

# Making a Joyful Noise

By Jeff Sauve

CERTAIN PRANKS THAT HAVE UNFOLDED on Manitou Heights over the years have achieved nearly legendary status. In the 1960s, when white signs were installed in front of campus buildings, students placed mounds of dirt in front of them, making them look like graves. Two memorable pranks occurred in the dorm rooms of old Ytterboe Hall during the 1970s: A horse was brought into one room and, not to be outdone, an ice rink was created in another. In the 1980s, Paul T. Granlund's "Resurrection" sculpture was outfitted in Hawaiian attire complete with a surfboard and briefly renamed "Surfing Jesus."

But the Holy Grail of St. Olaf practical jokes is known to a generation of Oles as the Alarm Clock Caper, and the names of the perpetrators have never been divulged. Accounts vary, but all agree that in the spring of 1952 — on the day he was set to speak in chapel — President Clemens Granskou, described by one student as "placid, phlegmatic and sober," was the intended target. At that time, daily chapel was held in the St. Olaf gymnasium and the service was broadcast live on WCAL, the college's radio station. St. Olaf music professor G. Winston Cassler served as the pianist.

On that particular morning, President Granskou introduced an unexpected guest speaker, Reverend Oscar A. Anderson, executive secretary for the International Young People's Luther League. Anderson, who later served as president of Augsburg College in Minneapolis from 1963 to 1980, walked directly into an unforgettable trap.

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Ray Michel '52 recalled the event at his 50th class reunion. When he woke up that morning in Thorson Hall, his wind-up Big Ben alarm clock was missing. It was equipped with a double-bell repeater that would sound on, off, on, off. In his memoir, *In the Beginning: A Small Part of St. Olaf's Majesty*, James Kallas '50 writes that Reverend Anderson rose to address the filled chapel, cleared his throat, recognized the faculty and opened with a quote from Psalm 100, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." Kallas continues:

*It was unexpectedly magnificent timing! As soon as he said, "joyful noise" an alarm clock under the bleachers went off. Oscar was irritated but smiled nonetheless. "Make a joyful noise," he started again and waited a second — maybe he had a premonition — and sure enough, another alarm clock went off. Then another, and then another. Rev. Anderson picked up his notes and walked out of the gym without saying goodbye.*

Reports of a dozen or more alarm clocks sounded from all



**CLEMENS GRANSKOU**, who graduated from St. Olaf in 1917, personified the college's early ties to Lutheran missionary fields. He became St. Olaf's fifth president during the strains of World War II, which included the departure of most male students and the location of a naval flight school on campus.

corners of the gymnasium, including the balcony. Ray Michel recognized the bell of his Big Ben alarm clock clanging from inside the grand piano. Later he would tell Dean Cully Swanson, "It wasn't me! It wasn't me!" Students broke out in laughter and President Granskou signaled that the radio broadcast be immediately cut off.

He waited for the last alarm clock to strike, then walked to the pulpit and repeated the morning scripture passage from Psalm 100, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." According to James Kallas,

*When the audience erupted in appreciated applause he didn't crack a smile. Instead, he preached a ten-minute homily on the joys of spontaneous celebratory worship.*

The esteem held by students for President Granskou rose dramatically that morning. "I saw through his sobriety," writes Kallas. "He was a good man." 🦁

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