

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



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Faculty of music at Wilfrid Laurier University celebrates 20 years

Waterloo (March 16) — "So what if it was primitive? It was fun," says Prof. Victor Martens, recalling the places music lived on the campus of Wilfrid Laurier University in the early days. The faculty celebrates its 20th anniversary this year; a gala performance of Hector Berlioz' *Requiem* at Kitchener's Centre in the Square on March 31 will mark the occasion.

On its 20th anniversary, the faculty is recognized as offering one of the finest undergraduate programs for music in Canada, is home to the internationally acclaimed Pendercki String Quartet, has an outstanding performance facility, and boasts about 300 music majors. Many of its 990 alumni are operatic and orchestral performers, soloists, accompanists, composers, teachers of music at all levels, music therapists, music librarians, and church musicians.

The faculty was established in 1975 with 50 students, but music played on well before that. In 1956 the calendar for Waterloo College (Laurier's forerunner), offered two courses in music history and a course in church music. In the 1960s, WLU's 70-voice choir toured frequently (New York State was an especially popular destination). With the 1967 appointment of baritone Peter van Ginkel, who visited the campus six times a year, WLU became one of the first universities to employ an affiliate artist. In 1970, the university approved a three-year music program, and five years later, the board of governors approved the establishment of a faculty of music, which had degree-granting privileges for an honours bachelor of arts degree in music.

Martens, a professor of voice at WLU since 1969, remembers that his first class was in the chilliest room on campus — the chapel, then located in the Arts Building. The windows wouldn't close and Martens battled a cold all winter.

"We moved into the Scale House after that' (a double entendre: the house was shared with biology, and the basement contained aquariums full of fish), says Carol Raymond, co-ordinator of auditions and concerts, who arrived at WLU in 1970 and was music's first departmental secretary.

She recalls the houses long ago demolished: "62 Bricker, that was where the parking lot behind the Seminary is. That's where we set up the music department. And we held classes in the recreation rooms in 32 Bricker. Students would use the bedrooms in the houses for practicing."

(more)

Martens taught in another house on Bricker, and his students' music immediately found disfavor with neighbourhood residents, who complained to the administration about the noise.

"A petition was circulated the spring of '70 after my first winter there. It demanded I be removed from the community," Martens says. "The evenings were too noisy. The neighbourhood didn't object to the music. They just wanted it kept in the centre of campus."

University administrators put Martens in the garage of the president's house (now Alumni Hall). "It was quite nice and I was out of the way," he says.

Prof. Barrie Cabena, who arrived at WLU in 1970 to teach organ and theory, recalls that his own office on Bricker was a "hat rack" (not a shelf, but a converted closet), and that he taught students on the organ in the chapel and then for a period at a local church. In 1974, the faculty got its own organ and Cabena brought his students back to campus. A year later, music moved into the Macdonald House residence. Two portables behind the building provided classroom space.

The music faculty began dreaming about having their own space as early as 1971. "In the early days we talked about a music building but thank goodness it didn't happen," Cabena says.

Martens agrees it was a good thing that the John Aird Centre took some time to realize. "The lack of capital worked in our favour. We first built the program and then we built the building, rather than the other way around. By the time we got our building, our program was firmly in place."

He recalls that during the planning of the John Aird Centre he and other music faculty toured some university facilities in the United States. "Some of the places were like morgues. The halls were quiet. There was no sound coming from behind the doors. We insisted that there be no double doors in the Aird building. We wanted it to be like it was in Macdonald House. When you walk in the building, you hear music. You hear life. Something's going on here.

Opened in 1988, the John Aird Centre features the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall, praised by performers, music critics, concert-goers, and producers for the excellence of its acoustics. Its other music facilities include two rehearsal halls, 40 practice rooms, electronic music and organ studios, and the music therapy clinic.

"(In the early years) the lack of space was an incredible challenge, but the music faculty believed right from day one that we could build an undergraduate faculty second to none," Martens says.

Cabena names the music therapy program, which operates a community clinic, and the church music program as two features that make the faculty unique in Canada. "There are perhaps only two other church music programs in the country. We were first. And of course the music therapy program is something we're all especially proud of."