

## GENA BRANSCOMBE

(Continued)

"Dear are remember'd things, fire-light and home,  
Pines white with glist'ning snow, bays bright with  
foam.

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 Gena Branscombe and dedicated to The  
Royal Canadian Navy on its Fiftieth Anniversary.

"Compose an exercise every-  
day, for a song, a musical in-  
strument, or voices for choral  
work. Have courage and re-  
fuse to be discouraged," Picton-  
born gifted Gena Branscombe  
advises those aspiring to be  
composers.

Golden words are these from  
a composer of more than 150  
songs, many choral works, 55  
choral arrangements of classi-  
cal and modern compositions,  
and written works for violin,  
piano and orchestra.

Now, today, one of America's  
leading and distinguished wo-  
men composers, conductors and  
poets, Gena regards her United  
Empire Loyalist ancestors with  
great pride and will tell you:  
"my mother's people, the Bran-  
scombes, landed where the  
Brooklyn Navy Yard is now, in  
1640, from the little Elizabethan  
village of Branscombe on the  
south Devon coast, landing ear-  
lier on the coast of what is now  
New Hampshire." Recently, she  
had the pleasure of visiting the  
lovely old rambling manor  
house "Edge Barton", where  
12th century old Bishop Bran-  
scombe, (who built Exeter Cath-  
edral — his ornate tomb with  
effigy is there) was born.

That the tales and stories of  
her adventuresome pioneer an-  
cestors have played a direct  
part in shedding historical signi-  
ficance on some of her work is  
evident in a major work entitled  
"Pilgrims of Destiny" which  
has to do with early American  
history; the courage, faith and  
vision that came with the young  
English Pilgrims who sailed on  
the Mayflower, ("I felt I knew  
each of the passengers on that  
ship personally, after finishing  
all the research on them. . .")

This, her longest and perhaps  
most ambitious work, a choral  
drama, (of which Gena also  
wrote the text) was sponsored  
by the National Federation of  
Music Clubs at historic Ply-  
mouth in 1929, and has since  
been the recipient of various  
awards and citations, among  
which was a performance dur-  
ing the 100th anniversary of  
Broadway Congregation's  
Church's founding.

(cont. top of page)

I composed the music were "Of  
My Old Loves", "Old Dr. Ma-  
Gin" and one of his last poems,  
"Blow Softly, Maple Leaves,"  
which was written upon the oc-  
casion of maple trees being sent  
to England for planting on the  
graves of Canadian service men  
buried there, after World War  
II.

My mother, Sara Bran-  
scombe, who was a wonderful  
writer, but had little opportu-  
nity to develop her writing, also  
influenced my work. . . Then"  
she continued, "the cycle for  
chorus and orchestra entitled  
"Youth of the World" (again  
her own text) "has a middle  
movement called "Maples"  
which has to do with trees grow-  
ing along the Bay of Quinte at  
Picton. The closing movement,  
which gives its name to the cy-  
cle, "Youth of the World" con-  
tains the lines: "And Canada's  
sons, with bright fair hair, Met  
death on sea, and land, in air  
Were twisted in cauldrons of  
fire!"

This work was a part of the  
NFMC's Biennial Convention at  
Salt Lake City in 1951, and has  
had performances in London,  
Holland, the Philippines, Can-  
ada and the music centres of  
the United States.

"The Symphonic Suite, 'Que-  
bec," Gena went on, (and ex-  
plained it is music based on an  
unfinished opera. The final  
movement called "Procession"  
is being used this year by the  
"Voice of America" abroad)  
"has to do with the brave  
French who settled at Quebec  
in the 16th century," and was  
first performed by the Chicago  
Women's Orchestra with the  
composer conducting.

Nor are we forgetting her  
Navy Hymn (for which she  
wrote both words and music as  
a tribute to the land of her  
birth) which was officially  
adopted into the repertoire of  
the Royal Canadian Navy in 1960  
the words of which grace this  
column, by the kind permission  
of the author. This hymn was  
played by the massed bands of  
the Atlantic Fleet and sung by  
Navy choruses.

"Has any of your work stem-  
med directly from your Can-  
adian background?" we asked.

"Oh, but definitely," she an-  
swered, and spoke of the pleas-  
ure she's had of writing the mu-  
sic for poems written by such  
Canadian poets as Katherine  
Hale. One called "Dear Lad O'  
Mine" was used in World War I  
and all the royalties were given  
by the publisher, poet and com-  
poser to the Canadian Red  
Cross.

"Another influence was Arth-  
ur Stringer. . ." and she set to  
music his "Our Canada From  
Sea To Sea" which was played  
by bands and sung by massed  
choruses across the country  
when King George and Queen  
Elizabeth visited here in 1939.  
It was played at the White House  
by the U.S. Marine Band (orch-  
estra) during the dinner given  
by President and Mrs. Roose-  
velt for the Royal couple; by the  
Goldstream Guard Band and  
by the Detroit Symphony Orches-  
tra under Barbirolli up at Fort  
William.

"Other poems of his for which

The Intelligencer  
Oct 3, 1964

"But," declared Gena, "my  
birthplace gave me a treasure  
for which I'm ever indebted,  
namely the love affair which  
I have had with brass all my  
life. This, you see, started when  
I heard the military band lead-  
ing its regiment through Picton  
in the middle of the night en-  
route to its summer encamp-  
ment on the Quinte bay-shore.  
My earliest musical memory is  
of being awakened that night,  
by sounds of such haunting,  
 unearthly beauty that my little  
three-and-a-half year old heart  
almost burst with longing.

"Every orchestral work I've  
written has leaned heavily on  
the brass section — there are  
two suites for French Horn —  
and I've always used brass (and  
low woodwinds) when instru-  
mental ensembles were indicat-  
ed, with my chorus. . .

"The epitaph I'd like best,  
would be: "She walked to the  
sound of invisible trumpets"."

"And it's my firm conviction  
that all composers, down deep in  
their hearts, feel exactly the  
same way."

(CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK)