

# Second Glance

By Viva Richmond Graham

GENA BRANSCOMBE

Arms that have shelter'd us, land that we love,  
Fields green in summer sun, high hills above,  
Our solemn pledge we give, thro' years to be,  
Canada, Canada, guardians are we,  
Proudly thy ships will ride, keeping thee free.

—from "Arms That Have Shelter'd Us" — the words and music by Gene Branscombe and dedicated to The Royal Canadian Navy on its Fiftieth Anniversary.

How do you feel about marriage and careers?

Is it possible for a woman to have both if she wishes?

We asked Mrs. John F. Tenney of New York City, a guest of her cousin Mrs. M. E. Branscombe, 64 Queen St., who answered:

"Yes, I believe it is truly possible, especially for a creative woman with an understanding and sympathetic husband."

Mrs. Tenney, successful wife, homemaker and mother has proved her point — as composer, conductor and poet. (Imagine being sought as the subject for a thesis by students seeking higher degrees in music!)

Indeed, last year, the United States Information Service sent an article about her life and work to all its European centres (for use on radio and TV and in magazines and newspapers) to illustrate how American creative-women carry on their homes and professional lives; the article contained the following sentence: "She has done perhaps more than anyone else to revitalize and expand the repertory for the nation's many women's choral groups."

### WOMEN COMPOSERS

Presently on display in the New York City Library, are the manuscripts and choral works of the ten most distinguished American Women Composers, including Mrs. Tenney, professionally known as Gena Branscombe.

Gena Branscombe is her maiden name — familiar to many living in the Quinte District, for Gena was born in Picton. At the age of five ("when I thought everybody did") she busily improvised little tunes on the family piano which came all the way from India via Cape Horn. At six, she played accompaniments for an older brother in public.

She finished Picton High School at the age of 15, and went to Chicago, where she enrolled at the Chicago Musical



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tions, the chorus sang at military and mental hospitals, and was the first chorus to sing a Christmas program of music (from many nations) at the United Nations (1946). It inaugurated the singing of Christmas music at Pennsylvania Station as the great crowds stopped to listen ("the beautiful expression on faces was a blessed thing to see") to Palestrina and Bach as well as the familiar carols. "I was fortunate, at that time, in gathering the most complete collection of carols from all over the world ever assembled"

Gena recalled.

Her fame as a conductor spread, "to me it seems a miraculous wonder that I should have dear and close friends in practically every major city in the United States and Canada" — for Gena has served as guest-conductor for performances of her own choral and orchestral works all over the American continent. During the war years she conducted the New Jersey State Chorus, the first organized A VS chorus which sang in uniform.

### CONSISTENT ACHIEVEMENT

Gena's progress is a story of consistent achievement and high honors which are integrated, unabatedly, with devotion to the church.

"The glory of any church lies in such gifted and consecrated people," her minister, Rev. Dr. Albert J. Penner has said, adding: "Her face glows by an inward light!"

Gena Branscombe Tenney, however met with wide acclaim, wears such recognition "with that quiet self-forgetfulness" which is her "chief badge of spiritual distinction".

"I was able to mingle marriage with a career because of my husband's warm understanding, help and encouragement. He seemed to take pleasure and pride in my work and believed that in each man and in each woman lie gifts and talent waiting to be released by exploration and nurturing, to express undreamed-of, God-given possibilities."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Branscombe, Gena

College for her first serious musical study. She was awarded a scholarship with Felix Borowski (with whom she studied seven years), winning the Gold Medal for Excellence in Composition in both her graduate and postgraduate years. Her piano teachers were Arthur Friedheim, Hans von Schiller, and later, Rudolph Ganz.

Her work was of such excellence she became one of the faculty of her Alma Mater, leaving later to head the piano department at Whitman College, Washington. Here a young handsome man, fresh from Yale law school, fell deeply in love with her and won her hand upon her return from study abroad with Humperdinck in Berlin and a period of recital work in Europe. The couple settled down in New York City.

### WIFE AND MOTHER

With characteristic vivacity and enthusiasm, Gena assumed the responsibilities of wife and motherhood, maintaining interest in the Women's Club of her church, contributing her talent to it generously, as well as her career in music.

Now a mother of four daughters, she focused upon composition. To give more adequate performances of her own works, she completed a course in conducting at New York University with John Erb, and took further study with the American Orchestral Society under Chalmers Clifton, acquiring a fine technique under Dr. Frank Damrosch.

When a daughter of the financier, J. P. Morgan, organized a choral group, she asked Gena to conduct it. She accepted. The Broadway Congregational weekly rehearsals and the Church offered its facilities for group became known as the Branscombe Choral. Not only did this provide an excellent medium through which to express her artist's creativity, but the Choral became an integral part of New York musical life for two decades, with concerts at Town Hall and over the air each season. Each Christmas, red-gowned members of the choral sang of Christ's nativity at a candle-light service at the church.

### FAME SPREADS

As extra-curricular contribu-