

S O P H I A

W I S D O M

*Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister."
Proverbs 7:4a*



A Musical Mosaic

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C O N T E N T S

SOPHIA: A Greek feminine noun associated with the biblical wisdom tradition, translated "wisdom" and personified in the book of Proverbs; equivalent in the New Testament to *logos*, the creative word that was with God in the beginning, creating and giving life to the world.

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We are grateful to Linda Schwarz-Trivett, Assistant Professor of Music at Concord College,
for allowing us to use her manuscripts to illustrate our front cover.

The Music that Feeds Us

by Debra Fieguth

Writing about Mennonite women and music is as daunting as writing about Mennonite women and food: where to start? and where to *finish*?!

And how do you best mix a funky, dreadlocked Sister Dorothy Penner with an opera singer like Edith Wiens? And where does ethnomusicologist Doreen Klassen, who has studied African and Mennonite folk music, fit in? It's something like putting *vereneke* and *plumamoos* in the same dish.

(And how can you possibly fit everyone into one small issue of *Sophia*? The answer is that of course you can't, but you can sure have fun coming up with a sampling.)

Music is so integral to our existence that it has even become the focus of Mennonite jokes: how many Mennonites does it take to change a light bulb? Thirteen – one to screw in the bulb, and a dozen to sing the Doxology in four-part harmony (alternative answer: three to make the lunch).

We celebrate with music. We laugh with music. We speak our faith with music. We who are not musicians find sustenance in the music articulated by others. I remember a Good Friday at the Orpheum Theatre in Vancouver several years ago, when Henriette Schellenberg, a Manitoba Mennonite, was one of the guest soloists for a performance of Mozart's Mass in C Minor. When Schellenberg sang *Et incarnatus est de Spiritu sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est* ("And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man"), I felt shivers. The Latin *factus* is drawn out in a beautiful yet haunting way to illustrate the mystery of God being made into a human being.

After the concert I left the opulent Orpheum, gigantic chandeliers hanging from its magnificent ceilings, and walked out onto Granville Mall, where sad-looking street kids were panhandling and wandering the sidewalks. Henriette's voice was still soaring and sailing in my head, and, instead of jarring me back to reality, the street-kid



scene and Mozart's music became part of the same reality. I saw those kids among the human beings for whom God became incarnate. He was made human to dwell among such as these. Jesus suffered for the sorrows and sins of the runaway kids on Granville. There was a profound connection between Henriette's voice projecting from the stage and the presence of kids on the street.

In another place, I sat on a blanket during an outdoor Sunday evening church service in an aboriginal community in Western Australia. One of the hymns we sang was "In the sweet by and by." The Fitzroy River flowed past us as we sang in either English or Walmatjari, and I knew that though I would never see these Christian brothers and sisters again on earth, we would meet some day "on that beautiful shore." Music connects us with other believers even when language doesn't.

Music sustains us as Christians when hardships threaten to overwhelm us. One man, after losing his daughters in a shipwreck, wrote, "When peace like a river attendeth my soul, when sorrows like sea billows roll..." In either case, he said, "it is well with my soul." Mennonites came to North America, sometimes to escape persecution, sometimes to escape poverty, with few earthly possessions. But they came with their hymns, and those hymns are still alive. Early Anabaptists wrote hymns prior to being martyred for their faith. And it is interesting to note that in southern Sudan, where many Christians are losing their lives for their faith, severe persecution is accompanied by a phenomenon of hymn-writing.

We as Mennonites can't claim to be the only people for whom music is inextricably linked with life. But neither can we deny that it is in our lives, as surely as the sun rises, and as surely as there will be *zwieback* at Oma's.

We hope you enjoy this issue, which spotlights just some of the varied gifts of Mennonite women who make music. Not every style of music will be to everyone's taste, but that's okay: just think of it as a smorgasbord.

We goofed! Irma Epp wrote a fine article for our last issue about her participation in the 1995 MB Women's Conference in Zaire. Unfortunately, only half of the article was printed. We apologize to Irma for the error and to our readers for any resulting confusion. The second half appears in this issue. May it give us better understanding and empathy for our sisters in Zaire.

A Theology of Beauty

by Carol Dyck

Art is more than a product –
a song or a book or a painting.
It is a way of looking at life,
through the imagination.



Carol Dyck is a gifted composer and performer. After many years of making music in the Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton, she is currently the music director of the First Baptist Church in that city. She wrote the popular hymn “He My Shepherd Is”.

Several years ago she was commissioned to compose a piece for choir and congregation at the Church Music Seminar sponsored by the two Mennonite colleges in Winnipeg. The following are excerpts from a workshop she presented there.

I first began to write music when the drama group in the Lendrum M.B. Church, which regularly mounted rather ambitious productions, suggested one year that I write some songs to go with a play. So I did, although this was something I had never done before. I found I rather liked doing it. I was staying at home with young children at the time, and feeling a little understimulated intellectually. So it was my home situation that gave me time and the need to create.

As well, I was blessed to have an eager and enthusiastic group of people reaching out to accept anything I could give them. The church community served as an incubator for my gifts as a composer. What does a person need when she begins to write music? She needs performers. This church had many great voices and a few good instrumentalists. She needs an audience. The

church provided me with that. She needs subject material. This was a community where people shared their personal histories, and struggled together with the deep issues of faith and life. There was lively debate and freedom to think and explore.

For nearly 25 years I have mused over the question “What is the role of the artist in the life of the church-based community?” Art is more than a product – a song or a book or a painting. It is a way of looking at life, through the imagination. In my community I think I have been able to contribute a particular way of looking at things, but certainly I am not the only one who has done so. So when I speak of the role of the artist, I am thinking of many people.

A CREATOR OF BEAUTY

For me, the artist’s first task is to create something beautiful. At a music seminar, I asked participants what they perceived to be the role of music in the worship service. Only two people admitted to valuing music in church because it is beautiful. I thought this was rather sad, coming from people who love music enough to spend a week in Winnipeg in January just singing together. I don’t believe these musicians were unresponsive to the beauty in music. They just had a hard time admitting this was important in the church context. I concluded that we need to develop a theology of beauty.

I live very near the beautiful tree-lined river gorge in Edmonton. There is hardly a day I don’t thank God for the privilege of living in such a lovely setting. The God who created that river valley cares about how things look, smell, feel, taste and sound. I believe the Creator realized that beauty has its own utility – it calms the spirit, it has power to heal, it draws us deeply into the unspeakable realms of God’s creation and makes us feel part of the whole.

Music, with or without text, shares in this power of beauty to heal and connect. We should never feel that people who provide experiences of beauty for our communities are doing something decorative or peripheral. Nor should we feel that all our experiences at church must enter our lives at the rational level. The

realm of the spirit surely reaches above and beyond any set of reasoned ideas. Music, the most abstract of the arts, is a natural language for that realm.

A GIVER OF POETRY

Poetic expression is different from prose, or scientific writing, or the traditional sermon. So much of what we hear in our church communities is prescriptive – do this, don't do that. With poetry, images reverberate at different levels of our consciousness. It tends to be reflective, or expressive of deep feelings and experiences. Although a community's experience of poetry need not be limited to biblical images, the artist does have opportunities to shed light on biblical literature that does not get much exposure in our tradition.

Last year, I co-taught an adult Sunday school class on the Song of Songs. None of us in the class could remember the last time we had heard a sermon on this beautiful biblical text. Perhaps preachers have considered it too personal or been embarrassed by its sexual nature. The Song of Songs is an anthology of poems on a common theme – erotic, physical love. But it is not too personal for communal use. In traditional Jewish celebrations, it is read on the day before Passover. For many Jewish people, it is associated with spring.

The liturgical function of the poem is to celebrate the renewal of life that occurs in nature and the physical drives that ensure the renewal of life for the human race. For one of those sessions, I set several of the poems to music. I set them for individual male and female voice and for violin and cello, two instruments I felt could convey the man-woman dialogue at a wordless level.

EXPRESSER OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF THE COMMUNITY

Within the church the artist has the opportunity to transform personal events into communal events, to incorporate personal history into communal history. This kind of story telling has suited me well. Interacting with a close, particular community is the most powerful experience of art for me. I have written music for specific church events, such as our 25th anniversary celebration. I have also collaborated with others to create joint sermons – music interwoven with spoken elements.

Beyond these liturgical acts, I have tried to deal musically with the life events of the community. Mrs. Siemens was an elderly woman in our congregation with a very interesting story. As a young woman she,

with others from her Mennonite village in the Soviet Union, escaped over the Amur River into China one very cold Christmas night in the early 1900s. I thought everyone in the community should hear the story she shared with me. So I wrote a cantata for choir and soloists, which was eventually performed at the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg in 1984.

Interestingly, my 12-year-old son and his friends began to view Mrs. Siemens as a movie star. They would see her in the church lobby and say, "That's her!" Somehow her courage and adventure became a source of pride for all of us. As for Mrs. Siemens, she seemed awe-struck that a part of her life was worth expressing in artistic form.

When we tell our stories artistically, we look at them in new ways and see how they resonate on a more universal level. About 10 years ago, our community suffered trauma when two young men committed suicide. We became aware of the dark side of life, not only in their lives but in our own. I believe that our faith experience needs to help us articulate our deepest feelings, our fundamental needs and longings. We have very few hymns that help us express anger, despair, self-hate. When we neglect to express these feelings in our communities, we tell people that when they feel that way they are not acceptable in our midst, that Christians should not feel those things.

I was commissioned to write a piece in memory of one of those young men. This was a challenge for me. How did I think the community should process that experience? The resulting piece was called Songs of the Longest Night. It incorporated powerful texts about pain by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke and biblical expressions of gentle hope from the Psalms and Revelation.

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... our faith experience needs to help us
articulate our deepest feelings, our fundamental needs
and longings.

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INTRODUCER OF INNOVATIVE IDEAS

I have been fortunate that my church has been somewhat more open to divergent thinking than some congregations. To lose that openness is not only sad but dangerous. One reads much these days about a renewed interest in spirituality. In our mechanized world, people are hungry for that other dimension. But many are not turning to organized religion to feed their hunger because for them the church consists of little more than static creeds and immovable hierarchies of power. It has become too inflexible to address the pressing needs of the 20th century.

I am deeply concerned about the experience of women in faith communities. As women have become increasingly aware of themselves and their life experiences, many have felt excluded from the biblical narrative and from the reported life of the church. It is important to try to change old language patterns in our hymns and liturgies. It is even more important to articulate women's experience. In a song about Hagar called *Motherlove*, I tried to imagine how Hagar might have pictured God as her child lay dying in the desert. God became a mother grieving for her own dying child – the earth.

Similarly, I wrote a song called *Adoration* using biblical images – male terms to describe God as the speaker of the word, female terms to describe a nurturing mother and non-human images of wind and light. Using the pronoun *her* in relation to God was very disturbing for some people. There was a strong reaction when it was sung at a Canadian Conference. This is because people have lost sight of the fact that anything we say to describe God is image. When we say that God is a loving father, that is an image. If we say God is a loving mother, that is an image too. God is beyond male or female.

Surely, in our art forms we have a responsibility to expand the range of images used, and thus to widen our experience of the divine. My experience with this song taught me just how dangerous it can be to use language or ideas outside the normal parameters of church talk. We pay a price for doing so, but in the end we pay a larger price for not doing so.

What the church now needs is imagination. We need to be less afraid of being wrong and let our imaginations take flight. We need to break out of old patterns of thought and speech and make new connections. This is what creativity is. I also believe it is God's

spirit moving in and among us. Creative people need to help direct the thought and energy of the church. I pray that the church will be free enough to listen and respond.

MotherLove - Hagar's Song

by Carol Dyck

One day The Living One Who Hears leaned down from the heavens to hear the song of the ripples in the stream.

But there arose only silence,
and a child's faint crying,
and a woman's lone and bitter sighing
"Oh tears, blind these eyes
for I cannot watch while the child dies!"

At this, The Living One Who Sees looked down from the heavens and saw the earth growing barren and dry.
"Oh who took the flowers?
Where has the green gone?
And why are the young and innocent dying?
Oh tears, blind these eyes
for I cannot watch while the child dies!"

That day, The Living One Who Loves came down from the heavens
to stand and weep with the woman, hand in hand;
till there arose from their weeping
a well of compassion
that sprang up, surging through the land.
And the earth drank
and the child was filled
and the woman and The Living One Who Sings
sang.

On Raising a Musical Family: A Memoir

by Bertha Klassen

How do musical families develop? It's hard to say. We were lucky that our children accepted our way of life. They could have repudiated it, saying, "That's too much work," or "I want to be rich," or "It's not cool." None of this happened. They worked hard. They became involved in activities that did not take them away from practising. What we did will not necessarily produce the same results in another family, place or time. We were just lucky.

Our daughter was introduced to music from birth. When my husband brought us home from the hospital, he carried her into the house past stereo speakers that were pouring out Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. He wanted her to get used to lots of sound, not to be disturbed when we carried on our lessons or rehearsals.

She, of course, absorbed a lot unconsciously. Late one night after an evening of vocal lessons taught by my husband, we heard her singing upstairs in her crib. She was one-and-a-half. The major scale came through very clearly ah, ah...ah....ah (slower now as it got higher)....ah.....ah.....ah! And she reached the top of the scale!

Our son also absorbed music daily. When he was four he took part in group lessons especially designed for four-year-olds. He came out of those classes confidently repeating any complicated rhythm on a drum and easily playing simple tunes on the piano. Later, as he took violin lessons with a good teacher who knew the Suzuki method well, he surprised us by demonstrating perfect pitch. In fact, both children had this ability, which was not destroyed because we always kept our piano tuned up to an A-440.

Perfect pitch is a gift that many children are born with. It is the ability to recognize any pitch and identify it, much as we would identify color by sight. In music, all we had to do to keep this perfect pitch was to teach our children the names of the sounds they were constantly hearing.

Many children lose this ability because they are constantly playing out-of-tune pianos so they don't always hear the same sound for A, B, etc. I believe I lost this gift because, as I learned later on in life, the piano I had played on was a half-tone flat throughout its whole register.



*Bertha (centre back) and
John (centre front) Klassen and family*

Musical families are developed when there is money to spend on instruments and lessons with a good teacher. At one time, when my husband and I were both studying, we were spending \$200 a month on music lessons. By today's rates this would amount to \$2000. One of my piano students' parents told me she had spent \$600 for drapes and \$200 for a piano. This particular piano had a pitch problem, so much so that the student told me, "My music sounds different at home." I was not surprised when she quit lessons early.

If you want a musical family, you must pick your grandparents carefully. This may sound facetious, but it really does make a difference if, as in our case, one grandfather played the French horn, and the other the violin. Although some will argue that environment and not heredity is responsible for musicality, one is probably better off with both: the genes and the setting.

We had no rec room in the basement to which we could banish the children for their practising. This room can be a rather lonely place to do this hard work. So our children practised in the living room. I could listen from the kitchen and supervise and correct when things were going wrong.

I was not above giving them the choice of doing dishes or practising. Needless to say, I did a lot of dishes by myself. I also gently reminded my daughter, aged 5: "Friendly Giant comes on in five minutes. You have to practise before you can watch." At that age, five minutes was all that was needed for one practice session.

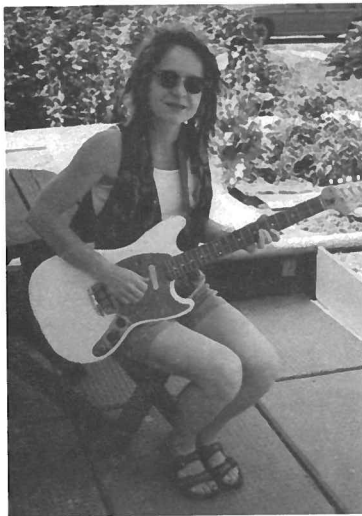
Our children knew what practising meant because

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Sister Dorothy:

AN INTERVIEW

by Agnes Dyck



People invariably smile upon entering the record store where petite Dorothy Penner, arrayed in a glittery shift with black socks and boots, performs her own compositions. Her dreadlocks flying, she executes a sort of bird dance, hopping on one foot, skipping with both feet, waving a free arm in salute to the customers and radiating enormous energy from her diminutive self.

Dorothy Penner and I met for Caribbean food at Deen's in St. Boniface.

Agnes: Describe some of your early influences.

Dorothy: We sang all the time. I was told, "Go stand there on the corner and sing." Laura did mandolin and I did guitar.

A: What instruments have you played?

D: I've played percussion instruments, guitar, electric guitar, flute and piano. My mother often said, "You can do whatever you want."

A: Are you self-taught, or have you had other training?

D: Albert Horch was my first flute teacher. I studied classical guitar for many years. I've also participated in many workshops.

A: What sort of feedback have you had about your music?

D: I submitted some recordings to CJOB. They responded, "I'm afraid it's too much for CJOB." CBC and 93FM, however, played my version of O Canada.

A: Your songs are very poetic.

D: Yes, I like to write. I draw and paint, too, and I'm working on some videos. CKND has a short, two-minute video for which I get an honorarium.

A: My sister and I were deeply moved when you played Kernlieder in the Playhouse Theatre. The songs were unembellished and quite lovely.

D: Yes, and I have a recording in mind: "Songs for Oma." (Dorothy's grandmother lives in Donwood Manor.)

A: What are your main interests?

D: I'm interested in performing, writing and recording. A good balance for me are those three. I like sewing. My mother bought us all sewing machines.

A: You attend church regularly. How does your faith affect your music career?

D: I want to be somebody who espouses good things and not bad things. It's integrity that counts. You try to do something good and something worthwhile.

A: Does your music fit into a genre?

D: I fit into a pop area, but I like classical too.

A: How would you sum up your philosophy or credo?

D: I spend a lot of time doing it, but you have to leave yourself open; things happen – serendipity. You make your own pie. I used to think, if I was told something would hurt me, "Well, I'll try it and see." Now I see that there are rules and that some things can hurt me.

Dorothy launched a series of short videos recently, beginning with a delightfully exuberant rendering of "Sister Dorothy's Homemade Salsa." The message is: You save money on this cheap recipe and you have enough to offer an extra jar to a friend.

A childlike and refreshing humour accompanies Sister Dorothy's eccentric costumes and sets. (Some of her costumes are bought at the Self Help Store.) "Swim Away," for example, finds Sister Dorothy performing a quirky swimming crawl on a low stone fence, or reclining in a child's wading pool complete with fins and a sort of tutu in black. For "Ollie's Cousin" Sister Dorothy darts about, hiding behind pillars, listening at doors and parodying all the world's nosy gossips. The final and startlingly shrill rendering of "O Canada" echoes the listener's response to a niggling sense that Canada "ain't what it used to be."

In addition to her just-released videos, "Sister Dorothy 'Big-Big-Up'", Dorothy has produced two tapes, "A Xmas Album" and "Big-Up."

A Lifelong Commitment

Has anyone had as much influence on the musical lives of generations of Mennonite children in Winnipeg as has **Helen Litz**? About to enter her fortieth year as founder/director of the *Mennonite Children's Choir*, she credits this lifelong commitment to her early decision to glorify God through the gift of music-making. Her mission, as she describes it, has been to "help gifted and ordinary children make extraordinary music, spreading joy and goodwill along the way."



artistic achievement, travelling widely and winning countless honours, including two international first prizes at children's choral competitions in Montreaux, Switzerland. It has performed at Carnegie Hall, at Florida's Epcot Centre and at Washington's famed Kennedy Centre for the Arts. Several years ago, when the choir hosted children's choirs from Siberia and Kiev, it presented each child with a Bible, highlighting what Helen has

always perceived to be the other mission of the choir: "Helping less fortunate children around the world." Royalties for songs written for the choir are sent to projects for underprivileged children. In the summer of 1995 the choir visited one of the children it sponsors through World Vision in Bethlehem, Israel.

When asked what helped shape this vision, Helen recalls: "My parents created the blueprint in a home where they together made music on guitar and mandolin with family singing. Though we were a poor immigrant family, my dad had certain priorities. One of these was the beautiful Heintzman piano which graced our humble Northend home. Upon coming home from church, I would try to re-create snatches of the music I had heard sung, which was always in harmony. Since playing the piano came naturally to me, my dad proceeded to arrange for violin lessons. Regular practising and playing in 'Onkel Ben's' Mennonite orchestra, along with my self-taught piano and singing in Beth Cruikshank's Winnipeg Girls Choir became routine."

Over the years Helen's choir has become known for its high standards of excellence and

Besides conducting, Helen's career has included many other duties and honours. She has served as guest conductor, choral clinician and adjudicator at festivals, workshops, churches and music camps. She has won the City of Winnipeg's outstanding service reward and been nominated for Woman of the Year. Some of her compositions have become extremely popular. Her arrangement of the Canadian Pavilion's Expo Theme Song *This is My Home* was recently made available to all Canadian schools. Her *Prayer of St. Francis* has sold over 70,000 copies.

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they heard us doing it. Regularity was the emphasis, but certainly our example helped.

We, and they, had countless opportunities to perform. Performance, performance, performance... that was the key to keep going. Just before their teens they had the chance to play in youth orchestras. This was an incredible opportunity to meet with people of like interests and to realize that, while they might be the only kids on the block taking music lessons, there were literally dozens of kids (and "cool" kids, too) who took their music seriously. We

soon realized that our children's choice of friends was going to be from this group, and we were content because generally they were wonderful people from which to choose.

As I said earlier, we were lucky. Another century, another country... maybe our story would have been different.

Bertha Klassen is a member of Elmwood MB Church in Winnipeg. She has taught several instruments, played as an accompanist and taught in school music programs. This past year she and her husband, John, taught music in Paraguay.

Worshipping God in all Fullness

by Christine Longhurst

Jesus makes only one reference to worship leaders in the entire New Testament. Unfortunately, it's not a very flattering one. The reference is found in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). One of the individuals who chooses to walk past the wounded man, instead of stooping to help, is a Levite. The Levites were the tribe set aside by God to oversee the worship and music at the Temple – in other words, the worship leaders of their day.

We are not told why the Levite passed by the wounded man on the side of the road. We don't know what urgent business prevented him from taking time to stop and help. Maybe that particular road was notorious for robberies—getting robbed and hurt was just one of the unfortunate results of travelling on it. Maybe the unfortunate traveller should have known better, or taken precautions.

This text has been coming to mind a lot recently as I struggle with the issue of using expanded images of God in worship. When I apply this text to my situation as a worship leader, I realize two things. First, people are being wounded by the issue, some because they hear male imagery for God, others as we try to expand our idea of who God is. Second, unlike the Levite, I can't walk by these wounded people. Whether or not I understand or identify the pain, what matters is that I don't ignore the pain I see.

What kind of pain am I talking about? For many people, conservative in theology and conservative in practice, the idea of viewing God as anything but a father is almost heretical. When they hear God referred to as "mother," for example, they experience great discomfort. Others are equally uncomfortable hearing God referred to by male imagery. Some may have been hurt by church settings that constrict their efforts to find different ways to understand God; others may even have experienced abuse at the hands of men.

Passions run high on both sides of the issue. The problem is especially acute when it comes to worship music. Our repertoire of congregational songs relies heavily on masculine imagery for God (King, Shepherd, Master, Lord). Those who feel strongly about traditional male imagery cannot understand how these images, clearly presented in Scripture and deeply meaningful to them, are not enough for everyone. Those who long for wider imagery have little

patience for what they see as a narrow view of God, and they wonder why others are so slow to recognize their needs.

As a worship leader, I cannot ignore the needs of either of these groups. I must minister to them both. Sometimes I feel pain, too. It hurts to hear that some people are angry when I push the edges even a little bit with a song or a reading. Even more painful is when others criticize because I don't go far enough.

Is God only father or mother?

An initial response to the overwhelming male imagery in our worship was an attempt to balance it with solely female images (eg. Brian Wren's "Sister God", 1980, or "Who is She", 1983). Another response has been the neutering of the imagery, for example, the substitution of the word "God" for any male reference to deity.

The response by those who feel threatened by this issue is predictable.

On a personal level, I sympathize with these responses. But as someone responsible for community worship, I keep coming back to the same question: Is it not possible to stretch our understanding of the divine nature without having to lose the richness of traditional imagery? For the sake of my congregation, and the many like us, my answer must be "yes." And my inspiration comes from Scripture itself, where we are given glimpses of the divine through an amazing array of common images. We see God as a rock

*Is it not possible
to stretch our
understanding of
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the richness of
traditional imagery?*

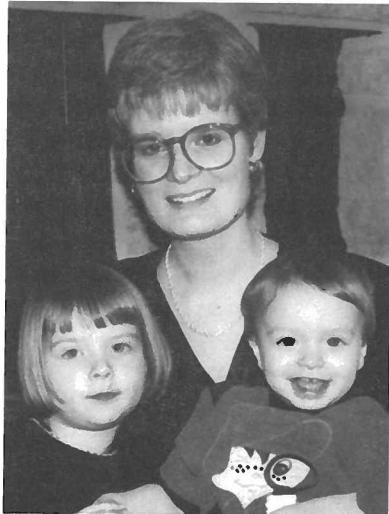
(Psalm 18); Jesus as a vine, God as a gardener (John 15); God as a potter (Jeremiah 18) and a mother hen gathering her chicks together (Luke 13); the bright morning star (Revelation 22) and the bread of life (John 6); the eagle granting refuge under her wings (Psalm 91); the mother comforting her child (Isaiah 66).

Scripture encourages us to explore God imagery. No single image can provide us with the richness we encounter in God's own kaleidoscope of pictures. But neither should we underestimate the hesitancy with which some people will approach this process. The hymn writer Carl Daw eloquently summed up the journey in the first stanza of one of his hymns:

O God, on whom we lost our hold
when all your names were changed,
we find our prayers and hymns confused,
more awkward and estranged.
Yet there is hope in these new words,
sweet fruit in bitter rind:
the promise of a keener faith
than that we leave behind.

(in *A Year of Grace*, c.1990, Hope Publishing Co.)

Christine Longhurst
is the mother of
Rebecca (4) and Dylan
(1). She is Pastor of
Worship at the River
East Mennonite
Brethren Church in
Winnipeg and Adjunct
Professor of Church
Music at Concord
College. She was man-
aging editor of the
recently-published
hymnal *Worship
Together*.



A Winter Poem

O Creator God
who set the stars
to dance and burn
in measureless cold,
O Sun of God
touch this dust
this frozen earth
and bring it Spring.
I know that cold
and frost and snow,
frozen waters,
skeletal trees,
I know that these
are forms of rest.
I know that cold
must come, And yet
I dread to hear
on naked clay
the clear chill echo
of Winter's steps.
O Creator God
remember for me:
the Sun grows nearer
when Winter comes;
the days are short
the nights too long
and yet the Sun
is closer now
to this cold earth.
O Creator God
I know that deep
beneath the ice,
within the bitter
breast of earth,
the living waters
wait at rest
for Spring to bring
its warming breath.
O Creator God
when Winter comes
let the star,
the burning Son,
burn close and bright
in that dark night,
that measureless
space of our souls.

Erin Morash is an M. Div. student in the
Winnipeg Theological Consortium of schools. This
poem was written for the "Poetry of the Psalms"
course at Concord College.



Zairian Church Women Are On the Move – Part 2

by Irma Epp

In our last issue, Irma wrote about her journey to Zaire in November 1995 to take part in that country's MB Women's Conference. In spite of difficulties that would overwhelm many, 144 delegates, numerous visitors, and many children were able to worship, work and plan together with joy. The second half of this story is about the issues Zairian women are facing and how they are beginning to deal with them.

Since this was the first conference the women had planned on their own (previous conferences have been planned for them by the men), the Executive Committee had to teach conference procedure each step of the way. The delegates had to be taught how to show respect for differing views, how to disagree without attacking the speaker and how to vote. Each of the three regional leaders was responsible for interpreting the information to her cluster of delegates and for helping those who were unable to read or write.

They formally accepted a very ambitious set of objectives regarding spiritual, socio-cultural and economic activities. Some of their spiritual objectives were to gather for prayer on a regular basis and to conduct teaching seminars on family life, on how to become a mature Christian by demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit and what it means to be a faithful Christian in a suffering church. They agreed to conduct an entire Sunday morning service in their home churches every first Sunday in June and to form women's choirs in each parish or church and participate in the Sunday morning worship services.

Some socio-cultural objectives were to engage in prison ministries, to care for the sick, the orphans, the widows and the elderly in their regions. Social services do not exist in Zaire. The sick are not fed in hospitals; prisoners are often not fed in prisons. Accompanying relatives or concerned women look after their meals and care.

Some of the economic objectives are already being put in place. Plans are underway to set up three literacy centers where women will be taught to read and write and encouraged to participate in money-making projects that will help to augment their meager incomes. Some of these projects include soap making, sewing, cloth dyeing and the rotation of crops.

Several issues with which the women are wrestling surfaced during plenary discussions. The roles of men and women

have changed. With urbanization the women no longer have large fields to till. Besides bearing many children (8 to 12 are not uncommon) and providing for them and their husbands, out of necessity they have become entrepreneurs, buying and selling at the markets. They are the ones handling the cash flow today.

Most of the men are jobless. There is a 90 percent unemployment rate in Zaire. In the past men had a very firm control over the family's finances. They want to continue to handle the finances without any input from their wives who have become the major providers. Much anger was expressed on the floor about the way they were being treated. There was a cry for equality and recognition of the gifts that the Lord had given them.



Baking buns for the opening ceremony

*In the midst of
chaos
they have learned to
sing a song of
hope*

Another major issue revolved around a conflict that had arisen between Christianity and cultural patterns. When a husband dies, his relatives say that the goods of the deceased are theirs, not the widow's. What should a Christian wife do when her husband goes to the deceased brother's home to claim the goods? Should she as a Christian woman accept the goods or stand up for what is right? The women called in the President of the Zaire MB Church and voiced their concerns regarding some of these issues.

The plight of single, unmarried women also surfaced. Frequently they have no way of earning a living except through prostitution. In their culture they have no identity without a husband or children. Several of these single women had the courage to share their pain and feelings of alienation both within their culture and in the church. One of these women left the meeting sobbing bitterly. She later had the courage to return and minister to the group by using her gift of making music.

During the last session there was a unanimous decision to send a declaration to the General Assembly. The gist of the declaration was that they want their daughters who have received training in Bible and theology schools to have the same opportunities as their sons. The only way to achieve that in their present situation is through ordination. This is presently one of the discussion items of the General Assembly.

In spite of adverse living conditions and extreme poverty, Zairian MB Church women are on the move. In the midst of chaos they have learned to sing a song of hope while moving forward in the strength of the Lord.

Touching Lives Through Music



Maxine Gacek never planned to be a singer. She was busy raising a family and, although she had musical talent, "I never considered myself a serious musician." Not, that is, until she felt God calling her to use her gifts in a public way.

Since then, she has recorded an album (which she describes as gospel pop-rock with an r&b feel), works with a band and has sung at contemporary music festivals such as Jesus Manifest last summer in Dauphin. She's also involved in leading worship at her church, McIvor Avenue Mennonite Brethren.

Maxine sees music more as a ministry than as a profession. "That means touching the lives of all kinds of people," she says. "I really enjoy connecting with people," she adds, citing a concert last winter when the audience was especially responsive. "We all had a wonderful time. I realized then that that's how I'd really like it to be."

They Have Blessed Many

The origins of *The Gitarrenchor*, the North Kildonan MB Church's Guitar Choir, lie in the pioneering days of Paraguay's Mennonite colonies. With a few guitars and mouth organs among them, a group of men and women began to sing together, both for the pleasure it brought into their lives and for God's glory. When many emigrated to Canada in the 1950s, those in Winnipeg met for "house music" again, also adding members.

Today the choir has over 40 singers and instrumentalists (4 mandolins, 10 guitars). The group is mostly self-taught. They choose songs older people will remember from Russia or South America. Conductor Peter Reimer says he is amazed and humbled by response to the group over the years. Five cassette recordings have blessed listeners world-wide, and the proceeds from their entirely voluntary efforts support many projects of MB Communications and their own church.

On Being Gracious, in Success or Failure

by Edith Wiens



***P**ride goes before a fall. Many of us grew up with this ringing in our ears. And it's true; many have experienced it. But in our eagerness to avoid painful pitfalls, another extreme can emerge: self-depreciation and the destruction of our self-worth. I want to think with you about being gracious about our abilities and about our failures. This applies to every part of our lives, of course, but let me stay within my metier of music and give two examples of what I mean.*

A ladies sextet is asked to sing Sunday morning. Choosing and arranging the hymns and finding the time to rehearse takes quite a bit of time and effort, but by Saturday evening all are content that their ministry will be a blessing.

But, the mezzo spends Saturday night up with her feverish baby. Tired and bleary-eyed, she does her best on Sunday morning but can't hold her pitch and, on top of it all, goes into the wrong arrangement on one of the verses. The group makes it through, but the mezzo is miserable to think that she ruined everything.

After church, an older woman comes to this singer. "Thank you so much," she says. "That was just what I needed."

The singer answers, "Really? It was terrible. I was so out of tune. It wasn't nearly what it should have been."

The woman is taken aback. She wonders if her ears are so bad that she can't tell what's in tune. Has she made a fool of herself by not realizing it wasn't well done? Her blessing is gone.

The second example comes from Kurt Masur, conductor of the New York Philharmonic, who told me that once as a young conductor he had to jump in at a moment's notice to conduct an opera he didn't know. Somehow he swam through, somehow the orchestra and singers got to the end, but he felt awful. This, surely, could not be what music was about!

As he left the theatre, an old actor came to him and said, "Thank you for one of the highlights of my life!" Kurt Masur began to stutter and said, "But this was a dreadful performance. Nothing was together and..." The actor interrupted him, "Masur! How dare you destroy what I experienced tonight?"

There it is. We need to take tender care of what our audiences and families experience through our efforts. Grace, after all, is undeserved favour from God. So smile. Say thank you. And then thank God who lets us be involved in something so much bigger than ourselves.

Here I am, a singer, practising every day for 25 years, and I'm saying the battle for perfection doesn't matter? Of course it matters. But we must not forget two things. First, we are not in ultimate control of our gifts and of where those gifts will take us, and second, the need of the listener acts as a magnet with its own laws. There is a wonderful quietness in knowing that music, a sermon or a one-to-one talk can wing its own way straight to the listener's need.

How does one handle the situation where one intended to bless or entertain – or both – and the performance was truly disastrous? First, one should get a grip on reality by asking, "Just how bad was it?" Analyze what went wrong and look for reasons in yourself. Outer factors such as a room being too hot or cold, a distracted audience or mean-spirited colleagues can admittedly influence our performance but should never shatter the core of what we're doing. Know Thyself: you are responsible for you.

Is the problem technical, emotional, a matter of lack of discipline? Get help from appropriate sources. Begin to correct the situation. Make decisions about priorities that you and those you love can live with, and pray for the wisdom, discipline and organizational talent to stick to them. It is often energizing just to know you are on your way.

Having prayerfully analyzed what went wrong, put it behind you. Move on to the next project and do a better job. It always hurts to stand up after a fall but doing so remains one of the most important parts of success.

The other important key to overcoming failure is plain hard work. I learned that from my minister father, who was blessed, and

*We need to take
tender care of what our
audiences and families
experience through
our efforts.*

blessed many, by being an excellent speaker. What did his seemingly effortless ability to communicate look like behind the scenes?

His sermon began with hours of prayer. (We could see the thumbprint of his folded hands on his forehead when he came out of his study.) He then wrote out his sermon long-hand, typed it word for word and went for long walks to memorize it. All this for one "normal" sermon on a "normal" Sunday. Is it surprising that his ability to "speak freely" was such a blessing?

My father's example certainly affected my own backstage effort. When I am invited to perform I first check to see if the piece suits me and is within the boundaries of my

ability. This has given me the reputation of dependability: if I agree to perform, I will most certainly be there!

Whether I have sung a piece 20 times or if it is the simplest hymn, the same method to achieve excellence is applied. I work with a tape recorder, listening back to correct whatever I missed while practising. Most memorization happens during my practice time, but I have also spent countless hours before falling asleep, going over and over my texts. I sometimes listen to recordings to see how others solve the phrasing, for example, but generally I prefer to discover on my own what I consider to be the musical necessity. To be able to make the music so much my own that people want to share in my experience is a gift from God.

How mercifully often we experience a hymn, a sermon, a friend's concern, deeply and life-changingly, where and when we need it. What a gift to have ears to hear and a heart that can melt!

And when you are the giver, let there be room for experiences you don't know about and cannot control. Please remember that by being gracious, you are making room for the miracle of grace. Do your best and leave the results to God.

Soprano Edith Wiens enjoys a distinguished international career. She has sung with virtually all major orchestras and has recorded extensively.

She is Professor of Voice at Robert-Schumann University in Duesseldorf. She lives with her cellist husband, Kai Moser, and their two teenage sons in Munich, Germany.

Music That Speaks To Me

*What kind of music do women listen to when they want to be uplifted or touched at a deeper level?
We've asked several women to reflect on their own experience.*



A GARMENT OF PRAISE

*Let there be praise
Let there be joy in our hearts
Sing to the Lord
Give Him the glory.*

Dick & Melodie Tunney

I have always loved singing hymns in choir and listening to music, but would have to say the current praise and worship songs really speak to me. Often the words are directly from Scripture, which makes it easier to hide His Word in my heart. One song says to "Put on a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness".

Putting this into practice helped me overcome a period of depression in my life. It isn't like a magic button that you push to be happy (I was also under a doctor's care), but rather it allows your spirit to pray and cry out to God when you are emotionally unable to.

When I lift my voice in praise

I remember your mercy to me...

His mercies are new every morning

His love endures forever.

Scott Hargreaves

Ann Kroeger farms with her husband, Don, near Brandon, Manitoba. Her hobbies include childcare, reading and cross stitch.

"WHEN WORDS FAIL, MUSIC SPEAKS"

Hans Christian Anderson

I was a very young girl when I first heard music being played in our home. My parents had purchased a Victrola gramophone at the T. Eaton Company in Winnipeg. Along with the player, they brought home two records. One was the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*, the other the "Anvil Chorus" from Verdi's opera, *Il Travatore*. Although very different in theme, both were majestic. I learned to appreciate good music. As a young adult I also loved to listen to different music. Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald singing the "Love Song" would make any young girl's heart skip a beat.

Today the gramophone has been replaced by more sophisticated players and the market is flooded with all kinds of music - country, western, contemporary. Much of it is very enjoyable. I have no problem listening to the Statler brothers singing: "I saw your picture in the paper Sunday morning" as I go about merrily doing my housework or baking cookies. But when the time comes I need a bit of a lift because the day has not been as bright as it could have been, I let the MBC Singers speak to me by singing: "He is all that I need". Finally, however, when I want to meditate by myself, I retreat to my favourite chair, turn the lights down low, light a few candles, and let Nana Mouskouri raise her voice above orchestra and chorus:

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

Then I say "Amen! Thank you, God, for music!"

Hilda Dick is a devoted homemaker, mother, and grandmother as well as a gifted story-teller. She and her husband, Abe, attend the McIvor Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church.



MEMORIES

When I think about the kinds of music I enjoy listening to, I notice a certain trend. The music that means the most to me is the music that I associate with certain events in my life. We can all relate to how Christmas music reminds us not only of the Christmas story, but of the memories connected to Christmas. My favourite songs are like this. One example is "The Circle of Life" from *The Lion King*. When I went to Asia with my dad, we brought a cassette of the songs from this movie. As our plane was flying over Cambodia and I caught my first glimpse of that country, I was also listening to "The Circle of Life" on my walkman. Since then, whenever I hear this song, I think of Cambodia and the way it looked when I first saw it.

Music brings up emotions as well as pictures. When I



CENTERING ON GOD

Music has always been a very important part of my life. My parents met because of their involvement in a group called the Gospel Messengers. I enjoy many types of music but one definite criterion for me is being able to understand the words (although I do enjoy music without words as well). I choose to listen to Christian music 99% of the time because of the effect the music has on me. For me, music is a meaningful way to learn scripture and biblical truths and to worship. When I listen to praise and worship music, that is where my heart and emotions tend to center, in praise and worship of God.

hear music by Simon and Garfunkel, I am reminded of my childhood. As a young child I would lie awake and listen to the music that my parents were listening to downstairs. When I hear that music now, it gives me a feeling of being at home, safe and secure. It works the same with church music. If I know the story behind the hymn it is more significant because I can relate to similar life experiences as the author. At other times, I may not know the story but the words might remind me of something specific. It is these songs that I enjoy, listen to and sing the most.

Emily Peters is a first year arts student at Concord College and the University of Winnipeg. She attends the Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren Church.



Music lifts me up when I am down and keeps me on solid, stable ground. It helps me express to God my feelings for Him. I have many, many favourite songs, songs that become prayers for me, songs that express my desire to be what God wants me to be, songs that express my love for Him. So, I guess the main thing that makes music important to me is its ability to help me express my feelings and focus on the One who means everything to me, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Music groups that you will find in my home include: Vineyard Praise and Worship, Michael W. Smith and CeCe Winans.

Donna Wiebe is a homemaker who supplements the family income with child care. She is the wife of Harry, a hardware salesperson, and the mother of Jordan, age 11, Graham, age 8, and Heidi, age 4. She is a member of Jubilee Mennonite Church.

PASSION & ADVENTURE

It might be simpler to ask "What music doesn't speak to me?" I am very adventurous when it comes to music, believing that all music has something to say to me, and wanting to hear it and respond to it. Naturally all music doesn't touch me at a profoundly deep level. As I thought about this topic, I began to analyze why I feel so passionate about some forms of music and perhaps not so about others.

At an early age I began piano lessons. I remember that when I began to play Chopin – preludes, nocturnes, waltzes – I thought "now this is real music". The music was often in a minor mode, which seemed exotic to me, full of passion. The ideas in Chopin's music were extremely well-contrasted and short enough to learn and hold my interest. By the time I was 16 I was already teaching a few of my own students and with the money I earned I joined the Columbia Record Club. One of the first records I owned was Alexander Brailowsky playing Chopin's Concerto in E Minor. I must have worn out the needle on the phonograph, I listened to it so often. I was transported to another world when I heard this emotional, melancholic, romantic music. I suspect it was a lot like myself at that age.

Another composer who has touched me deeply is Rachmaninoff. Again, his use of the minor keys is abundant. One of my favourite pieces to play is the Prelude in C Minor. It contains great brooding chords with a haunting melody woven between. One of my favourite choral works by Rachmaninoff is "The Vespers", a mass for unaccompanied choir. The choir often sings in eight parts with brilliant clear sopranos on one end and those "Russian" basses at the other.

As I look back now, I realize those two composers represent the two national backgrounds from which I can trace my roots, my father being Polish and my mother Russian. Could there be a connection? As well, I would say that the music to which I was exposed at a young age has had a profound and lasting effect on me.

Lousie Enns is a Minister of Music at Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, where she conducts choirs (vocal and handbell) and plans worship. She is the mother of two grown daughters, Marni and Melinda, both gifted musicians, and a 10-year-old son, Philip.

My Heritage: Mennonite and Musical

by Eleanor Martens

Bolting out of nowhere one day last spring came the sudden recognition that I will never play a Mozart piano concerto. It was one of those middle age reality checks that flash out of some subconscious reservoir from time to time to remind me that all my youthful hopes and fantasies have not been realized, and that time is running out. It left me wistful and a little sad but gave me reason to invoke once again a prayer of gratitude for my musical heritage.

Were I to try to construe my cornerstones, the deeply-rooted substructures that give my life substance and meaning, love of music would stand there, straight and solid beside the other good Mennonite values that form the pith and marrow of my existence.

As a youngster I assumed that learning to play the piano and sing in the church choir were normal requirements for growing up. Now that I am older, a life minus orchestras or oratorios or hearing the time-honored traditions of the church given full, glorious expression through music seems almost unimaginable. Not to have a piano or the array of delectable choices offered daily by my CD library would leave me feeling impoverished indeed.

The musical diet of my childhood consisted almost entirely of hymns and choruses, my earliest recollection being of the utter bliss that would settle over me as, from somewhere in the house, would drift the sonorous voices of my parents intoning together the favourite *Heimatlieder* of their past. Yet another memory places me, per-

haps at the age of three, at a small coffee table on which sat a lace doily which, in my childish imagination, fancifully presented itself as a piano keyboard. I remember “playing” that keyboard in anticipation of the day when I would make *real* music.

When I finally did learn to play, I recall the sense of achievement at playing my first song out of the hymnbook, the heartfelt applause of my parents vigorously affirming this sense of having arrived.

Could this loss of song also threaten us as a faith community?

Around the age of nine I was inducted into the world of classical music when my parents took me to hear Handel’s *Messiah* at the Winnipeg Civic Auditorium. I can still feel my stunned, breathless response to the sublimity of that work, which seemed to sweep me to the very throne of God. Soon after that our family purchased its first *Blaupunkt*. With it came “the world” and a whole range of more suspicious offerings from cowboy music to the more questionable “Saturday Afternoon at the Opera” to the openly outlawed pop. For years most secular music, with its penchant for indecency and worldly values, continued to arouse the consternation of my parents.

Not surprising really, given that in the rural communities where they grew up, the church stood at the centre of community life and two German texts, the Bible and the *Gesangbuch* (songbook), were the primary reference points for life. Our parents sang hymns because that was all they knew and because outside influences were shunned. They also sang them because the music reflected who the Mennonites were as a people. Their hymns bore witness to a recently renewed church and one that had suffered much. They imparted a sense of past, present and future rooted in faith.

I often wonder how our young people will retain this heritage. In church they sing so few of the great anthems that have enriched my life. Interest in music lessons and choral singing seems to be declining. Electronic music is replacing instruments and choirs. We now live in an era where music, like everything else, is mass-produced for purchase and consumption, much of it secular or antithetical to the Christian faith.

The Scottish author Jame Hogg, in lamenting the loss of folk culture in Europe, wrote, “On looking back, the first great falling off is in SONG... They have ten times more opportunity of learning songs, yet song-singing is at an end.” Could this loss of song also threaten us as a faith community? Will our rich traditions be swept away by mass culture and by the secular, urban world in which we live? What will sustain our peoplehood amidst cultural chaos and corruption?

As I see it, we will need a whole lot more to retain our peoplehood than the ways in which we make music. We need to remember that piano lessons and hymn-singing are not the most important legacies of our Mennonite upbringing. Rather, they have been means of introducing us to life's larger refrain: loving and serving God with heart, mind, and soul; committing ourselves to follow Jesus. My best music teachers were not the experts who taught me to sing and play but those who had a song in their hearts.

Maybe we ought to worry less about *what* the next generation sings than *that* it sings. Will they have a song to sing and will we help them sing it?



ILLUSTRATION: DOROTHY STREILEIN

A Course Set Early



Being exposed to concerts at a very young age helped determine **Sara Jane Schmidt's** career in music. As a tiny child, "whenever I went to a concert I was enthralled." Hearing an a cappella choir from Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Concord) and at age 11 a piano recital by Karen Redekopp ("I was totally mesmerized by her playing") were particularly instrumental in setting her on her course.

Sara Jane now teaches piano and theory at Concord and privately, conducts choirs occasionally at Jubilee Mennonite Church, and sometimes does solo performances. "I love performing," she says. One of her performing highlights was in 1989, playing the Liszt Piano Concerto with the Mennonite Community Orchestra.

Were she to begin her career over again, "I would definitely major in conducting." Still, she finds satisfaction in helping others learn about music. There's also joy in seeing her 15-year-old daughter, Keli, find opportunities to perform as a percussionist.

Those Mysterious Genes

by Doreen Martens

Among the presents church friends thoughtfully bestowed on us after our first child was born was a delightful pair of children's books, one titled *If You Were A Writer*, the other *Sing and Read*.

With Mom being a writer and Dad a musician, this seemed a particularly apt gift, destined to encourage either of the talents we assumed our child would be born with. After all, we reasoned, does the acorn fall far from the oak?

In that special fantasy land inhabited all too briefly by first-time parents, we dreamed of our child someday accepting the Governor General's Prize for his Great Canadian Novel, or perhaps humbly bowing before a standing ovation at Roy Thompson Hall after a splendid recital. At the very least, we figured, we would find ourselves raising an avid under-the-covers-by-flashlight reader, or perhaps a garage-band neighborhood nuisance.

I should have figured the jig was up musically speaking when our son, at the tender age of 6 months, scowled to hear his daddy break into a chorus of "Old Man River." (Everybody's a critic.) Or maybe even before that, when he was still in the womb and a night out at the symphony listening to Mahler giving the timpani a workout provoked a fusillade of kicks that nearly drove me out of the concert hall.

When he was 2, we fancied that his fondness for sweeping his arms about and shouting imperiously was a youthful imitation of his father's conducting technique. Then we realized he just liked to wave his arms and yell a lot. At 4, he began vehemently protesting his mom's cheerful tendency to belt out Beach Boys songs in the car (how could he resist those good, good, good vibrations? I wondered, despairingly). At 6, he hit on the idea of verbal percussion at Sunday School. Oh boy.

Now, he can match pitch if we pester him about it, but he can't see any point using up valuable shouting energy trying to get pretty on the high notes. Alas, we had to admit to ourselves at last – music just isn't his cup of root beer.

Funny thing is, writing probably isn't, either. The tedium of printing made kindergarten a drag. Why write slowly when you can talk fast? This boy has better things to do.

Talent is a mysterious thing. Abilities and aptitudes foreign to a parent's worldview can crop up out of nowhere. Enthusiasms can arise literally out of the dirt. For Christopher, they appeared at his feet. Sow bugs. Ants. Worms. Spiders. Houseflies. Where the rest of us tread obliviously, Christopher spotted wildlife worthy of endless observation, comment, study.

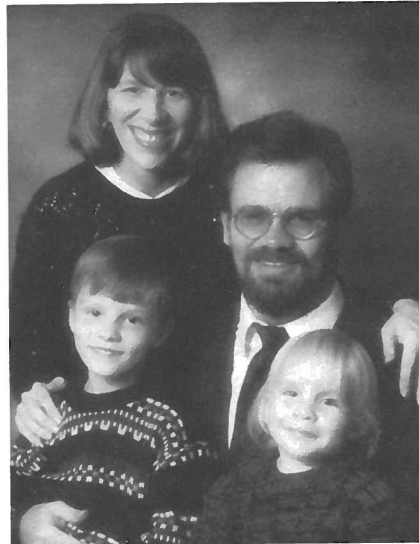
At age 3, his investigations sent me screaming hysterically from the bathroom after I happened upon his wriggling maggot collection, so sensibly stored behind the shower curtain. And that was just the beginning.

He put bugs in jars, peered at them through magnifying lenses, looked their pictures up in books, spent hours lying in the dirt studying their movements, begged us to read aloud long passages from encyclopedias, recorded moth species sightings in his Little Golden Book, experimented with foodstuffs – to the point of gathering aphid-covered leaves to nourish a pair of shiny black stinkbugs he housed for weeks in the unmerited luxury of a spacious plastic pretzel barrel.

Music to his ears? The evening symphony of crickets or chorus of toads, prompting a flashlight foray into the undergrowth.

The first neighborhood fight he ever got into was with a bigger child who actually had the boylike gall to STOMP on the fluttering Red Admiral Christopher had been examining. (Our son, the Mennonite boy, conked the murderer over the head with his butterfly net.)

He moved on to bigger things: zoo tours and aquarium visits and whale-watching cruises and one TV nature show after another. And soon he was telling us things we never knew, or even knew we wanted to know, about the natural world.



(Clockwise from top left) Doreen, Jeff, Rebecca and Christopher

ANNOUNCEMENT

SOPHIA'S FIRST ANNUAL NEW WRITERS CONTEST

Sophia is inviting women who have not previously written for *Sophia* to submit their writing to our first New Writers Contest. Submissions should be a maximum of 800 words, typed. Please include title of article, your name, address and phone number on a separate piece of paper. Include title, but not your name, on article. Submissions will not be returned. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS MARCH 31, 1997.

A \$50 prize will be awarded for each of the four best entries, which will be published in a future issue of *Sophia*. Runners-up may also be invited to have their submissions published. Writing should be in one of the following categories:

1. *Life Writing*. A thoughtful account of a personal experience, a biographical story about a woman you know, or a life's experience recounted through letters or in diary/journal format.
2. *A Reflection from Scripture*. Of particular interest is interpretation of Scriptures about female characters or from a female perspective.
3. *My Experience As a Christian Woman at the End of the Twentieth Century*. A reflection on how you see your life and experience (or a particular facet of your experience) as a woman and a Christian in the present age; how this relates to your past and/or your future; what you see as the most important issues facing you in your daily life or your future.
4. *A Theme of your choice*.
5. *A Short Story*.

Then there were new worlds to be discovered – the planetary system, dinosaurs, electricity, gravity; crystals to be grown, rocks to identify, baking-soda-and-vinegar experiments to conduct. And the impatient boy who couldn't see the point of struggling to sound out words suddenly discovered the usefulness of reading.

When his teacher asked his Grade 1 class to dress up some paper teddy bears to represent what they'd like to be when they grew up, Christopher gave his bear a white lab coat and test tube. So much for mentoring our little artiste. Against the genetic odds, we're cultivating a scientist. But, much as we marvel, sometimes we wonder:

Who IS this kid, anyway?

This is why people have second and third children, I guess. When she was barely 1, we could put our daughter down for a nap with a book in her hands and she would page through it carefully, making up the story in her head, before drifting off to sleep. At 3, she surprised me one day, in the paint aisle at the hardware store, by suddenly lifting her sweet voice in a rousing, note-perfect rendition of "God Bless America."

Not my choice of song (or venue). But she did get a standing ovation.

Doreen Martens is a regular contributor to Sophia. She, her husband and their two children live in California.

Uniquely Gifted



Music has always been a part of **Kathryn Koslowsky's** life. She astonished her mother at age two when she began to play one-finger melodies of Sunday school songs on the piano. At four her mom taught her to play left-hand chords. But she didn't start formal lessons until she learned to read. From then on she learned quickly. She developed special relationships with her piano teachers and credits each of them with helping to develop her skills in different ways. By the time she reached high school Kathryn was participating in festivals and competitions, and she has won several prizes. At present she is in her first year at U.B.C., studying piano performance. Kathryn sees this as a time to develop further a gift that God has given her, and as she looks ahead to the future, she is seeking to understand how he is calling her to use it.

On *Passion* and Permanence

by Irmgard Baerg



There they stood, gargantuan columns, towering above us in regal splendor, Corinthian/Dorian capitals crowning a few, hinting at the glorious spectacle that inspired the residents of Ephesus, Prienne, Didem, Pammukale... Unable to fathom the logistics involved in constructing and raising these gigantic edifices, I was astounded by the intricacy and creative flair demonstrated in the friezes and decorative borders of the pillars that adorned these ancient cities a few hundred years before and after Christ.

My husband, Bill, and I, along with good friends, were “doing” the Greek and Roman ruins in Turkey and were deeply moved by what we saw. Several years back we had seen similar sites in Greece together. Once again we felt goosebumps and a profound sense of wonder in the Mediterranean sun as we pondered the lives of our human ancestors. We needed to know more.

How did they transfer the rock or marble from the quarry? How did they manage to erect pillars of such incredible dimensions and weight? What kinds of tools made the elaborate design-work possible?

The projects must have involved a major percentage of the population, who gave willingly or unwillingly, utilizing brain or brawn for the greater cause. Among the many layers of questions that lingered long after we had left the sites, the question of “why”? preoccupied me. Our lives are short. Theirs were even shorter (by about half). But they made choices, and the traces they left behind teach us volumes about what mattered to them. The elaborate aqueducts and drainage systems, for example, were

built to last! Not content with functionality and durability alone, these ancient builders added detail, structure, proportion, design.

Why the additional effort? Why the concern about durability and beauty? Did they not have daily domestic tasks to attend to, as we do? Why not be content with those? Let the next generation take care of their own fresh water supply and drainage systems and create whatever beauty might turn them on!

Or is it important to leave some evidence of who we are – a legacy that illustrates what we have gleaned from life, what we consider to be of value, a beacon to those who follow us?

We must remember that only that which has quality will hold up; anything less will be thrown away. It must endure wear and tear both physically and spiritually. It must also be beautiful (not necessarily pretty or entertaining) in its timeless expression of truth. It must be worth preserving.

In creating something beautiful and durable, the creator must be prepared to

sacrifice. The price is not negotiable – it is very, very high. The hours of labour exact a toll on mind and body. No detail is too small or too demanding to be ignored. Ultimately, it must be a labour of love, a forgetting of self, an investment of time today for tomorrow, a grappling with an idea in an effort to distill and communicate it simply in one's chosen medium.

This burden to bring into being a thing of beauty is, I believe, a gift of God. It persuades us to lose ourselves. It keeps prodding us, as it did our ancestors, to illuminate those facets of this life and the next that are hazy. It is a yearning to reach beyond the mundane to the ethereal, a stretching out to God, a desire to see through the glass a little less darkly.

As one who has spent much time making music, carving and polishing the raw material from the quarry of the composer's brain, I thrill to the relative permanence that artistic passion produces. In my chosen medium I am aware that my performance recreates the permanence of the original music. I have the opportunity to resurrect the distilled message and recast it in my time.

Rome wasn't built in a day, we say. I believe we recognize the inherent worth of taking the time to do something well. I am not convinced that we are entirely comfortable with this notion when it is applied to the arts, particularly music, which has an ephemeral quality. One minute it is here, the next it is gone. We look for shortcuts and find it difficult to justify the time spent learning the art – the technique, the hours of rehearsal and the gradual shaping of the musician who must learn, as our ancestors did, that durability and beauty require discipline, detail, structure, proportion, design, and self-denial.

I think often of my husband's mother, who gave final instructions to Bill as he revved his motorbike on the old Coaldale farm, about to leave for college in Winnipeg. "Don't marry a pianist," she shouted, with a laugh, above the roar of the engine, "you'll end up washing floors for the rest of your life!" Her comment was uncannily prophetic, although she later vehemently denied ever having said such a thing. Despite her warning, mother Baerg, throughout our lives together, celebrated her pianist daughter, and I was moved by her love and admiration for my work.

Howard Dyck, in his address to the Arts graduates at Wilfrid Laurier University where he was awarded an honorary doctorate, used the image of Jacob, wrestling with the angel, to illustrate the artist's struggle. "I will not leave Thee, except Thou bless me," moans Jacob. I believe that all those wrestling to create something of permanence and beauty are engaged in the battle of shedding the dust of self, including anxiety, fear of failure, fatigue and doubt, but at the same time stubbornly invoking God's blessing and chastening until the work is finished.

That selfsame blessing, in which one has wrestled oneself away, is a profound act of worship and inner renewal, a sacrifice to God and to posterity. It has the potential to reignite and communicate its message from one generation to the next. Perhaps that is why those ancient builders went to so much trouble.

Irmgard Baerg is a pianist and member of the Music Faculty at Concord College. She is currently on a one-year study leave. Her CD featuring the music of Clara Schumann is to be released next year.

In creating something beautiful and durable, the creator must be prepared to sacrifice. The price is not negotiable – it is very, very high.

Listening

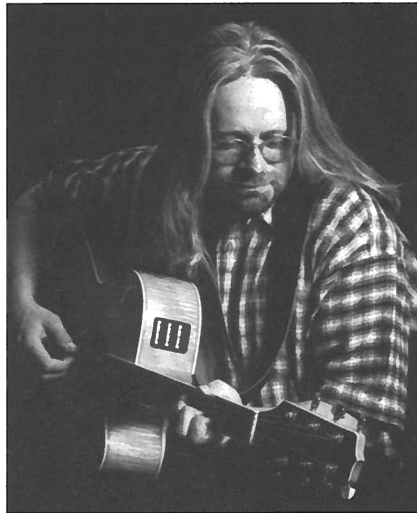
by Rick Unruh

When I was growing up, my family sang together. I remember listening to the voices of my sisters and my mother, my dad and my brother. I remember the struggle of rehearsals, memorizing words and melody, and solos. But what I remember most clearly is that we were at our best when we all sang together.

Several years ago I heard a CBC radio show about the coming wave of female musicians. Susan Vega, Tracy Chapman, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Roseanne Cash and an act called Indigo Girls were featured. I began then to pay close attention to the music of these artists and to watch as the music of women gained more and more acclaim. The wave swelled and the list was joined by Jann Arden, Sarah McLachlin, Shawn Colvin, Jan Krist, Bjork, Alannis Morissette, Ani DiFranco, Jonatha Brooke, Tori Amos, Paula Cole and others. I listened to these fresh voices with great interest – especially to those who would fit the description of singer/songwriter.

I am not much of a musical tourist. I always want to live with the songs for awhile, to share their identity. And so, the music of these women has influenced me greatly over the past few years, to the extent that it seems I have listened to almost nothing but the music of women.

Recently I read an article that referred to these artists as the “angry young women.” It does seem at times that certain of them, most notably Morissette, DiFranco and Amos, are consumed by anger. Now, anger can often be justified, but to remain angry is to be stuck on reaction. It is important that one moves from reaction to response so that the song can become creative and life giving.



I don't always agree with the view of the world presented by these songwriters. But I don't have to agree, I have to listen and engage with what I hear. Ultimately I feel I end up growing through the experience, especially when I find something vibrant, truthful and alive.

For me an important element of a song is that it shows me something of who we are. If it is really a good song, it will show me what we can become. The Indigo Girls, Jan Krist, Jonatha Brooke and most recently Dar Williams find ways to

address challenging issues and to speak in prophetic tones that often point to the need for reconciliation and redemption. They express hope in the face of adversity and oppression and see the world as a shared place where we need to hear the voices of those who have been marginalized.

The Indigo Girls have shown me that “the sweetest part is acting after making a decision...that I can see the whole as a sum of its parts, that my life is part of the global life.” I resonate with Jan Krist's question: “...who will love her if she does not shine?” When Jonatha Brooke says, “My mother moved the furniture when she no longer moved the man,” I am drawn closer to an understanding of what it means to be Woman. Ultimately these songs move beyond anger and provide a response that says we must find ways to live together. We must listen in a way that will allow us to hear each other's voices through the noise of every day.

With songs like “When I Was A Boy,” “Nuclear Family,” and “Mortal City,” folk singer Dar Williams sharpens our hearing and helps us unite with one another. In “Mortal City,” a man and woman are

having dinner together for the first time at the woman's apartment. New to the city, she feels like an outsider. She comments that the city is dying or more correctly that the people are dying and nobody cares. Through the course of the evening the city is engulfed in an ice storm and everyone is asked to shut their power off because it is needed at the hospital. One by one the lights go out as people give their power to the hospital.

It becomes obvious that the two of them must spend the night together as a matter of survival. So they bundle up in "...t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants, socks, hats....," every piece of available clothing and, to ward off the cold, crawl into bed together. As they lie there listening to the storm the man comments, "I wish you liked the city," and she replies, "Maybe I do. I think I have a special kind of hearing tonight. I hear the neighbors upstairs. I hear my heart beating. I hear one thousand hearts beating at the hospital and one

thousand hearts by their bedsides waiting, saying that's my love in the white gown." Then the song concludes, "We are not lost in the mortal city."

As I have experienced something of the world through the eyes of these women, I have grown as a songwriter, as a man and as a person. Listening to their songs I can't help but be reminded that ultimately we are in this together with all of our faults and failures. I am in this with you and you are in it with me. It may take a special kind of hearing, but if we listen we will hear... together we are not lost in the mortal city.

Rick Unruh is a singer-songwriter who lives in Winnipeg with his partner Katherine. They attend River East MB church. Recently he travelled across Canada, doing concerts for the Mennonite Central Committee. His latest CD is "Wonder and Blue."

To Teach, To Love

For **Linda Schwartz-Trivett**, Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition at Concord College, music is a passion and a calling that finds its home in the service of the church. She began singing solos in church at age three. By age eleven, she was playing piano and organ in church services, which she says was a good teacher for her because of its demand for lots of sight reading and transposition. She started writing down her compositions and arrangements in grade eleven and was encouraged in this by her teachers.

Linda sees her gift in two ways. She is a musician who does not perform in the usual sense; much of her time is spent in music scholarship and critique. Here she tries to help her students to integrate their music with the rest of life and to learn to articulate what it means in the light of the Scriptures. On the other hand, she sees her gift very much as a pragmatic one – as a calling to create and perform music that serves as an element of worship for the church.

At present she is working on a doctoral thesis on the life and teaching of Nadia Boulanger, a very gifted French musician who as a teacher has influenced most of the great North American musicians of this century.

Recently, Linda composed a musical score for a series of poems written by Sarah Klassen on the experience in space of astronaut Roberta Bondar. Linda was intrigued by the sense of quest and wonderment in the poems and by their exploration of "the vast exterior and interior spaces of women's lives, always juxtaposing the personal finitude of existence with the timeless, endless presence of God." The piece, called *Born again: a woman's space journal*, was performed by soprano Heidi Klassen in May, 1996.

Preparing Others to Serve God



Barb Doerksen (Calgary, Alberta) began teaching piano at age 14. Some 28 years later, she instructs 55 to 60 students weekly, including her three daughters. "I love kids," Barb says. "I

love it when we – student and teacher – work hard and succeed musically." She uses the Suzuki method, which she considers a superior method for beginners, and then switches her students to the Royal Conservatory program after several years. With her Christian students (about half), one goal is to prepare them to serve God with their music.

Barb has designed, and now produces with her family's help, a line of adjustable piano footstools and seat boosters to promote good playing posture for younger students. She is a woman of enthusiasm and romantic flair. Several years ago she secretly enrolled some extra students, and then surprised her husband, John, with tickets to Europe for a second honeymoon!

Rhythm First

"I'm always grooving," says **Pauline Dyck**, a fourth-year University of Winnipeg and Concord College student. Although she appreciates melody and harmony, her response to music is first of all to its rhythm. She took piano lessons from age four, in Winkler, where she grew up, and she also plays guitar. She began drumming in 1993.

Drumming is a natural form of expression for Pauline – she's self-taught – and her passion is African percussion. She owns and has mastered, two congas, one dumbuque and various other percussion instruments, an accomplishment rare among women in Manitoba, where she plays in churches, in workshops and with bands. Transporting the bulky drums can be a problem, she admits. She spent the summer of 1995 in the Toronto area, busking and playing in churches, music festivals and street festivals.

For the fall semester of 1996, Pauline travelled to Lithuania as an exchange student at Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda. She had to leave her drums in Canada. She missed "more than you can imagine" the unity and passion experienced in exploring sound and rhythm together with other good musicians.

The Way Folk Sing



Doreen Klassen's specialty is ethnomusicology. She spent ten years researching and writing a master's thesis, now a book called *Singing Mennonite*, about Mennonite folk songs. Now she is working on a doctorate degree at Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Her dissertation research took her to Zimbabwe for a year to explore the interrelationship of gesture and narration in Shona women's oral narrative. She is spending this year working on the dissertation in Winnipeg.

What Language Shall I Borrow?

God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology, by Brian Wren.

New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1993.

Reviewed by Elisabeth Vensel

It is refreshing to find a male theologian strongly advocating a feminist viewpoint. Brian Wren is a minister in the United Reformed Church, and a well-known hymnodist. In a new hymnbook I was able to locate eight hymns that he wrote in the '60s and '70s.

Wren deplores our age-old patriarchal world-view based "not on equality but on subordination, not this-with-that but this-over-that: reason over emotion, soul over body, spirit over flesh, mind over matter, 'man' over nature, and men over women." He demonstrates how scientists and philosophers have equated reason with masculinity, and have denigrated as feminine the intuitive, the emotions, and the senses. Political theorists and economists are constructing models, he says, that ignore the facts of birth, childhood, aging, and death, with negative effects on nurture and education on a global scale. Foreign policy too reflects a masculine "cult of toughness". The media, the arts, and even the Church reinforces images that establish things masculine as the norm, while the feminine becomes deviance from the norm.

The author is convinced that this "flawed Maleness" creeps into the language of worship and theology and may perpetuate positions of power and privilege.

Wren provides an excellent analysis of imaginative language, especially metaphor. He reminds us that our metaphors for God are not themselves God, and should not become "idols".

The living God, who is beyond gender, has created humans in the divine image. The Trinity models for us, Wren suggests, "three centers of personhood, so beautifully distinct that their distinctiveness is revealed in Christian history, and so beautifully one that if we encounter one center of personhood, the others are immediately present." In contrast our hymns portray a patriarchal God who is always in control; a monarch who decrees obedience; a tough and triumphant Almighty One; a distant Father. Research on hymns is framed in a delightful fable, "The Roq:un Fragment".

Wren stumbles in some areas of theology. He bristles against God's omniscience and omnipotence. He finds it hard to reconcile Christ the suffering Servant with the victorious risen Lord, ignoring Jesus' own words. Similarly, creeds which were carefully framed to counter heresies cannot be carelessly rewritten.

Moreover while I agree with Wren's conclusion that we must use many more varied metaphors in naming God, I am concerned that we do not change Scriptural God-talk, since the Bible is both history and revelation, accurately depicting fallible, changing persons in each era, as well as the unchanging God. Thankfully the Bible has preserved prophetically such a range of metaphors for God that nurturing images can be rediscovered. As for creeds, perhaps our church mothers will soon get around to writing some.

MISSION STATEMENT

Sophia offers a forum for women in the MB church. Her pages provide room for dialogue, room for women to speak to each other about their place in the family, the church, the work place and the world. She recognizes that the MB sisterhood is rural, urban and suburban, that its members speak with various voices.

Sophia offers herself as a rallying place for women in an uncertain, changing world. She is interested in women's stories, in their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. She invites expressions of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. She encourages women in the use of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Although Sophia was conceived and brought to birth by and for MB women and celebrates sisterhood, it is her desire to be inclusive. She hopes to challenge both men and women; she welcomes their voices and invites them into dialogue

Sophia acknowledges the authority of God, the giver of wisdom, and of the sacred Scriptures, the story of God's dealings with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33)

Speak to one another
with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
Sing and make music in your heart
unto the Lord.

Ephesians 5:19