

Swalin, Benjamin Franklin ^[1]

Swalin, Benjamin Franklin

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30 Mar. 1901-27 Sep. 1989

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Benjamin Franklin Swalin led the North Carolina Symphony for 33 years, from 1939 to 1972, revitalizing and expanding the project that Lamar Stringfield had started under the WPA. In 1945, Swalin's work resulted in the passage of North Carolina Senate Bill 248 (dubbed the "Horn Tootin' Bill"). This was the first time that an orchestra was recognized as a state agency in the United States.

Swalin was a tireless promoter of classical music and the North Carolina Symphony. Under his direction, the Symphony maintained a rigorous travel schedule, playing throughout the state. In addition, the Symphony's innovative Children's Concert Division, begun in the 1940s, influenced and educated young people all over the state.

The son of Benjamin and Augusta Swalin, Swalin was born on 30 March 1901 in Minneapolis, Minn. He grew up in a musical atmosphere; his father, a Swedish immigrant, played the violin, and all of the Swalin children played instruments. At the age of 18, Swalin joined the Minneapolis Symphony as its youngest member. He left Minnesota to study music under Franz Kneisel, 1921-1926, and later studied with Leopold Auer. While his chief focus was music, he had a broad range of interests, as evidenced by his M.A. in English from Columbia University.

Continuing his education in Austria, Swalin earned a Ph.D. in music from the University of Vienna in 1932. He taught at Depauw University, 1933-1935 and was accepted as a student of the Moscow University American Institute during the summer of 1934, completing studies in economics. In 1935, he accepted a position with the Music Department at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Swalin met Maxine McMahon in 1926 at the Institute of Musical Art (now the Juilliard School of Music) in New York. The two shared great intellectual curiosity and a life-long interest in music. When he moved to North Carolina, she moved to Boston to pursue a graduate degree at Radcliffe College. After a year's separation, she moved to North Carolina in 1936 with her master's degree. Maxine joined in her husband's dedication to the North Carolina Symphony and music education. She served as the Symphony's executive assistant and frequently played the piano and celesta in North Carolina Symphony performances.

Benjamin F. Swalin retired as Director of the North Carolina Symphony in 1971, but continued his involvement in cultural and civic life. In 1972, the Swalins moved to Norway where Benjamin served as visiting conductor of the Stavanger Symphony. In 1974, he ran as the Democratic candidate to represent the 16th district in the North Carolina Senate, emphasizing the need for increased support of arts and adult education in the state. Throughout retirement the Swalins continued their support of arts appreciation and children's music education in North Carolina through their continued relationships with the North Carolina Symphony, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and other state and civic institutions until their respective deaths in 1989 and 2009.

Benjamin F. Swalin published a number of books, including: *The Violin Concerto: a Study in German Romanticism* (1941) and *Hard Circus Road* (1987), a history of the North Carolina Symphony. He received the North Carolina Award for Achievement in Fine Arts in 1966, honors from the National Federation of Music Clubs in 1967, the Morrison Award for Achievement in Performing Arts in 1968, and honorary doctorates from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1971 and from Duke University in 1979.

Maxine M. Swalin published *An Ear to Myself* (1996), a reminiscence of her childhood in Waukegan, Iowa, her life with Benjamin F. Swalin, and her work with the North Carolina Symphony. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Duke University in 1979 and received the North Carolina Award for Public Service for her four decades of pioneering activity in support of the programs of the North Carolina Symphony in 1989 and the North Caroliniana Society Award on her 100th birthday in 2003. The North Carolina Symphony also announced in 2003 its first recipient of the annual Maxine Swalin Outstanding Music Educator Award, which recognizes "an individual who instills and inspires a love of music in North Carolina children." In 2005, she was one of three recipients of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's first annual Lifetime Achievement Award for the Performing Arts.

References:

Benjamin F. Swalin and Maxine M. Swalin Papers #4962, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04962/> ^[4]

Additional Resources:

Swalin, Benjamin Franklin. 1973. *The violin concerto: a study in German romanticism* New York: Da Capo Press.

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