

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt and a dark skirt. She is sitting at a piano, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. Her hands are on an open book of sheet music on the piano, and she is holding a pen as if writing. The piano is a dark upright model. The background is a simple room with a window and a small table.

Violet Archer

Centenary Concert

A Tribute to Violet Archer in Words and Music

Sunday, **September 22**, 2013, 2:00 pm
Convocation Hall, University of Alberta

An Ivory 88 Production

PROGRAM

Two Fanfares for a Festive Day (1989)

1. Majestic Fanfare

*Robin Doyon and Brian Sand, trumpets; Shamilla Ramniwaj, French horn;
Kathryn Macintosh, trombone; Scott Whetham, tuba*

Welcome

Sylvia Shadick-Taylor

About Violet Archer

Brenda Dalen

Six Preludes (1947)

3. Lento – come elegia

6. Allegro appassionata

Leanne Regehr, piano

Trio #1 for piano, violin and cello (1954)

2. Theme and Variations – Largo molto tranquillo

3. Allegro

Anna Kozak, violin; Colin Ryan, cello; Sylvia Shadick-Taylor, piano

Prairie Profiles, a song cycle for horn, baritone voice and piano (1980)

Text and title by David Carter

1. Buffalo Jump – Allegro, energico e ritmico

2. Have you Heard Snow Falling? – Largo molto

3. Ground Blizzard – Quasi Allegro

Timothy Anderson, baritone; Megan Evans, French horn; Sylvia Shadick-Taylor, piano

I n t e r m i s s i o n

Two Fanfares for a Festive Day (1989)

2. Joyous Fanfare

*Robin Doyon and Brian Sand, trumpets; Shamilla Ramniwaj, French horn;
Kathryn Macintosh, trombone; Scott Whetham, tuba*

Ten Folk Songs for Four Hands (1955)

9. The Cherry Tree Carol

10. The Frog and the Mouse

Isabella and Bradley Houston, piano duet

Three French-Canadian Folk Songs (1989)

1. Petit Rocher

2. La poulette grise

To Rest in Thee (1981)

University of Alberta Madrigal Singers

Leonard Ratzlaff, conductor

Three Biblical Songs (1972)

I. Te Deum - Psalm 104: 31-34

Elizabeth Turnbull, mezzo-soprano; Sylvia Shadick-Taylor, piano

Episodes (1973)

Electronic Music

Divertimento for Saxophone Quartet (1979)

1. Preludio

2. Meditation

3. Festive

Edmonton Saxophone Collective:

Charles Stolte, soprano; Raymond Baril, alto;

Dominique Shulhan, tenor; Chee Meng Low, baritone

Program notes prepared and presented by
Mary Ingraham, Jessica Rogers and Andrea Tarnawsky

French-Canadian Folk Songs

Violet Archer

Petit Rocher

*Dear friendly crag in the high mountain light,
I come to you for I must end the fight.
Ah, gentle echoes, hear my painful sigh,
I languish, for I know that soon I will die.*

*Small gentle birds, your sweet harmonious song,
Remind me that I still to this life belong.
Ah, if I but had soaring wings like you,
I would be happy ere this long day is through.*

*A howling, hungry wolf with savage ire,
In search of meat come very near my fire.
“Be gone from here,” to that wild beast I cried,
“Or, on my faith I vow I’ll pierce your hide.”*

*Here, in this spot the world has cast me down;
But you sustain my hope, O Saviour of man.
Most Holy Virgin, do not leave this place;
Permit me now to die secure within Thy grace.*

La poulette grise

*My little hen all grey, lays eggs in the church;
She will lay one for my sleepy head,
who lies tucked in his little bed,
She will lay one for my sleepy head,
Who lies tucked in his little bed,
Hushaby, baby*

*My little hen all white, lays eggs in the
branches...*

My little hen all black, lays eggs in the cabinet...

My little hen all green, lays eggs in the covers...

My little hen all brown, lays eggs in the moon...

My little hen all yellow, lays eggs in the alder...

*English Translations by Carolyn Osborne

University of Alberta Madrigal Singers

2013-14

Leonard Ratzlaff, conductor
Sara Brooks, choral assistant

Soprano

Louise Ashdown
Rachel Berg
Sara Brooks
Silken Conradi
Vanessa Jerusalemiec
Kirstin Piehl
Katrina Smith
Alexandra Thompson
Katrina Townsend
Sylvie Vigneux
Leigh Walbaum

Alto

Hilary Davis
Brianna Dennehy
Rose Kilgannon
Elizabeth Kreiter
Kayla MacDonald
Angela McKeown
Jennifer O'Donnell
Marie-Josée Ouimet
Liz Pankratz
Rebecca Parsons
Kelsey Vankosky
Aleah Wielinga

Tenor

RJ Chambers
Matthew Dalen
Eric Epp
Christopher Friesen
Raimundo Gonzalez
Mark Keeler
Mackenzie May
Savio Nguyen

Bass

Jackson Berry
Stephen Gust
Kurt Illerbrun
Jeremy Kerr-Wilson
Nick Rheubottom
Adam Sartore
Krystian Sekowski
Stephen Trevoy
Anthony Wynne

TRIBUTES AND MEMORIES

It is with profound gratitude and appreciation that I pay tribute to Dr. Violet Balestreri Archer in this commemorative Centennial Concert. I am deeply indebted to her, both for opening up a path to my composing and performing music and also for her life-changing influence on me while I was her student: she opened my eyes and ears to the deep connection between music and spirituality.

She spoke of the importance of making oneself a pure instrumental vessel or conduit of the divine God of creation. She said that the performer is an instrument and that the performer and his or her instrument must become one.

Violet's personal and professional life were one and inseparable. She had honesty and integrity in even the smallest things. She used to tell me, “Always be true to yourself, and always do the right thing—not the convenient shortcut.” She was always true to herself, to her credo in life, to her Christian faith. She said that her final purpose was to praise God with her musical gifts and to be a gift of self to others.

Violet composed her last work—*Pensieroso for Classical Accordion and Orchestra*—for me. It is a sublime spiritual musical expression of a deeply felt and lived faith in God. When I heard the music for the first time in the recording session, I felt her presence, and was profoundly moved. This music continues to touch me deeply.

Thank you, Violet—with all my heart—for your inspirational teaching, your valued and devoted friendship, and for the sublime music you have written for me.

N. Antonio Peruch, studied with Dr. Archer at the University of Alberta and privately '72-'96

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I remember going to Violet's (can I call “Miss Archer” that now?) at her invitation to talk about singing some of her music. Her ... kitchen table was strewn with papers, as one would expect at the home of a professor of composition. Her manner was quick, quiet and pleasant. The first thing she did was offer me a cup of tea, and we chatted. As I asked, she shared a bit about her [life] growing up and her study with Béla Bartók. ... Our visit was hastily concluded because her cats were not a good mix for this histamine sensitive songstress! ...

Professor Archer suggested a work she wrote in 1958 for soprano and B flat clarinet. ... The very talented John Mahon accompanied on the clarinet while I performed ... *The Lamb* from *Songs of Innocence* and *The Fly* from *Songs of Experience* - short, simple, endearing, and effectively written songs based on poems by William Blake. ...

As others would agree, Miss Archer bustled along the University of Alberta Music Department hallways with purpose, not often making eye contact with non-composition students such as myself. Her attitude was not unfriendly or aloof, but one could sense by her determined footsteps her anxiousness to get home to her study and pen the next artful motif bubbling up from within. Thus it is with fondness that I look back ... and see that I had somehow, by two songs and a simple cup of tea, gained the treasure of her nod and smile, and I feel privately honoured.

Jennifer Rutherford, née Scragg B. Mus. '77, M. Mus. '81

[Violet Archer's] music is characterized by great craft and an often almost overwhelming intensity and intellectual rigor.

Dr. Fordyce Pier, Professor Emeritus and Former Chair, Department of Music, University of Alberta, 1973 – 2004, quoted in The Canadian Encyclopedia/The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, WWW site, viewed September 5, 2013, s.v. "Violet Archer," www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/violet-archer

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Violet was a most perceptive teacher. She had a special way of seeing just where my weekly composition assignment had given me the most trouble and over which I was most unsure. . . . She not only noticed these places but always made a practical suggestion for improvement. She did this week after week. It was quite uncanny. Once, while paging through an orchestral piece I had composed, she stopped, pointed at a place on the page, and said, "That sounds nice." I know she wasn't faking because now I can do it too. . . .

In the intermission of a concert of her students' works, I was describing somewhat loudly to friends a small dispute I had had with Violet over one [song of mine] of a set of three songs we had just heard. She wanted me to change one of them but I felt it was right and I defended it in class. It is the mark of a great teacher that she not only allowed me to do this, but she accepted my defence in the end, and the song was duly presented as I first wrote it. I didn't know she was standing behind me. "Yes," she commented, "of the three I favoured that one least."

Ron Hannah B. Mus. '73, M. Mus. '75

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I was Violet's guest at the premiere performance of her *Sonata for Saxophone and Piano* in Toronto. The program [included] a short biographical sketch of her. A man sitting directly behind her was reading the bio and we both heard him comment to his companion, "Studies with Béla Bartók and Paul Hindemith. I'll bet! She was probably in row 28 of some Saturday afternoon seminar." Violet looked my way and winked. After the performance there was a call from the stage for the composer to stand for a bow, which she did. It was interesting to watch the man behind cringe as he realized his big faux pas. . . .

John Butler B. Mus. '65, M. Mus. '69

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I came to Edmonton in 1960 to enter the B. Mus. program, . . . a new program started by Richard Eaton. I studied piano with Robert Stangeland and Sandra Munn, and also started playing the oboe as a second study. I think it was in 1962 when Violet Archer came to teach and I studied composition with her. . . .

Even before she arrived in Edmonton we were singing some of her music in the Music Division Chorus, conducted by Prof. Eaton. I remember thinking that it was very attractive and pleasant to sing.

What I remember most about Violet was her intensity and her passionate commitment to her craft and her students. She believed that at least some of her students were destined

for greatness and that even our earliest compositions would be sought after someday. Therefore she required us to finish each work in the best possible publishable format and send it to the Canadian Music Centre where it would remain in the archives, and thus our names would be on record as contributors for all to see. . . .

Violet was unfailing in her support and encouragement. She didn't teach her students to write in a particular style but rather to develop their own ideas. She included Paul Hindemith and Béla Bartók as two of her chief mentors, but her own style was unique and she established herself as one of Canada's foremost women composers. It gives me great joy to go to a concert now and hear her works still being performed. Just last week I heard the Windrose Trio playing trios by Violet Archer, Roger Deegan, and John Macpherson. I consider it my great good fortune to have been associated with all of them.

Bob Cockell B. Mus. '63

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My first memory of Violet Archer is from when I was a student at the summer music camps . . . at Camrose Lutheran College in 1970. (In 2013, the college is now the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta. The summer music sessions continue, as MusiCamp Alberta at Red Deer College.) We were playing her *Three Sketches for Orchestra* (BMI Canada, 1966) under conductor Marvin Rabin, and she had been invited to come from Edmonton to offer her critique of this young group--our ages ranged from about 13 through 17. After she had listened to us attempt a reading, Dr. Archer was invited onstage by the conductor, but the steps were very steep and she declined, . . . stating modestly, "I have a narrow skirt." Naturally this raised a few eyebrows among us ever-so-worldly teenagers in that first heyday of the miniskirt: "What a prudish old fuddy-duddy," we thought, with the natural cruelty of youth. But immediately she raised her voice and said, "If you don't mind, I'll address you from the floor here." We were suddenly in the presence of someone who was not only very much in her milieu, but very much in charge. I shall never forget that she began by praising our efforts, which I can't recall but which must have been very meagre indeed. . . . The suggestions she made were all well within our abilities to realize, and focussed deliberately on our forest of sins, rather than its innumerable trees, which proved her skills at triage in an educational setting. . . .

Later and in many interviews, she recalled her lifelong love for the symphony orchestra and how, even as a child, it was the "instrument" she really wanted to play. That day she showed a group of Alberta musical novices her mastery of her favourite instrument, and impressed upon each of us the force of the mind that occupied such a slight, almost frail body.

She attended student recitals from undergraduate through post-doctoral faithfully and without discrimination. Her professionalism and her sense of responsibility to all the students in the Department were both simply of an old-world order: she sincerely believed that it was wrong for faculty members not to attend as many student performances as time and circumstances would allow during the school year, though she would never have had the bad graces to say so to fellow faculty who were less diligent.

Canada has lost a great citizen, as has the world of music.

Neil Hughes, B. Mus. '77

Violet was the first Edmonton composer I met when we first arrived in Edmonton in 1986. I have since played much of her music involving the cello; trios, string quartets, cello and piano sonata, miniatures for young cellists. Though tiny, she was a formidable intellectual and musical presence. One overriding memory of her is of the day when she was very kind to my daughter, a very young Helenka, when we visited her at her home. Helenka remembers her to this day as “the kind old lady”!

Tanya Prochazka

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I knew Violet Archer in a very personal sense. She and I were both appointed to the Music Division of the Fine Arts Department at the University of Alberta in 1962. I was personally astounded and in awe to be working alongside a composer of her reputation, and yet at the same time was struck by her petite, almost birdlike stature.

She was consumed with an insatiable desire to be writing music. Whenever she was away from home I could tell she had a constant flow of notes travelling in her head, impatiently waiting to be written down.

Violet's youth was a very difficult one. She had three strikes against her in the society of the time – her heritage, her gender and her calling to be a composer. Born into an immigrant family, she was frequently called by the racial slur, “WOP”. She did get a comforting chuckle later, however, when I matched that by calling myself a “WASP”. The prejudice was so strong that she decided to change her name from Balestreri to its anglicised version, Archer. The gender and career battles were a constant throughout her life and forged her inner strength and tenacity to fight. This tenacity, when she was on a mission, led to her often used nickname of “Violent Archer”. Throughout all of this stress though, she was constantly compelled to write music.

In her years in Edmonton, Violet continued to be struck with many adversities. A mentally unstable student led to the Chair of the Music Department procuring a security guard to be posted on her front lawn. An accident in her home caused a spell in hospital – as did a serious mugging on her way home from university, and later, a battle with breast cancer. In each instance her strong desire, shown with much impatience, was to return home. She never complained, never wanted repercussions, but just wanted to return to her writing and her cat!

I had the honour of premiering much of her music. Many of her song cycles were also written for the Edmonton tenor, David Astor, and myself. I was constantly shocked by her almost naive sense of appreciation that anyone would play her music. If we asked for feedback when preparing for a concert, she would only ever say, “Whatever you would like to do, please do it!”. She was just so grateful to have anything of hers performed. I realize that many feel her music shows a strong influence from her studies with Paul Hindemith, and I do see that in the sparseness of her writing, but I see a stronger influence from her time with Bartók. I feel her music captured his characteristic rhythmic vitality that came from the folk music he had explored so extensively.

Violet and I joined the Canadian University Music Society and would travel once a year to these meetings. These were an extreme benefit for her for exposure on the Canadian music scene. Still though, she felt thwarted for recognition and performance of her works. She would fight back by writing letters to publishers and colleagues – fighting hard for

herself and fellow Canadian composers. Eventually she did begin to receive commissions from CBC and Canada Council but still felt she had to fight for each and every one.

Violet was the major influence in building the composition program at the Department of Music. Her insistence on having more composers in the program led to the appointment of Malcolm Forsyth. She also encouraged the formation of a new music society that became known as the Edmonton Composers Concert Society, now known as New Music Edmonton.

Through all the adversity Violet faced, I never heard her speak ill of anyone. She was very independent and unfortunately often misunderstood. The basic elements of day to day living I believe she performed simply to continue composing which was the driving force of her life.

Compiled by Sylvia Shadick-Taylor from conversation with Professor Alexandra Munn

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I remember the day that a group of us decided that it was no longer right to refer to Violet as Miss Archer, as students had for many years. After all, she had been given an honorary doctorate from McGill. So, for the first time, one of us raised a hand to ask a question and said “Doctor Archer, could you please explain. . .” The look on her face was the intense glare she always gave a student when she was interrupted, now coupled with a slightly bemused smile. “Yes,” she replied, and from then on always insisted upon being called Doctor Archer.

I remember her explaining to us the importance of musical craft. A composer must know everything there is to know about her music, about what is possible for it, before she can even begin to consider its form. Only after all of that pre-compositional exploration would the piece appear, for her, as a whole, as a shadowy figure lit up for a moment by lightning. Then she would begin to bring it to life, a work emerging from the work. Her classes were about development and variation, never about imagination or – God-forbid – self-expression.

When she had finished her undergraduate work at McGill, she was seeking a composition instructor and her teacher told her that Béla Bartók was in upper New York State. She wrote a letter to him and was accepted as a student, for which [he requested] ten dollars a lesson. She arrived for her first lesson and was shown to the studio by Bartók's wife. He was just finishing playing a work at the piano and turned to her and asked “Do you know this piece?” She replied, “Yes, that's Haydn's 102nd Symphony, last movement.” Bartók then said to her, “You are so fortunate. I have been studying this piece for ten years now and I still do not know it.”

I remember asking her what it meant to be a woman composer. She took deep umbrage, telling me that there was no such thing as a woman composer: there are only composers. She was born female, she became a composer, just like her teachers, Bartók and Hindemith.

I remember in particular one of the many long telephone conversations that I had with Violet over the years. . . . Violet was convinced that we would never have a mature musical country if young people only played the classics or popular music. They had to

become engaged with contemporary music right from the start of their musical education and it was up to us all to compose for them. She committed herself to spending one-third of her composing time to that project. And, if you check her list of compositions from the latter part of her career, you will find that she succeeded.

I remember when Violet chose to go to England to study electronic music . . . as her last sabbatical project before retiring. When I asked her why, she said that she did it because she did not know anything about it and that she should. She was already well established as a composer and did not need to change her style or her media. But, because of her curiosity, the University of Alberta got its first electronic music studio. In her eighties, she took a keen interest in jazz. Somehow she had missed it the first time around.

I remember the last concert that I attended with Violet. It was at the Banff Centre. . . . The concert featured one of her compositions as well as compositions by Robert Rosen, Vivian Fung and me, all of us former students. It was very clear that she took the most pride not in her own work or that of her two older colleagues but rather in the work of Vivian Fung, at that time still a teen, and her youngest student. Violet was always concerned about the future and the future was with the young.

I remember sitting in Violet Archer's living room, beside her baby grand piano that was covered with scores and pieces of manuscript paper. I remember long conversations about music and poetry, about Inuit songs and Bach counterpoint, about concerts, about the state of music in Canada. I remember the tea and I remember her cats. I remember her wit and I remember how serious she was. I remember all of the times that I have listened with great pleasure to her music.

When I need to remind myself what it takes to be an authentic artist, I remember Violet Archer.

Allan Gordon Bell, "Remembering Violet: Influential Composer Would Have Turned 100 This Year," Prairie Sounds (Spring 2013), 1-11.

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I was just an impressionable teenager when I went for my weekly lessons with the Professor Emeritus at the U of A. She would have me sit at her old grand piano and I would always start playing what I wrote that week, sometimes very little, sometimes a lot. Her lessons were generously sprinkled with stories, especially about Bartók and Hindemith, but it was her advocacy of the importance of learning musical craft that has remained with me to this day.

May her music live on, and may memories of her continue to live with her students and all who have come to know her through her music.

Vivian Fung, private student 1988-1992

A **Mesostic** while thinking about a "Violet"

I ha **v** e had
many **i** mportant
ment **o** rs
in my **l** ife.
E ach
of **t** hem
has t **a** ught me
diffe **r** ently -

the great American John **C** age

the inspiring Polis **h** master, Witold Lutoslawski

and , of cours **e** most importantly,

Violet Arche **r** , the passionate Canadian.

fervo **R**

J oy

and **R** esponsibility

To your memory, Thanks!

Robert J. Rosen

2013



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