

Music in Her Life

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L'auteure a été invitée à composer un programme musical pour la cérémonie commémorant la vie de Doris Anderson qui a eu lieu 12 mai 2007 à Toronto. L'auteure nous dit combien Doris aimait la musique et elle nous parle de son initiation à la musique créée et interprétée par les femmes. Doris a écouté toutes sortes de musique au cours des années ce qui, disait-elle, "a été une partie très importante de ma vie."

When I was informed of Doris Anderson's wish that I put together a program of music for the event commemorating her life on May 12, 2007, I felt honoured—if somewhat intimidated. I should not have been surprised, though, as we had a history of musical experience together over the years that I knew her (1980-2007). Her request came with some instructions: while the selection was up to me, the music was to be peaceful but not sombre, and there were to be no hymns. Chopin's "Military Polonaise" (in A major, Opus 40, #1) was to mark the conclusion, as Doris maintained that this could always galvanize her for action again, if she was feeling depressed or down-hearted.

The collage of recorded music that I prepared to precede the memorial event consisted of pieces chosen to represent some of the things that gave Doris great pleasure throughout her life—her family, including some Scottish roots; travel; the advancement of women around the world; championing unsung women's achievements; going to movies; and, of course, music in a wide range of types. Some pieces were classical, others "popular"; some were structured, others less so; some were meant to be familiar, others not. The collage ended with a New Zealand/Maori women's paddling song which welled up in a performance that to me offered an appropriate image of Doris in later life: the voice of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa emerges out of a community of voices within which she is deeply grounded, and upon which she weaves her own strong and individual expression. As for music during the event, I felt that in addition to the Chopin, there was one other *must*—"The Song of the Soul" (about which more

later). Then "Stone and Sand and Sea and Sky," written by Rose Vaughan and performed by her trio from Halifax, would reflect Doris's beloved summer walks on the shore by a family cottage in Prince Edward Island. Finally, Mary Lou Fallis—Canada's own "Prima Donna" accompanied by Peter Tiefenbach—had offered to lead those attending in "Doris, We Sing in Chorus," which they had written for and raucously unveiled at the 80th birthday celebration for Doris in Toronto, 2001.

"Music is profoundly important in my life," Doris had begun, when she was interviewed as an eminent Canadian on CBC radio's weekly program "Music in my Life," in 1986. Doris went on to describe how the music she heard early in the morning could colour her mood for the day. She played examples of music which she liked and which illustrated the successive eras in her life to that point. She also readily acknowledged how much she loved to dance.

Before I moved to Ottawa to work for Doris, I was involved in organizations of the Canadian women's movement. I have also had a lifelong love for music. Combining these two interests, I would seek out music written and performed by women, which I used to play and discuss with colleagues—sometimes even doing some informal speaking and writing. Later, with the advent of recordable cassette tapes and then CDs, I would create "samplers" for friends, Doris included. But when I had first mentioned my interest in "women's music" to Doris, it seemed to be a new concept, as it was then for many others. In her inimitable voice, Doris told me, "I have a Helen Reddy record." When I responded that I thought the President of the Advisory Council could do better than that, Doris offered me dinner in exchange for a "briefing" on the subject. In those pre-Internet days, she not only listened

to the records I played and what I said, but she took notes. This was, I soon observed, typical of her enduring curiosity about things new and unfamiliar.

One of the records I initially featured was *The Changer and the Changed*, written and performed in 1975 by Cris Williamson, the American feminist singer-song writer. Released by the all-woman firm of Olivia Records in California, this has reportedly become one of the best-selling independent albums of all time, despite lacking commercial distribution. Indeed, Cris Williamson reprised it on fifteenth and thirtieth anniversary tours (in 1990 and 2005), and it is now considered a classic of women's music, with several of its songs often referred to as "feminist anthems." Prominent among these is "The Song of the Soul." And it is perhaps quintessentially a "second wave feminist" anthem, because: first, it pays tribute to a "fore-mother"—it begins with a quote from the hymn "Open Mine Eyes," written in 1895 by Clara Scott; and secondly, it is very participatory—it asks everyone to sing along, and has a women's chorus exuberantly doing exactly that on the recording.

When Doris resigned from the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in early 1981, in the struggles over how best to enshrine women's rights in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, it was a time of personal disappointment for her and those of us who left alongside her. But I can attest that Doris always had faith that Canadian women would step into the breach and "get the job done"—as they did, led by the Ad Hoc Committee. Meanwhile, her then-former staff took to getting together with her, over pot-luck dinners in someone's home. To bolster our morale and express our ongoing sense of solidarity, it became our custom to listen to "The Song of the Soul"—while singing and dancing along, as we came to expect with Doris. In 1982-83, Doris and I were both elected to the executive of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), and I continued to make the samplers of women's popular music which I would share with her, among others; one I recall was specifically created for dancing after NAC executive meetings. Doris credited her participation in the Canadian women's movement via NAC as making her more aware of the "wealth" of women singers and performers who are not much heard in the mainstream media.

My ongoing dialogue with Doris about music took various forms over the years, depending on where we were living and other preoccupations in our lives. Before Christmas in 1980, she asked me to assist her in buying a full "sound system," as all her sons were to be with her in Ottawa over the holidays, and she knew that they would want to play their music. At the time, she also invested in some new albums for herself, from both the classical and jazz repertoires. Sometimes Doris would invite me for dinner, when we would play and discuss recent recordings. A fervent listener to CBC radio, she had a habit of writing down the names of pieces that she liked as she heard them,

so that she could look up the recordings. She enjoyed, as she said, almost everything "from Bach to Bartok"—but Bach was a special favourite, as were Mozart, Chopin, and Handel. In her autobiography *Rebel Daughter*, Doris tells of being sent by her mother for piano lessons, as a girl in Calgary. She often played a Bach piece for examinations, which in those days were overseen by the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. One year, the visiting examiner was none other than the Conservatory's august head, Sir Ernest MacMillan himself. Young Doris noticed that he began laughing at a note she handed to him in which she listed the pieces she would play. She was disconcerted by this until her teacher saw the note afterward: Doris had written that she had "memorialized" the music. She received one of the highest marks in the city—she wasn't sure why, she claimed, much later. These early piano studies were entirely classical, she said—much to the chagrin of her father, who complained that she couldn't play anything useful, such as popular songs for sing-alongs at social gatherings. In contrast to the pattern of most young listeners today, Doris explained that she started by appreciating classical music and only really discovered popular music in adulthood—as a young career woman in Toronto, during the era of jazz and "big bands." And given her well-known sense of humour, I felt comfortable providing Doris with a copy of Mary Lou Fallis's CD of amusing vintage Canadian songs, "Prima Donna on a Moose."

Once Doris returned to Toronto, I saw her less often, especially when I was working overseas (1987-90). But her already eclectic taste in music was influenced by her travels, as she visited such countries as India, China, and Turkey. Her interest in women's issues broadened out to the international level through the 1980s, when she participated in the United Nations World Conferences on Women and their associated NGO forums—in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985). In fact, the last piece Doris played in the 1986 "Music in My Life" program was an African composition. She was clearly affected by what she referred to as the "energy and affirmation" of women in developing countries, who were active agents in the global women's movement which was "changing society." For Doris, this was a "social revolution" that could "embrace everyone," male and female alike.

Yet, as a proud Canadian, Doris's determination that our artists receive their due in public attention extended to music—beyond her well-known promotion of Canadian women writers in the pages of *Chatelaine*. While in Ottawa, she went to concerts by the National Arts Centre Orchestra. And one of Doris's long-standing enthusiasms was for the singing of contralto Maureen Forrester, whom she knew and admired, particularly for her interpretations of music by Handel. In 1999, the Canadian Opera Company mounted a spirited production of Handel's rarely seen opera *Serse* (or *Xerxes*), with American counter-tenor David Daniels, a then-rising star, among the cast. At dinner with Doris before we left for the theatre, I

played excerpts from a new CD of Daniels singing Handel arias. She sniffed, “Well, I’m not giving up my Maureen Forrester for that.” I hasten to add that she really enjoyed the rollicking and gender-bending production, including Daniels’s marvellous performance. But while she owned CDs by Forrester, Doris repeatedly said that she wished she had more of the contralto’s recordings to play at home. In fact, that was the subject of the last e-mail I sent to her. And it was gratifying to be told that in her later years, on the trips with her sons that she cherished so much, Doris would take along and play the sampler CDs.

Coda: I can imagine that, in future when I hear Chopin’s “Military Polonaise” sound, its rhythms will evoke Doris’s footfalls—confident, steady, and determined—just the way

I think she wanted, and expected, women to proceed on their quest for equality.

Wendy Lawrence was an active member of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women (1972-1980). She was hired in July 1980 by Doris Anderson as a ‘policy assistant’ at the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, a position from which she resigned with Doris, in January 1981. In 1982-83, she was an elected member of the executive of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, on whose editorial committee she had previously served. She retired from the federal public service in 2006, after working for 25 years at the Canadian International Development Agency, most recently as a Gender Equality Specialist.

Song for Doris Doris Anderson Memorial, May 12, 2007

Lyrics by Mary Lou Fallis

CHORUS

“Doris!”
We sing in chorus.
Roget’s Thesaurus we have outdone
In lauding
And in applauding
Doris Hilda McCubbin Anderson.

VERSE ONE

Out in the foothills of Alberta
In 1921
A woman gave birth to a babe
A daughter, not a son

That child turned out to be a force
With which one had to reckon
Her homeland was too tame for her
But Europe seemed to beckon.

VERSE TWO

Post-Europe she returned to walk
The journalism beat
As Chatelaine of Chatelaine
Her revenge was mighty sweet

The circulation tripled,
And she became a star
She’s our rebel daughter
She’s taken us so far.

VERSE THREE

And then she went to Ottawa
Her sojourn there is legend
She headed up the the NAC
Put an end to hedgin’

At constitution-signing time
They called her a curmudgeon
But she knew when to make a stand
And stormed out in high dudgeon.

VERSE FOUR

The mother of three children
And three-time novelist
She’s been chancellor and governor and
editor and director and...
There’s lots that I have missed
(Did I mention the three honorary
doctorates?)

VERSE FIVE

She’s a friend to Madame Adrienne,
June Callwood and Michele,
Sheila Kieran, Nancy Ruth
Lois Wilson and as well

She’s helped a thousand others
Oh don’t you ever rest?
You’ve led us ever onward,
Oh, Doris: you’re the best!

Mary Lou Fallis, a Toronto born singer, writer, teacher, broadcaster, producer, is Canada’s foremost “Soprano Comedienne.” She combines a teaching position at the University of Western Ontario’s Faculty of Music with her performing career. Most recently, she produced the Gemini award winning series Bathroom Divas for BRAVO! TV