

Barbara Troxell

September 10, 1916 — September 23, 1984

On September 23, 1984, Cornell University lost a valued member of its artistic community. Professor Barbara Troxell, a distinguished singer and teacher and a member of the faculty for twenty-three years, died at Tompkins Community Hospital of a heart attack.

Barbara was born in Easton, Pennsylvania, the only child of Edgar and Eleanor Troxell. Her early education was in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, where she studied the piano and sang in her school and church. Her scholastic achievement in high school won for her a four-year Senatorial Scholarship to attend Pennsylvania State University, from which she received the Bachelor of Science and Master of Music Education degrees. With strong support and encouragement from Professor Willa Taylor, with whom she had struck up a close friendship since her freshman year, she decided to pursue a career as a singer.

In 1939 she was accepted as a scholarship student to study with the world-renowned soprano Elisabeth Schumann at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where she remained until her graduation in 1942. There followed a decade of concertizing and additional work with Mme. Schumann and illustrious vocal coaches such as Paul Ulanowsky, Tibor Kozma, and Fausto Cleva. Important events in those years included a debut in 1943 with the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy; an appearance in the role of Pamina in the *Magic Flute*, under the baton of Sir Thomas Beecham, with performances in Mexico City and Montreal in 1944; a role as soprano soloist in Bach's B-Minor Mass, under Leopold Stokowski, in 1945; the role of the Marschallin in a New York Concert performance of the *Rosenkavalier*, conducted by Leonard Bernstein, in 1946; a New York Town Hall debut in 1947; a role as soloist in Mozart's C-Minor Mass and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Cathedral Choral in the Washington Cathedral in 1948 and 1949 respectively; and a role as soloist in the *St. Matthew Passion* with the Cantata Singers in New York, Arthur Mendel conducting, in 1950. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1950 and remained with the company for two years. During the 1953-54 season, while on a concert tour in West Germany with the Mozart Trio, sponsored by the United States Information Service, she was invited to join the Flensburg Opera as a leading soprano. She stayed in Germany as an operatic singer for seven years, first in Flensburg and then in Wurzburg, Ulm, and Wiesbaden, until her appointment at Cornell in 1961.

Thus Barbara joined the Cornell music faculty after having gained recognition as a soloist in operas and concerts. Her vocal artistry was then at its height, and in the decade that followed she gave numerous exquisite

performances at Cornell. Among them were song recitals in collaboration with faculty pianists and with the University's performing organizations in works such as, in 1962, Fauré's *Requiem*, conducted by Nadia Boulanger; in 1963, the premiere of Maximilian Albrecht's *Requiem*, conducted by Thomas Sokol; and, in 1965, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, performed in Ithaca and at Lincoln Center in New York City, conducted by Karel Husa as part of Cornell's centennial celebration. Most memorable was her singing of lieder by Wolf, Schumann, Schubert, and other German composers. But her interest and knowledge extended beyond the standard repertoire of great operas, cantatas, oratorios, and lieder. The music of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, and other twentieth-century composers interested her more than most of her friends and students might have supposed. When some of Webern's early songs were published for the first time in the 1960s, she studied them patiently, chose a few that suited her best, and performed them wonderfully, in a program that included solo songs by Poulenc and Finzi, framed by arias of Mozart. Works by Charles Ives, Elliot Carter, and other American composers were also part of her large repertoire. For her accomplishments Barbara won the "New Voices" and the "Town Hall Presents" contests in New York City in 1944 and 1945 respectively; the American Federation of Music Clubs contest in Pennsylvania and the Lucius Pryor Award in 1945; and the Pennsylvania State University Woman of the Year Award in 1962.

Barbara made the transition from professional singer to university professor with aplomb. This transition meant devoting less time to performing while concentrating on the teaching of Cornell voice students. She inherited a vocal program developed by her distinguished predecessors, Sir Keith Falkner and the late Dame Isobel Baillie, which she molded into Cornell's modern singing program based on her unique and keen analytic insight into the vocal process. She dedicated her energy and expertise to her students, who were drawn from across the University. They included novices as well as advanced singers. She was able to bring forth the best from all her students, whether they were eager preprofessionals, enthusiastic choristers, or budding actors learning to project their voices. But Barbara's teaching was not limited to giving voice lessons. With her vast experience and knowledge of opera, she quickly became the keystone of opera production in Ithaca. At Cornell, under her guidance, students in her opera workshop gave exciting performances of operas such as Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*. In 1973 she became artistic director of the Ithaca Opera and with this group provided Ithaca with its semiannual gala operatic performances.

Many at Cornell learned from Barbara through her elucidation of different aspects of opera. A favorite role that Barbara had sung and enacted many times in Germany was that of Tchaikovsky's heroine Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*. Hundreds of students through the 1970s heard her sing phrases of Tatiana's music to illustrate her talk

about Tatiana's growing up from the trusting girl of act one to the wise and complicated woman of act two. Even if some of those students supposed that they would never be interested in opera, Barbara won their respect for the possible depths of operatic characters and for the craftsmanship of singing actors. Those listeners could all turn to Tchaikovsky's symphonies and chamber music with more helpful contexts for understanding than they would have possessed without her expert instruction.

Barbara's contribution to Cornell was not limited to music. Her astuteness, common sense, and forthrightness could be counted upon in the deliberation over departmental affairs. She also took part in college and University affairs, serving on the admissions committee of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1975 to 1978 and as a member of the Faculty Council of Representatives from 1978 to 1981.

Barbara's death leaves us unable to replace her in her whole array of activities, but we are grateful to have had her as a friend and colleague for twenty-three years.

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