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CELEBRATING A LIFETIME OF ACHIEVEMENT; THE LASTING LEGACY OF JEAN COULTHARD

By Glenn Colton, Ph.D.

In February of 1998, the musical community of Vancouver will mark the ninetieth birthday of Jean Coulthard with a week long festival of concerts, lectures, and radio broadcasts devoted to the music of its most cherished composer. To be sure, Coulthard remains one of the foremost composers in the history of Canada and one of the most remarkable women in twentieth-century music. Her compositions are among the most widely performed and recorded works in the Canadian repertoire, and she has received numerous awards and honours for her music both nationally and internationally. At home, honours bestowed upon Coulthard in recent years include the performing Rights Organization of Canada Composer of the Year (1984), the Order of Canada (1988), the MacLean's Magazine Honour Roll (1990), and the Order of British Columbia (1995).

This well deserved recognition is the result of a lifetime of musical achievement which has placed her at the forefront of Canadian music. As a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers, Coulthard was not only a driving force behind the mid-century promotion and dissemination of Canadian music, but also a pioneer who paved the way for women composers (and, to a certain extent, Western Canadian composers) on the national music scene.

As an educator and mentor to a new generation of Canadian composers for almost three decades, Coulthard has been highly influential. She taught theory and composition at the University of British Columbia from 1947 to 1973 and, during the 1970s, taught at the Shawnigan Lake Summer School for the Arts on Vancouver Island, the Victoria Conservatory of Music, and the Banff Centre Composers' Workshop. Among Coulthard's eminent pupils are the composers Michael Conway Baker, Chan Ka-Nin, David Gordon Duke, Jean Ethridge, Joan Hansen, Sylvia Rickard, and Ernst Schneider. Coulthard collaborated with two of these former pupils, Duke and Hansen, to produce the highly regarded eight-volume set of graded piano pieces titled *Music of Our Time*.

Having long been a favourite of audiences and performers alike, Coulthard has recently attracted the attention of musical scholars. Her music has been the subject of doctoral dissertations by Vivienne Rowley (Boston University), Barbara Lee (Catholic University of America), David Gordon Duke (University of Victoria), Glen Colton (University of Victoria), Dale Maves (State University of New York), and Linda Black (University of Florida), a forthcoming biography by William Bruneau of the University of British Columbia; and recent articles in publications such as the Journal of the International League of Women Composers, the Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers, the International Encyclopedia of Women Composers, and the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada.

It is the music itself, however, which is Coulthard's greatest legacy. Having written extensively for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal combinations -- including works for solo piano, solo voice, chorus, orchestra, and a multitude of different chamber ensembles -- she has consistently worked within her own expressive, tonally-based style to write enduring music of the highest standards. Works such as *Image Astrale* (for solo piano), *The Pines of Emily Carr* (for voice, narrator, and chamber ensemble), the *Autumn Symphony*, and many others, reveal a composer for whom the ideals of inspiration, beauty, and emotional expression retain their intrinsic value. As Coulthard herself once stated, "I feel that music is my whole life. If one can interpret it, one can understand my personal philosophy. When I write music, I am releasing my inner self."