

Louise Holmes Stryker: A musical life

Williamsport Women

By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT

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Louise Stryker was one of several women of her generation who served the Williamsport community musically by teaching, holding positions as church organists and choir directors and sharing their musical skills with a variety of community organizations and gatherings. As a teacher in the Williamsport High School, Stryker was an influential force, pioneering the current extensive musical program.



STRYKER

A hall at First United Methodist Church bears her name. She

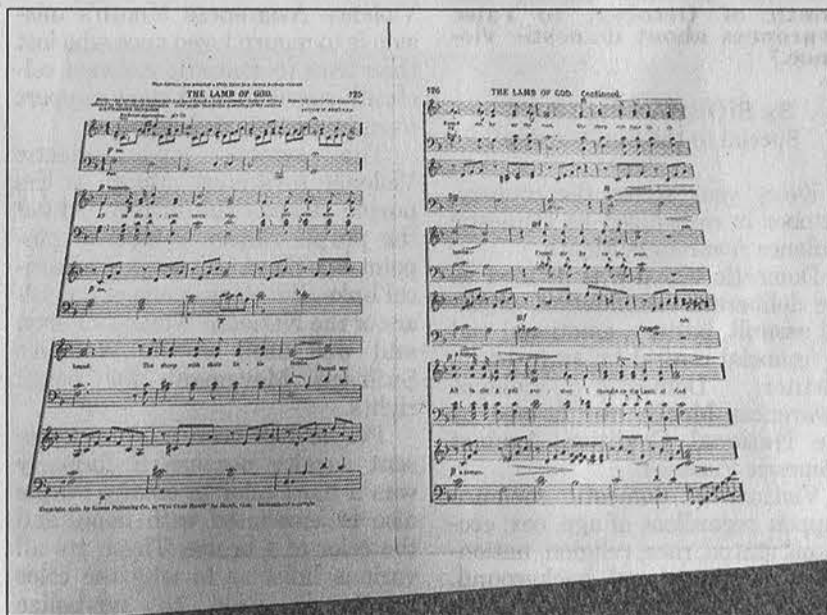


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Lamb of God sheet music by Louise Stryker is shown.

received a City of Williamsport Citation for her musical contributions, a community service award from the Williamsport Lycoming Foundation and the Bishop D. Frederick Wertz Award for church musicianship.

Early years

Stryker was born in 1913. After losing both her parents, Rodney and Winifred Stryker, at the age of 5 during the Spanish flu epidemic, she was raised by an aunt at 1121 E. Third St., which would be her home for most of her life.

(See LOUISE, Page E-2)

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(From Page E-1)

While attending Williamsport High School, Stryker (Class of 1931), who had taken organ lessons since the age of 13, distinguished herself by being the first female student to play on the three-manual Moller organ for daily chapel exercises. She accompanied the 180-member Glee Club and participated in the Modern Event Club — a group of students who discussed current topics and dramatized important events in history.

A full scholarship to Temple University took Stryker to Philadelphia, where she earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree in music education.

43-year musical teaching career

Former students believe there was no one else like her — everyone has a "Stryker story." She was passionate about encouraging young musicians. However, the gifted were not the only ones she inspired to teach, go to graduate school and perform; she reached out to those less musically inclined as well. She prided herself on having perfect pitch, and no matter how large the choir, she would find you if you were off key.

A March 23, 1975, article in the Sun-Gazette, "Choir Teacher Keeps in Tune with Times," quoted Stryker as being surprised at how many students sing out of tune, "They should be helped in the early grades, otherwise frustrations and fear of ridicule set in," Stryker said. In the same article, Stryker shared some of her teaching philosophy, "Music is like a mirror, and I try to make kids aware of music as an expression of people's feelings. Rock is an expression of our own period."

Her Christmas and spring concerts became a community tradition. Rumor has it that she even rehearsed the high school choir in secret at her church during a teachers' strike.

Church musicianship

Stryker's more than-60-year association with church musicianship included 30 years at Newberry Methodist Church as organist and choir director; she then held the same position at Faxon-Kenmore Methodist Church and served as organist at First United Methodist Church for 30 years. She was proud of being designated minister of music by the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. Her skill at playing hymns often was noted, especially since she could effortlessly transpose from one key to another. One former choir member remembers that she taught children how to sing reverently, but with a smile.

Community involvement

Newspaper archives include many mentions of Stryker's name. She was devoted to the Williamsport Music Club, serving in leadership roles, offering programs on composers, accompanying singers on the organ or piano and directing choral ensembles. Her high school choirs performed for many organizations, and she always was arranging a church concert or playing for a wedding.

Among the professional affiliations mentioned in articles were her roles as member of Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary teachers' fraternity for key women educators; member of the National Guild of Piano Teachers; and dean of the Lycoming Chapter of the American Guild of Organists.

Locally, Stryker was a regent of the Lycoming Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and a member of the DuBoistown Garden Club and the Williamsport Woman's Club; she served on the Williamsport Community Concert Board. Stryker also was involved with her Temple University alumni organization.

In recognition of her participation in the American Association of

University Women, the organization established in her name a scholarship that provided funds to bus children to symphony concerts.

A composer

Stryker was a composer as well. On occasion, she would write a piece for a wedding ceremony or a special event. Unpublished works include the music for a 1976 sesquicentennial pageant, titled "Susquehanna Valley"; "Brandon," written for a Brandon Park celebration in 1990; and "Preamble to the Constitution of the U.S.," composed for a Daughters of the American Revolution project.

Her Lenten anthem, "The Lamb of God" (1939), was published by Lorenze Publishing Co. It sold for 10 cents.

Stryker died in 2003 at the age of 89. She not only shared her musical talent with the community but also was generous with her material possessions. In addition to making a significant donation to the building fund at First United Methodist Church, she gave the church her Steinway piano. She established music scholarships at Lycoming College and First United Methodist Church.

Stryker always said there was no place else she would ever want to live or work except Williamsport.

Hulbert, guest writer for this month's Williamsport Women column, is a professor emeritus of library services at Lycoming College. She continues her interest in the Lycoming College archives by working on a limited basis as archival project specialist and being an advisor to the Lycoming County Women's History Collection.

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