



NEWS

FROM
Wilfrid Laurier University

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Famed contralto Maureen Forrester
succeeds Aird as chancellor of WLU

Maureen Forrester, Canada's great operatic star who is considered by many to be the finest contralto now performing, will become chancellor of Wilfrid Laurier University at the university's spring convocation, May 25.

She succeeds John Aird, former lieutenant-governor of Ontario, who served the university as chancellor for eight years. He has recently been named chancellor emeritus, a newly created position.

Commenting on the two appointments, Dr. John A. Weir, president of Laurier, said he was doubly delighted that such a world-renowned musician had consented to become chancellor and that Aird will be available to provide his usual sage advice and ongoing counsel.

"Miss Forrester's appointment also underlines Laurier's reputation for the excellence of its music faculty," he said.

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The university's new chancellor received an honorary degree from Laurier in November, 1975, and has also received honorary doctorates from a number of other universities, 13 in all.

The Laurier citation for her degree began with these words:

"Maureen Forrester, often described as a singer with 'a pure gold voice,' has blazed a trail of triumph across Canada-- and the world. The subject of ecstatic critical acclaim, she was once described by the music reviewer for the Chicago American as 'Canada's most precious natural resource since gold was discovered in the Klondike.'

Forrester, who began her career singing in church choirs, made her professional debut in 1953 with the Montreal Symphony, under the baton of Otto Klemperer.

Word of that magnificent concert soon reached Bruno Walter in New York, who invited her to audition. The audition was so successful that she made her first American appearance at Carnegie Hall, singing Gustav Mahler's Resurrection symphony. She has been considered the world's leading interpreter of Mahler ever since.

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Since those days, she has become a leading contralto and has been heard on five continents and with virtually every major orchestra. She is, in fact, the favorite of many of the great conductors-- Eugene Ormandy, Herbert von Karajan, Leonard Bernstein, and Seiji Ozawa, among others.

In 1978, she had the distinction of being one of the world's first major soloists to tour China, singing with the Toronto Symphony. She performed some songs in Chinese, to the obvious delight of her audiences.

In a rare move, the government invited her back to China so that she could give more concerts and lecture to students who were showing potential as serious performers in the western style.

Laurier's new chancellor devotes much time to the operatic stage, having made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera of New York in 1975. Since then, she has walked in triumph through the great opera houses of the world.

In 1967, Forrester was made a Companion of the Order of Canada, one of three women to be awarded the honor the year the Order was established.

In addition, she has, since 1984, been chairman of the Canada Council, the government agency that promotes and sponsors the arts in Canada.

In one brilliant concert season recently, she appeared with the orchestras of Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, and with the National Symphony in Washington.

John Aird, who said he was delighted with the appointment of his successor, added this recollection:

"The first time I met her was the day we both received honorary degrees at Laurier. I remember being taken aback by the size of the audience in the huge Kitchener Auditorium. But, as we walked down that long aisle to the platform, she said to me, 'Just keep your head up and pretend you're playing the Palace.'

"I remember it was a great convocation, because there were no speeches and she sang beautifully."