

MUSIC IN THE
AFTERNOON

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ESTHER McNEIL – A TALENT FOR MAKING THINGS GROW

By Robin Elliott

Esther McNeil stepped down as president of the WMCT Centennial Foundation this fall, so it is an opportune time to reflect on her long involvement with the Women's Musical Club of Toronto. I spoke with Esther early in September at her home on McKenzie Avenue. We sat on her back porch, overlooking a lovely ginkgo tree in her backyard – a tribute to her talent for making things grow.

Esther grew up in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in a musical family. A love of music was nurtured in her as a child and has been passed on to the next generations. She took piano lessons as a young girl. Her grandmother, a professional pianist, would send her hard cover editions of difficult piano music for inspiration. Both of her parents were musical; her mother played the piano. Three of Esther's five children had piano lessons, and her middle son became a luthier (a maker of string instruments). Esther also relates that "I have been fortunate to be able to accompany one of my granddaughters on her violin – a real treat for this dotting grandmother!"

While at the University of Edinburgh for graduate studies, Esther met her future husband, John McNeil, a Scotsman who became an executive in the Sun Life Assurance Company. The young couple moved to Montreal in 1956, where Esther began attending concerts of the Ladies' Morning Musical Club. "The concerts became my salvation; the intimacy of the music was of tremendous importance to me in my life, first as a teacher and then as a young mother," Esther recalls.

In Toronto Esther attended WMCT concerts in the early 1970s, but it was not until 1985, when the family returned to Toronto to settle for good, that she began to attend WMCT concerts on a regular basis. After one WMCT recital, Hanna Feuerriegel invited new members, including Esther, to her home to hear about plans for the 90th anniversary concert. Mary Dennys was also there and this marked the start of a friendship between Mary and Esther that ended only with Mary's death

in 1995. "Mary and I felt the WMCT needed to solicit support from the community," observes Esther. "Having never been involved in fundraising, I turned to my husband, who directed me to the person responsible for donations at Sun Life."



Second vice president Ina van Berkel watches as Esther McNeil opens a gift presented in thanks for ten years of dedicated service as founding president of the WMCT Centennial Foundation.

Fund raising efforts for the 90th Anniversary celebrations were so successful that there was a substantial amount of money left over after all the bills were paid. "Mary was president and, together with her friends Elizabeth Newton and Nora Dawson, we decided that the extra money we had raised should be used to set up a national music award," Esther recalls. "One day I walked into the office of a young piano teacher at The Royal Conservatory of Music, who advised me that the award should be for a young professional, not a student. His name was Peter Simon. The result was the Career Development Award for promising young professional musicians. Eight CDAs have been given out to date; the most recent winner, Darrett Zusko, will be heard in recital with the WMCT on February 10, 2011.

In 1990 Esther was asked to present an award to a WMCT scholarship winner. "A slightly dishevelled young man rushed in with his accompanist," recalls Esther. "When he began to sing I was swept away. It was Russell Braun. To my dismay I saw that the cheque was for only \$500 and at that moment I resolved to do something to increase the value of WMCT scholarships, if I could." Twenty years of work later that same award is worth \$5,000.

Esther became president of the WMCT in 1991, and inherited boxes full of WMCT files. "My husband soon tired of eating on a dining room table surrounded by those files," Esther notes with amusement. "He offered to allow the WMCT to use a Sun Life office. This gigantic step forward enabled us to hire our first staff: an office manager. Then in 1995 the indispensable Susan Corrigan was hired as arts administrator."

In 1997 Esther became president for a second time to oversee preparations for the Centennial Celebrations. "I again sought advice from friends in the music community, particularly Nicholas Goldschmidt and Arnold Edinborough. Their advice was repeatedly: involve Walter Homburger now and on every level. Walter agreed to take on the job, and soon a wonderful group of volunteers came forward to lend their support. Some were long time members – Hanna and Fred Feuerriegel, Isabel and Alan Jackson – and some were new – Betty Gray and Emmy Homburger. We began a massive fund raising campaign and succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. We had over \$100,000 left after the concert expenses were paid!"

It soon became evident that the WMCT was not set up to administer investments, so the WMCT Centennial Foundation was set up. "The project was spearheaded by John Caldwell and Barbara Gory, and with me as president, we formed a board," Esther recalls. "Since its creation in 2000, the board has moved from strength to strength with new energetic and talented directors including Ina van Berkel, Bart Bull, Bill Lambert, Helen Rotenberg, and Peter Goulding." In ten years the Foundation's assets have grown from \$350,000 to over \$700,000; fund raising in 2010 alone netted a record \$27,000 for the Foundation. In the coming year, Esther will be replaced as president of the Foundation by Bart Bull and Peter Goulding as alternating presidents.

Esther reflected on what it was that drew her to become involved with the WMCT: "One takes pleasure from the concerts, and would like to lend a hand to make all this possible. Volunteering becomes irresistible! Working together towards common goals develops lasting friendships, and this has been my most gratifying experience. Speaking personally, my life took on a whole new dimension when I became involved with the WMCT."

Looking ahead to the future, Esther observes that "The success of the WMCT has never rested on one person's

shoulders. It has always been a concerted effort of friends who share the passion joining together to make things work."

Robin Elliott is Associate Dean, Undergraduate Education, and Professor, Jean A. Chalmers Chair in Canadian Music at the University of Toronto; coordinator of the WMCT's Tuning Your Mind lecture series; and author of Counterpoint to a City: The First One Hundred Years of the Women's Musical Club of Toronto and Counterpoint Continued.

Highlights of the WMCT Centennial Foundation's first decade can be found on page 3.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last season, the 112th, was a great success and sold out for the third year in a row. A splendid celebrity concert featuring Isabel Bayrakdarian in Koerner Hall, a venue twice as large as Walter Hall, was also sold out, with one hundred seats donated to Student Outreach.

This season, the 113th, is on the cusp of being sold-out with 476 members subscribed and the number of student seats has been raised back to 25 from 15. To avoid the situation of empty seats in the hall we hope that you will return tickets you cannot use for a tax receipt or give them to friends. Please continue to point out empty seats to our ushers and remember that the coat check will be available starting in November.

At the Annual General Meeting on September 29th Dianne Henderson was elected and welcomed to the WMCT board of directors and Susan Johnston, Annette Sanger, and Jacqueline Wood were re-elected, all for a two-year term. H el ene Hunt retired from the board after six years of diligent and successful fund-raising. Vice president Ren ee Simmons will replace her as chair of fund raising this season. Members attending the AGM enjoyed a delightful concert given by three of this coming academic year's WMCT scholarship winners, Samuel Deason, Ronelle Schaufele, and Melody Chan.

If you would like a copy of the WMCT's 2009-2010 Annual Report please contact the WMCT office at 416-923-7052 or wmct@wmct.on.ca. The report is available by mail as a hard copy or by e-mail as a PDF file.

Archivist Susan Johnston and WMCT Centennial Foundation volunteer Nora Wilson are building a database of scholarship and award winners. Membership & Marketing Committee members Alice Frey and Frances Frisken are developing a long-time membership recognition system.

The WMCT continues to be in sound financial shape in a great part due to careful management and the fact that it is a totally volunteer-run organization with the

able assistance of the WMCT's part-time arts administrator, Susan Corrigan. There has been much talk in the newspapers recently about large amounts of money being spent by some charities on executive salaries, outside fund raisers, and administration with much smaller amounts going to the designated recipients. Unlike those organizations, the WMCT raises money for administration, rent, etc. through ticket subscriptions and door sales (and has no executive salaries or outside fund raisers) and therefore is able to assure donors that all money donated is spent each season on concerts, master classes, new Canadian compositions, and the Student Outreach Programme.

The WMCT and the WMCT Centennial Foundation intend to survey the membership this season on various aspects of activities as part of long-term planning. The boards of directors hope you will participate as your input is greatly valued.

Responding to members' requests, refreshments will be served at intermission at the October 14 concert for a trial run. Members and students will still have the opportunity to greet the artists after the concert. The WMCT thanks long-time member and volunteer, Marianne Weil, who has donated the coffee for the last several decades. Reserved seats for artists' friends and concert sponsors will be held only until ten minutes before the concert begins.

I hope that you will enjoy the 113th season of this remarkable and thriving organization as much as we, the board members and other volunteers, have enjoyed the preparations for it.

Julia Smith, President

2000-2010: A RETROSPECTIVE ON THE FIRST DECADE OF THE WMCT CENTENNIAL FOUNDATION

The WMCT Centennial Foundation is ten years old this year, and on this anniversary, Esther McNeil, founding President, and Bartley Bull, incoming President, reflect on the development and achievements of the organization.

The assets of the Foundation have grown from an endowment fund of about \$350,000 to one with assets of over \$700,000. Major factors behind this growth include the success of fund raising appeals to members and friends of both the WMCT and the WMCT Centennial Foundation, and the investment returns resulting from the careful stewardship of these funds. In addition, the WMCT has made several generous special gifts to the Foundation.

Twelve years ago, in September 1998, John Caldwell proposed to the WMCT board that it establish a charitable foundation. In March 1999 Betty Gray moved, seconded by Danuta Buczynski, that a foundation be

formed and that application for a charter and letters patent be made. During the following year, ably guided by Barbara Gory, the Women's Musical Club of Toronto Centennial Foundation applied for and received its charter and its charitable status. On January 31, 2001, the WMCT transferred \$349,331 to the Foundation to establish its endowment fund. The first general meeting of members was held on October 25, 2000, and the first Annual General Meeting on September 6, 2001.

The board of directors included three officers: Esther McNeil, president; Elizabeth Newton, vice-president; and Barbara Gory, secretary-treasurer. Additional board members were Richard Balfour and Margaret Davidson. Margaret established and chaired the Investment Committee. Michael Koerner joined the board in early 2001. Susan Corrigan, arts administrator to the WMCT, was appointed arts administrator for the Foundation.

The Foundation's mandate stated that the purpose of the Foundation was "to receive and maintain funds and to apply all or part thereof and the income therefrom for charitable purposes." For as long as the WMCT is in existence, the Foundation's first priority is to fund WMCT activities including concerts and annual scholarships and awards.

With the growth of the investment assets and income, the Foundation has been able to increase its support for sponsorship of WMCT concerts, as well as to increase the number and the value of the scholarships and awards.

The numbers tell the story:

- In the past 10 years, the Foundation has made disbursements totalling \$213,956. These include:
 - \$95,700 awarded in scholarships and the graduate fellowship
 - \$59,571 for the Career Development Award
 - \$58,685 in concert sponsorships and other donations to the WMCT.
- Fund raising totalled \$154,676 over the decade. Annual donations increased from \$5,300 in 2000-2001 to over \$27,000 in 2009-2010.
- The WMCT has made additional gifts to the Foundation totalling \$250,692.
- The fund balance grew from \$353,102 at March 31, 2001 to \$705,284 at March 31, 2010.
- The number of directors has increased from six to fourteen currently; and the number of committees from one to seven.
- A panel of honorary advisers was established and has grown to seven distinguished individuals.
- The *Legacy Circle* planned giving initiative begun in 2002-2003 with four members has grown to include eleven members currently, and has realized one bequest.

The Foundation has had a successful first decade thanks to the support of the members, directors, and friends in the WMCT and the music community. The goal of providing financial stability to the WMCT has been met and continued growth will enable the Foundation to provide even greater support to the WMCT as it meets new challenges. The Foundation goes into its second decade with confidence, energy, and enthusiasm.

Esther McNeil **Bartley Bull**
Past President *President*

WMCT PATRON WALTER HOMBURGER, GOVERNOR GENERAL PERFORMING ARTS AWARD WINNER

Their Excellencies the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, and Mr. Jean-Daniel Lafond presented this year's Governor General's Performing Arts Awards during a ceremony at Rideau Hall on Friday, April 30, 2010. In addition to Walter Homburger, this year's recipients were Bryan Adams, Françoise Faucher, Edouard Lock, Robin Phillips, and Buffy Sainte-Marie.

As an orchestra manager, consultant, impresario, and artist manager, Walter Homburger has been a driving force in Canada's classical music world for more than half a century. He has promoted a succession of extraordinary artists (including Glenn Gould, Victor Braun, Jan Rubes, and WMCT Career Development Award winner James Ehnes), and his unrivalled 25-year term as managing director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra set new standards for orchestra management in Canada.



Emmy & Walter Homburger at the Governor General Performing Arts Awards ceremony.

Born in Germany in 1924, Homburger moved to Canada in 1940. He quickly became involved in presenting international classical music artists to Toronto audiences. He became managing director of the TSO in 1962 and retired in 1987. After retiring, he continued to contribute to the Canadian classical music scene by presenting artists in solo recitals, man-

aging young Canadian artists, and advising musical organizations, including the WMCT and the WMCT Centennial Foundation.

Created in 1992, the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards are presented each year to Canadian performers whose extraordinary lifetime achievements have contributed significantly to the enrichment of Canada's cultural life. Nominations for the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards are made by members of the public. Recipients are chosen from six categories, including theatre, dance, classical music, popular music, film, and broadcasting.

TENTH BANFF INTERNATIONAL STRING QUARTET COMPETITION

August 30 - September 5, 2010

By Hanna Feuerriegel

The Banff International String Quartet Competition (BISQC) was founded in 1983 and is held triennially at the Banff Centre. This highly anticipated event is currently the leading international string quartet competition.

Since its beginning twenty-seven years ago, BISQC has attracted entries from the world's best emerging young quartets. This year was no exception. It is interesting to note that BISQC has received a respectable 32% increase in applications this year over past years from quartets the world over. Quartets from France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and Canada – in all, nine quartets – were vying for more than \$100,000 in cash and prizes plus an international tour.

The international jury of seven jurors, mostly members of distinguished string quartets (Borromeo Quartet, Juilliard Quartet, Orford Quartet, Quatuor Mosaïques, Vogler Quartet, Ying Quartet, and the Deputy Head of Strings at Guildhall School, UK) awarded the two Canadian entries, Cecilia String Quartet and Afiara String Quartet, first and second prize respectively, while the third prize went to Quator Zaïde from France.

In addition to the first prize of \$25,000, the Cecilia String Quartet (Min-Jeong Koh, violin; Sarah Nematella, violin; Caitlin Boyle, viola; Rebecca Wenham, cello) won a quartet of bows by world-renowned Canadian bow maker François Malo. The quartet also captured the prize of \$2,000 for best performance of *Commedia dell'arte*, the commissioned work by Canadian composer Ana Sokolovic.

Second prize of \$12,000 went to the Afiara String Quartet. This quartet also took the Székely Prize of \$3,000 for best performance of a Beethoven or Schubert quartet. Third Prize of \$8,000 was won by Quator Zaïde of France. The remaining six competing quartets were: Amaryllis Quartet (Germany/Switzerland), Asasello

Quartet (Germany), Atrium String Quartet (Russia), Hausmann Quartet (USA), Noga Quartet (France), and Peresson Quartet (USA).

In 2011-2012 the international tour will be expanded to an astonishing 65 performances including additional tour dates in Europe. In the spring of 2012 the winner, Cecilia String Quartet, will perform in the Eastern United States and Canada, including for the Women's Musical Club of Toronto. The composition of the quartet will differ slightly from that which appeared at Banff: one week after their competition win the Cecilia's announced that cellist Rebecca Wenham would be leaving the quartet and replaced with Hamilton native Rachel Desoer.

A special feature of the week-long event was the Alumni Gala. In a toast to the tenth anniversary of BISQC, members of its celebrated alumni – the Colorado, Miró, St. Lawrence, and Ying Quartets – made an appearance and performed the Mendelssohn Octet and Brahms Sextet to the delight of the audience.

Hanna Feuerriegel is a member of the WMCT Artists Selection Committee.

DVOŘÁK'S OPERAS: Exploring a Neglected Repertory By Eva Branda

When the name Antonín Dvořák (1841–1901) is mentioned in North America, the composition that is most likely to come to people's minds is his "New World" *Symphony in E minor, Op. 95*, written in 1893. In general, scholarly discussions of Dvořák have tended to focus on his instrumental output. For instance, in the sixth edition of *A History of Western Music*, Donald Grout and Claude Palisca address Dvořák only in their chapter on nineteenth century orchestral music. However, Dvořák devoted much of his career to the composition of vocal works and longed to be successful on the operatic stage in particular. In fact, in an interview for a Viennese newspaper taken just months before his death in 1904, Dvořák allegedly declared: "I am viewed as a composer of symphonies and yet I proved long years ago that my main bias is towards dramatic creation."

It is easy to see why Dvořák considered opera to be so important. The task of building an exclusively Czech National Theatre in Prague was taken up by a committee during the 1840s and dominated the cultural life of the city for nearly half a century. In preparation for the opening of the National Theatre, Czech composers, including Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884), Karel Bendl (1838–1897), and Zdeněk Fibich (1850–1900), worked tirelessly to build up a repertory of Czech-language operas, which were performed at various makeshift venues in Prague, including the Provisional Theatre, in use from 1862 to 1883, and several summer theatres. The National Theatre finally opened in 1883, after decades of fund raising and planning. In a cultural

climate such as this, where opera productions were often featured on the front pages of Prague newspapers, there can be little wonder that Dvořák became extensively involved in opera composition. Over the course of his career, he wrote no fewer than eleven operas, ranging from comic to grand. Jan Smaczny points out that "after 1869, there was no single period of any length in [Dvořák's] composing career when he was not engaged in some kind of operatic project."

Although Dvořák wrote prolifically for the stage, his operas have tended to be neglected. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Czech operas were hard to perform beyond the Bohemian borders because of the difficulties that the Czech language posed for both singers and audience members. Dvořák attempted to get around the language barrier by arranging for some of his operas to be translated into German, but in several cases this merely compounded the problem. The weak translation of the libretto of the opera *Šelma Sedlák (The Cunning Peasant)* (1877), for example, is one of the reasons why the work was given only a moderately favourable reception in German-speaking Europe during the 1880s. Likewise, American productions of *Rusalka* (1901) in English, which were mounted during the early twentieth century, were frequently criticized for their poor translation.

Even in the Czech lands – free from the constraints of language – Dvořák's operas were not always as successful as one might think. Though several of Dvořák's operas were very well received in Bohemia, opera was generally seen as the domain of Dvořák's older contemporary Smetana. As David Beveridge explains, Smetana's operas are more overtly nationalistic than those of Dvořák and were thus more able to enlist the sympathies of Czech audiences. After Dvořák gained international recognition, the outspoken Czech critic Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) – motivated by a desire to safeguard Smetana's reputation – went so far as to attempt to exclude Dvořák from the Czech opera canon. Nejedlý attracted a large following in the Czech lands, and vestiges of this antagonism toward Dvořák continued to influence Czech music scholarship and repertory choices at Czech theatres throughout the twentieth century.

Recently, considerable strides have been made toward a better understanding of Dvořák's operas. Scholars such as Alan Houtchens, Milan Kuna, Milan Pospíšil, and Jan Smaczny have conducted extensive research on and helped to prepare critical editions of a number of Dvořák's lesser-known operas, and over the past few decades, there has been a steady increase in the number of Dvořák opera productions within Bohemia; yet, *Rusalka* remains the only Dvořák opera to be performed abroad with any frequency. Perhaps more of Dvořák's operas will find their way to the international stage in the future. For now, it is necessary to acknowledge that, far from being merely a "composer of symphonies," Dvořák explored a range of genres, including opera.

Eva Branda is a Ph.D. candidate in Musicology at the University of Toronto.

MAUREEN FORRESTER, OPERA LEGEND AND WMCT PATRON, DIES AT 79

The Women's Musical Club of Toronto was saddened to learn of the death this past June of Canadian opera diva Maureen Forrester. As noted in *The Globe and Mail*, she was not only a talented teacher and dazzling performer, but was also world-renowned for her rich and deep classical singing voice and her advocacy for Canadian music.

Maureen Forrester had a long association with the WMCT, making her Toronto recital debut with the organization in 1956 at the Eaton Auditorium and serv-

ing as one of its patrons from 1993. She also chaired the 1994 Career Development Award jury. WMCT past president Betty Gray recalls: "At the reception following the CDA vocal competition in 1994, Maureen continued to engage some of the contestants in a light animated conversation on how to present themselves on stage. She gave them tips on hair style, make up, wardrobe, etc. It showed her warm, generous nature and a genuine interest in helping these young artists succeed."

In addition to her musical contributions to the country, Maureen Forrester served as chair of the Canada Council from 1983 to 1988 and earned nearly 30 honorary degrees. She will be greatly missed by the Canadian music community.

WOMEN'S MUSICAL CLUB OF TORONTO/WMCT CENTENNIAL FOUNDATION 2010-2011 RECORD OF SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIP, & AWARD

The Royal Conservatory of Music, The Glenn Gould School

1. The Women's Musical Club of Toronto Otilie M. Gunning Scholarship (established 1992) - \$5,000
Awarded annually to a piano student who displays musical excellence and is entered in a performance degree programme at The Royal Conservatory. The student must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant.

2010-2011 Recipient: Samuel Deason, piano

2. The Women's Musical Club of Toronto and the Women's Musical Club of Toronto Centennial Foundation 110th Anniversary Scholarship - The Glenn Gould School (established 2008) - \$5,000
The recipient must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant.

2010-2011 Recipient: Ronelle Schaufele, viola

University of Toronto, Faculty of Music

1. Women's Musical Club of Toronto and the Women's Musical Club of Toronto Centennial Foundation Fellowship (established 2001) - interest on the \$50,000 endowment plus \$3,000 top-up to the endowed fellowship
Established with a gift of \$25,000 from the donors, and matched by the University of Toronto, to create an endowment that will sustain an annual award in perpetuity for an outstanding graduate student in Performance in the Faculty of Music. The recipient must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant.

2010-2011 Recipient: Melody Chan, piano

2. Women's Musical Club of Toronto Entrance Scholarship (established 1993) - \$5,000
Awarded annually to a student entering the Performance Program, the scholarship is granted based on the entrance audition and academic achievements. The student must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant. (This scholarship replaced the WMCT Joan B. Wilch Scholarship in Voice, and the Mary Osler Boyd Women's Musical Club Scholarship, 1930-1973)

2010-2011 Recipient: Omar Ho, clarinet

3. The Women's Musical Club of Toronto Centennial Award - \$5,000
Established in 1997-1998 as part of the WMCT Centennial Celebrations, it is awarded annually to a graduating student from the Performance Program. The student must attain an annual grade point average of 3.5 or above, and have the intention to pursue a career as a concert musician. The student must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant.

2010 Recipient: Jian Zhang, piano

The WMCT and WMCT Centennial Foundation has changed the Centennial Award from a graduating award to a scholarship, as it was felt to be of more value to the Faculty of Music for the award to be given at the beginning of a student's fourth year of undergraduate studies. This change takes effect in the 2010-2011 academic year.



Honorary Board Members Committee chair Danuta Buczynski with scholarship winners Samuel Deason, Ronelle Schaufele, and Melody Chan who performed at the WMCT Annual General Meeting, September 29, 2010.