

Memory Project: In Conversation with Marjorie Hougham

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Marjorie Hougham has been a familiar figure in the lower mainland's musical landscape for the past five decades. She retired almost twenty years ago but she is as engaged and as inquisitive as ever. As a past-president of the Vancouver/Burnaby Branch, she accomplished much during her tenure and so, as we begin to celebrate our 100th anniversary, this year seemed an appropriate time for an interview. On September 12, 2020, I had the pleasure of speaking with Marjorie by phone, the following article is an informal compilation of her remembrances.

Marjorie Yates was born in 1925 in Ottawa to a musical family. Although her mother had not had the opportunity to develop her own skills, she made sure that both her children had lessons and Marjorie's musical education started at age six. Through their studies in Ottawa, the siblings developed a lifelong love of the piano with Marjorie's brother playing all his adult life and Marjorie completing her ATCM (ARCT) in 1942.

After graduating from high school in 1943, Marjorie was determined to further her skills in piano performance, history, and musicology. She had no aspirations of a concert career, instead, she wanted to focus solely on becoming a better musician, a goal she would later instill in her own students. She began a correspondence with Olga Samaroff, wife of Leopold Stokowski and one of the founders of the Juilliard School of Music. Mme. Samaroff convinced Marjorie to leave the "small town" of Ottawa for the greater opportunities available at the Philadelphia Conservatory. While working towards a Bachelor's, Marjorie studied with Mme. Samaroff, and took instruction in advanced harmony and counter point with Vincent Persichetti. She lived in residence until 1947

when she married her husband, George Hougham. After the wedding, they continued to live in Philadelphia where George continued his PhD studies until they moved back to Canada in 1950. While Marjorie never completed her own degree, she continued to take university courses and to broaden her knowledge through regular study and practice.

After a sojourn in Ottawa and then Toronto, where Marjorie gave birth to her two sons, the family returned to Ottawa and remained there until 1963 when George accepted a position with the United Nations in New York City. The move south allowed Marjorie to take advantage of the opportunity to work with Irwin Freundlich and to enjoy all of the cultural activities of the Big Apple. After two years, George took a short-term assignment in Cleveland, Ohio at the University and Marjorie studied with Theodore Lettvin while the boys continued their lessons in violin and clarinet. Eventually the family put down roots in Vancouver, where they settled for the next several decades.

On arriving in Vancouver in 1966, Marjorie joined the BCRMTA Vancouver Branch as it was then known. She then proceeded to grow her home studio into a large class of private piano, theory, and harmony students. In 1978, she was invited by Wallace Berry to join the faculty of the UBC Music Department; she accepted the position and was a respected member for many years. In the 1980's, Marjorie became directly involved with the BCRMTA Vancouver Branch Executive. She held the positions of 1st vice-president in 1982, president from 1983-1985 and past president from 1986-1987.

During her tenure, the Branch hosted the 1985 Canadian Federation of Music Teachers' Association (CFMTA) Convention at UBC. With over 200 members in attendance, it

was one of a select number of CF events to make a profit and was an event of which she is immensely proud. Marjorie remained active in the Branch until her retirement in 1990.

Aside from teaching and studying, Marjorie wore a variety of other professional hats, most notably that of energetic volunteer. Along with Diana Marr and Hazel Okun, she was a founding member of the Vancouver Music Festival Workshop (VMFW) which ran from 1974-1994. At the time of its inception, festivals were extremely competitive with no time at the instrument after performances and limited educational focus. The VMFW sought to give students a more positive and productive experience by adding time to each class for adjudicators to directly address the individual students. It had a profound effect on how festivals are now organized, and its collaborative committee style was a model for the rejuvenated 2021 Student Performers' Guild Festival. As a performer, Marjorie and her duo partner Peggy Prior regularly played to raise money for worthy causes. At the ripe age of 82, she organized a fund raiser with the Welsh Men's Choir at West Point Grey United; she and the choir alternated on center stage to great success. The RCM Alumni Association was fortunate enough to have her as president, and once she retired, she volunteered with the VSO to bring musicians into the local schools to help prepare music students for upcoming VSO concerts.

Even with a substantial teaching load, Marjorie was always interested in learning new repertoire and exploring music history. In 1967 she joined the Boris Roubakine Masterclasses. This group of dedicated pianists met three times a year to perform and

accept critiques from Mr. Roubakine. In fact, his final class was at Marjorie's home near the UBC Golf Course in 1974, he was to have heart surgery shortly thereafter. As he left, he said to her, "If anything should happen, think kind thoughts of me"; Mr. Roubakine passed away during the procedure. The group continued under the guidance of Dr. Robin Wood from 1974 to his own death in 2004. Like his predecessor, Dr. Wood had a wealth of experience and knowledge to share and his classes were always inspiring as well as entertaining. During this time, Marjorie's avid practicing necessitated a move in 1996 from her retirement condo in Tsawwassen to a more insulated townhouse in Surrey where the neighbours couldn't hear her determined fingers! After Dr. Wood's passing, the helm was taken over most ably by Bruce Vogt and Marjorie continued as a faithful attendee. Her last performance with the group was in 2011 during an all-Liszt event.

Marjorie lives now in Campbell River near one of her sons. George passed away in 2001 but she has six grandchildren and five great grandchildren with one on the way to keep her company. Her pedagogical legacy lives on in the students she worked with and through the generous donation of her piano, music library, recordings and resources to the Langley Community Music School. When asked if she had any words of wisdom to pass on to our members she said, "Search for beauty in all aspects of life; when you find it, enjoy it!"