‘Students Are Poor Listeners’

By Jim Shertzer
Staff Arts Reporter

Wake Forest University may not be in business to make musicians, but the university definitely ought to be in the music-making business, says the new chairman of the school's music department.

"There are very good opportunities here for making music, and making music is good for scholars," George E. Damp said last week.

By scholars he means both those studying music (which he feels strongly is "a legitimate subject" at a liberal arts school, not "frosting on the cake") and those pursuing other disciplines.

Unlike some ivory-tower music snobs who look down on performers, Damp thinks that the playing of music enhances the academic study of music.

Because society has become more sight- than sound-oriented, most students today are poor listeners, Damp said.

As a test, he recently began a course by asking students to write essays on some aural experience. He got back "some pretty feeble attempts," he said.

GEORGE E. DAMP
...music chairman ...

"At least half of them wrote about the sound of an air-conditioner. It's hard to imagine anything more unmodulated or duller than that," he said.

Because they do not know how to listen, "very few students are generally aware musically," he said.

"Almost all of them come to school with all sorts of elaborate record and tape-playing paraphernalia," he said.

"But the volume at which they play music symbolizes that many students do not know how to use their ears."

Most, he said, assume that music is something to be physically felt rather than heard. "We want to sharpen up their awareness of what sound can be."

The Wake Forest music department is not large (including Damp, it has only eight full-time teachers), and its work is not widely known on campus.

But it serves rather a large number of Wake Forest students. It counts the Marching Deacons Band, a chorus, two jazz ensembles, a wind ensemble and a small orchestra among its performing groups and encourages all-student groups like the Madrigal Singers.

There are few music majors (perhaps a dozen at any one time), and the school makes little effort to turn out seasoned professionals like the N. C. School of the Arts. But the department tries to make students aim high.

"We set high standards for teachers to pass on to their students," Damp said.

Damp wants to see that emphasis maintained and to see a further strengthening of the academic side of the department, possibly by sharing future faculty members with Salem College or the arts school.

Damp, who just turned 32, has come to Wake Forest from Carleton College at Northfield, Minn., where he was assistant professor of music and college organist. He graduated summa cum laude from Cornell University, where he later received his masters degree in musicology.

As evidence of his belief that scholarship and performing go together, he went to the Eastman School of Music for his doctoral degree, in performance and literature.

He said he always hoped he would be able to put together an academic music department one day. "I just never expected it would be so soon," he said.
Concert shows artistry of new organists

By RICHARD NEUBERT

During a free public recital this past Tuesday evening, Sept. 16, the artistry of George Edward and Alice Bancroft Damp was revealed to the community-at-large and specially to the membership of the American Guild of Organists for their first sponsored organ concert this season.

Dr. Damp is now serving Wake Forest University as chairman of the music department, and he and his wife will also serve the Reynolda Presbyterian Church as team-church musicians to develop the music program. Both Alice and George Damp have earned the doctor of musical arts degree from the Eastman School of Music and both are fine organists.

Their selections for this opening recital were extremely well-varied, including works by such substantial composers as J.S. Bach, Louis-Nicolas Clerambault, Cesar Franck, Vincent Luebeck, Jehan Alain and Hugo Distler, a formidable list. Mrs. Damp opened with the Prelude and Fugue in 'E Major by Luebeck (1654-1740), a bright, delightful composition, demonstrating a fine degree of clarity and expression. The Second Fantasy by Jehan Alain offered a marked contrast in style with its free, improvisational character based on modes of expression varying from prayerful harmonies to wild tone clusters a good deal of dissonance within a definite tonal structure. Her third work, a Trio Sonata by Hugo Distler (1908-1942), is a difficult polyphonic piece, a fine example of this composer's skill with exciting and contrasting rhythms, all within a readily comprehensible tonal structure. Mrs. Damp played this work with absolute clarity, a fine sense of registration, and thus revealed a talent and ability to perform music of greatly-varied styles and periods.

Dr. Damp began his half of this shared recital with the Suite on the Second Tone by Louis-Nicolas Clerambault (1678-1749). In reflecting on the style of this fine piece of French organ music, it is interesting to note that the dates of Clerambault's birth and death are so close to those of the great J.S. Bach (1685-1750), and yet how different the mode of expression! This work was an excellent choice, in view of the entire recital, to give the admiring audience opportunity to listen to the many beautiful sounds, singly and in combination, to be found with the fine Flentrop organ in the Reynolda Presbyterian Church.

Organists in attendance would agree, in my opinion, that this is a good French work, one on which they can draw for future use. The movements titled "Plein jeu," "Duo," "Flutes," and "Caprice" were particularly attractive to my ears on a first hearing, and the sound of the flutes on the Flentrop was a delightful experience. Dr. Damp's interpretation was clear-cut, well-defined, and in good style.

His playing of the Bach chorale prelude, "Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier," (BWV 731) was a moving experience. He closed the program with Cesar Franck's Chorale in A Minor, a favorite among organists and congregations, and justly so.

The Winston-Salem chapter of the American Guild of Organists is very happy to help welcome George Edward Damp and Alice Bancroft Damp to our community. The AGO program for this coming season will feature Donald Armitage (First Presbyterian director of music) in a November recital, Dr. Thane McDonald in a choral seminar on American choral music, the joint sponsorship with Salem College of a recital by the famed Swiss organist, Lionel Rogg, and another recital in May of 1976 by Richard Anderson, instructor at Bennett College.

AGO officers for the current year are Dr. Richard Neubert, dean; Dr. Thane McDowell, sub-dean; Mr. Robert A. Henderson, treasurer; Mrs. A. Couch, secretary; Mr. Charles McLeod, membership chairman.