

(CONCLUSION)

"Every so often," says Gena Branscombe, one of America's foremost women composers, conductors and poets, formerly of Picton, now of New York "someone asks me whether or not being a woman composer gives me a sense of inferiority."

Her answer? — "Unfailingly, no!"

The one thing, she says, that "gives me a sense of inferiority is when I've been lazy, or when I've let someone talk me into going to some lovely affair when I should have been working — getting on with a large composition that in all probability may never be heard."

All artists, male or female, know themselves to be a race apart. They are, Gena believes, "a race apart — of royal blood, as it were, and they never, even in times of despair, would wish to have been anything other than what they are," and have, unlike other mortals, a kind of "built-in radio-set, which at a certain time is able "to tune in some non-earthly place where beauty, truth, courage, joy and illumination are a way of life."

As to being a major or minor composer: "that is out of our hands — our only responsibility is to do the very best we can."

As for the great composers, "my feeling is that they heard more clearly and were able to get down on paper much more of what they heard."

The wonderful thing is the versatility of all artists' expression has a place in this world of ours, which is to its glory and honor. Only one condition must be met: each artist must pick the right wave length.

"And as for women composers," she declares, "think of the countless generations of gifted women, who were barred from any form of musical education so available to their gifted brothers. Even Felix Mendelssohn, personable, delightful and a genius, signed his name to many of his sister Fanny's smaller piano pieces and songs, since he, too, shared the belief, centuries old, that a lady should not allow her name to appear in vulgar print! Even not too long ago, some women used their husband's initials, such as Amy Cheney Beach, a most talented woman, known professionally as Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, to appease the Boston Back Bay Society tradition in which she lived.

"Today women who wish for serious study find the doors open, and use and refine their technical tools with ease and eagerness. Skill and training is a requisite, for to score well with orchestra, requires the same sort of disciplined mind that is required to run a great railway system (with the added basic requirement of a specialized knowledge of the intricacies of each orchestral instrument). So successfully have women written, found publishers and a public for their musical work, that had there been time, space and money, I could have done hundreds of programs devoted entirely to them. And above all, they are a joy to work with.

"So you see, it's a good life, being a woman composer, worth all the hard work that goes into it."

"Do you compose swiftly or in a slow manner?" she was asked.

She answered: "as a rule, rather slowly." The one exception was her work entitled "Pilgrims of Destiny", which has to do with the pilgrims who sailed the "Mayflower". In order to write the text, she first wrote a whole book on her research about it.

"This took me a year or more to do," she recalls, "and then when I came to write the music for the libretto, I finished it in four weeks. Something I've never done before or since.

"In the room where I was writing, however, was a lovely statue of a lady so placed by a window, that it seemed to inspire me. When I had finished my work, I asked our land-lady if I might buy it, since we were moving away.

"It belongs to my sister, who's away, so I couldn't sell it, I was told.

"Several years passed by before the subject came up again and I went to enquire about it and learned: 'My sister decided she didn't like it. So she gave it away to some antique dealer, I think. . .'

"More years passed by. One day, I happened to drop into an antique store in an unfrequented neighborhood and there, in a corner stood the very same statue — which finally became mine." and confirmed another sincere belief: "That which is really yours will find you."

Because she has served the cause of music so well, we thought you would like to read this impressive list of attainment and honors. Gena Branscombe served as: Vice President and Director of the National Association for Conductors and Composers; Chairman of American Music, Member of the Board, and earlier as Radio

GENA BRANSCOMBE

(Last of Three Articles)

Chairman for the New York State Federation of Music Clubs (she is now an Honorary Member of the Board); National Chairman of American Music and Folksong for the General Federation of Women's Clubs; member of the President's Advisory Board for the National Opera Club of New York; and as President of the Society of American Women Composers, now disbanded.

She is a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP); an honor member of the Associated Musicians of Greater New York; an honorary member of Delta Omicron, of International Beta Sigma Phi, the Women's Art Association of Canada; an Honor-Initiate of Zeta Tau Alpha; and a member of the MacDowell Colonists.

Whitman College awarded her an honorary degree. The Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution inscribed her name on their Honor Roll at Constitution Hall in Washington for her service to patriotic education. The American Mother's Committee of the Golden Rule Foundation gave her an award (as a woman and a mother) for her services in the musical field. Beta Sigma Phi International gave her a citation for her devotion to the interests of women all over the world. And the National League of American Penwomen gave her their most-distinguished - work - of - the - year-by-a-woman award.

Emil Ludwig once wrote: "Actions belong in the museum of history; characters, the substance of action and intellect, approach the heart and brain of every individual."

This, it seems, would apply to Gena and account for the remarkable interest and appreciation from so many readers, further stirred by her tremendous love of life, her good - will to all and the "fragrance" of her musical gifts.

Her story vividly reminds us that nothing of value can be easily won without "heart-grieving sweat" for according to a Greek poet "Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat. Long is the road thereto and rough and steep" while Plato sums it up with "Hard is the good". How fitting indeed, that "the excellent becomes the permanent."

To know that Gena Branscombe is Canadian-born makes us proud; that she is from our own Quinte district makes the heart rejoice.

Long may her trumpets sound!