 96 of them. If we could have found the 97th one and got \$13,000 for it, we could have broken even."

A devout churchman, with a clearly defined sense of what he regarded as proper pulpit conduct, he did not hesitate to follow through on his convictions. A member of a small congregation in a rural community at the height of the great depression in 1931 and '32, his local pastor, who had married into a wealthy family, had just returned from a vacation trip to Yellowstone Park. Conditions were such that no member of the church could get farther away from home than Tulsa or Oklahoma City.

At dinner one evening George announced that "if he preaches the Bible Sunday morning, fine; but if he starts to tell us about his trip to Yellowstone, I'm walking out." So when the pastor began "Instead of the regular sermon this morning, I thought you'd like to hear about our trip," George rose from his down-front seat in the sanctuary and strode the length of the center aisle toward the exit.

Mildred Andrews is one of those rare and blessed people who wakes up in the morning glad to be alive, happy with the world and its people, maintaining all the while a truly remarkable sense of humor and a discerning contact with life's realities which keeps her well out of the Pollyanna category. To a degree which constantly amazes her friends, she says exactly what she thinks of people and events.

For most of us this sort of brusque directness in an age of conformity would be a distinct social liability. But Mildred Andrews converts it into a positive asset. Her observations are made against a background of such impregnable good sense, poise, pinpoint accuracy and perception, that others' pretensions and rationalizations fall away like drying husks from a mature head of grain.

As a child learning to write her name, her parents found it always came out "mildreds." It required a great deal of persuasion to get it written any other way. To her the other two syllables seemed useless, time consuming, and completely without justification. The same practical approach has guided and shaped her career. And the same sense of what is proper, fitting and right under a given set of circumstances, and the unhesitating strength of character to act on those principles, is perhaps her father's greatest legacy and her greatest asset as a teacher.

It has been said that the work of a good teacher does not reveal itself directly; it is reflected in the accomplishments of others. In Miss Andrews' case the "others" translates into the eight Fulbright Scholarship holders and the seven national organ contest winners she has taught since 1950. No other organ teacher has produced so many of either. Fulbright officials, noticing the regularity of recurring grants to her pupils, were sufficiently impressed a few years ago that they made a special trip to Norman to meet Miss Andrews and see her in action.

Miss Andrews is the only member of the Music School faculty who has been granted the coveted David Ross Boyd Professorship. Dr. Boyd was the University's first president and the distinguished professorships which bear his name are awarded by the University's Board of Regents on the basis of proven teaching ability after exhaustive investigation by a faculty committee. They carry a sizeable gratuity and are reviewed at five-year intervals. Prestige on campus is comparable to that of the Queen's Honors List for a British subject.

Recently the president of the American Guild of Organists asked her to become National Director of Guild Student Groups. You may be interested in knowing, he wrote, that our board of directors regards this effort as one of the most significant and far-reaching programs of recent years. We are prepared to underwrite the total cost of its administration and eager to lend the full support of our national office. Yours was the only name mentioned for this assignment because of the eminence of your professional status and because you are the woman you are, he concluded.

Following master classes to be held in connection with the national convention of the American Guild

of Organists in Atlanta this summer, Miss Andrews returns to Union Theological Seminary in New York where she will again teach during the summer session.

Her crowded instructional schedule at the University of Oklahoma precludes acceptance of many of the workshop and conference invitations extended her. But breaks in her teaching schedule (holidays, short vacations during the school year, etc.) make it possible for her to accept some of them and fill some of the many concert engagements she is offered.

The cross of the professional organist it that practice must be done usually at someone else's convenience, on an instrument of some one else's choosing, in a hall, too hot or too cold, far distant from home, where access is a sometime thing and the mechanics of transportation and coordination consume half the practice time and most of the artistic benefits. But Miss Andrews recently moved into a new home ideally planned for her private and professional life. Its living room is handsomely furnished with a five-rank Schlicker; its dining room with a Steinway grand. Aside from the obvious correctness of these rooms, the house is in every other respect a perfect complement to the flawless taste and professional standing of its owner.

She is an accomplished cook who finds rest, relaxation and therapy in her kitchen. The most trying day yields invariably to the peace and contentment engendered by an hour or two devoted to the making of home made bread, the baking of a cake, whipping up a soufflé, and a few minutes reading and relaxing before an open fire.

Miss Andrews has hundreds of friends — faculty, townspeople, church (for a number of years she was organist and choirmaster at St. John's Episcopal), students, former students, organists and church music officials whose careers have taken them to the four corners of the world. She maintains an active correspondence with many of them. She entertains frequently and well, and possesses the rare ability to mix guests of widely varied background and interests.

She maintains this heady mixture of professional and private activity through careful budgeting of time and energy and a systematic coordination of effort which constantly amazes her friends. She can within forty-five minutes, and without once retracing her steps, deliver a loaf of hot bread to a friend, drop by a newspaper office to leave a concert program, stop at a super market for a couple of grocery items, have the car serviced and make two phone calls while it's being done, and get back home ten minutes before a scheduled appointment with a prospective student.

Miss Andrew's unfailing answer to those who mention the brilliance of her teaching career is that she has just been highly fortunate in that so many of the most promising organ students seem to be located in the Southwest. This is a modest and a gracious answer — but demonstrably somewhat short of the fact. It was never meant that the tail should so wag the dog!

She is a good listener, genuinely interested in people and places and things. And, on the proper occasion, she is a good talker, with a fine and penetrating sense of humor and the poise and polish of the professional she is.

Miss Andrews' career was duly launched at the age all great musicians begin. She was six years old when her Mother began her study of the piano. But her Mother did more than provide her with competent instruction; she went with her to Tulsa, sitting patiently through each lesson and taking copious notes on everything her teacher said. And specifically, she made it her business to see that during the hours of daily practice in the week that followed, due attention was given to the scales and etudes her teacher had stressed.

That the young lady resisted this enforced regimen goes without saying. Looking back now, she recalls that the rebellion of sore fingers and aching muscles came each week, almost on schedule, although she admits that it may have been oftener. Recalling those days, her Mother's sister recently observed that "it's a good thing music has provided a satisfactory career for Mildred — God knows, she had little chance at any other."

A graduate of the School of Music at the University of Oklahoma, Miss Andrews took her Master's Degree in Music at the University of Michigan and has studied with Palmer Christian, Arthur Poister, David McK. Williams, Carl Weinrich and Marcel Dupre. When she was back in Ann Arbor recently friends took her on a tour of the fine new facilities of the Music School and showed her the two new Moller practice organs. When she had played one of them for a few minutes, she turned to her host: "I'd give my right arm for just one of these down at Norman." The answer was quick. "You don't need it, Andrews; you could teach on a tub!"

For the past several years Miss Andrews has had more pupils than she can take. Through auditions she accepts only the more promising. Once accepted, however, she demands and gets total concentration and the best effort of which the student is capable. Anything less, she feels, is unworthy of her time and effort.

At a recent chamber music concert, the Quartetto di Roma played an encore that neither Miss Andrews nor her escort could name, although

both immediately recognized it as something they had known always. Aline Jean Treanor, Oklahoma City's senior critic of the performing arts, and for many years a friend of both, was seated just behind them. Finally Miss Andrews turned to ask her. "Miss Andrews," said Mrs. Treanor in a quiet but clearly audible whisper, "the quartet is playing the Second, or Scherzo, movement of Gabriel Faure's 'Quartet No. 1 in C Minor, Opus 15,' and thank you so much for asking. You will understand that it isn't every day that a poor, work-a-day mortal like me gets the chance to tell one of the three greatest organ teachers in the world the name of a piece of music. You have made my whole evening — my whole week, for that matter — and I may very well write a piece for my paper on this very incident." Miss Andrews turned to her escort with the stricken air of a woman sinking in quicksand. "Good Heavens," she said, "Why didn't you ask her?"

Rough A. Boggess

Rough A. Boggess, former president of the board of directors of Oklahoma City's Chamber Music Series and past president of the Norman Youth Orchestra Board, is Assistant to the Dean of Admissions and Registrar, the University of Oklahoma.

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