

Taylor String Quartet

DAN SHULTZ

Dan Shultz, emeritus professor of music, Walla Walla University, has researched and written extensively about Seventh-day Adventist music history and musicians. His publications include *A Great Tradition*—a history of music at Walla Walla University, and the *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*—an encyclopedia with biographies of over 1100 Adventist musicians. He founded the International Adventist Musicians Association, serving as its president for ten years and editing its publications and website for over thirty years. Shultz and his wife, Carolyn (nee Stevens), live in College Place, Washington.

The Taylor String Quartet, comprising children of Seventh-day Adventist music teachers Morris and Elaine Myers Taylor, achieved international acclaim during the 1970s and later became the resident string quartet at La Sierra University.

Beginnings

Beginning in 1967, the four children of Morris and Elaine Myers Taylor, music teachers at Pacific Union College (PUC) in Angwin, California, began performing publicly as the Taylor String Quartet. Elaine, though active as a performing musician, had made her role as mother the priority in her life, nurturing the children both spiritually and musically. That dedication, with support and assistance from Morris, created an atmosphere in the home where the children's musical gifts flourished.

After the Taylors arrived at PUC in 1966, the children, Lucille, Leonard, Lowell, and Lyndon, were practicing for an hour each on a string instrument and the piano each day. They then practiced together as a string quartet for a third hour. All four were achieving at remarkable levels.¹

International Acclaim

During the next five years, the precocious playing of the children and the excellence of their work as a string quartet stunned audiences and music critics alike. The *Palo Alto Times* described the response to a performance by the Taylor String Quartet at the annual conference of the Music Teachers' Association of California in 1971: "When 300 music teachers rise to give a performing group a standing ovation, the players can be sure they have received quite a tribute."²

The family's move that same year to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, marked Elaine's return to full-time teaching. A tireless teacher, she taught hundreds of students and performed countless workshops and master classes while continuing to work with the quartet.³ During those years the quartet was coached by the Juilliard, Fine Arts, Berkshire, and Guarneri Quartets as well as by nationally noted artists.⁴

The quartet toured in the United States, Europe, Mexico, and Russia, playing to great acclaim in famous venues, at over fifty colleges and universities, and on national radio and TV in Great Britain, Sweden, and Norway.⁵ In 1975, while on tour in Europe with the New England Youth Ensemble, the quartet was invited at the last minute and without prior notice to play for a banquet in Poland being held during a visit by President Gerald Ford with the Polish premier. They performed for two hours during the meal.⁶ The *London Times* hailed the quartet as the "Osmonds of the classical world" after their 1976 debut at Wigmore Hall.⁷

Tragedy

In 1978 Elaine took a three-week tour with her children, traveling from California to Texas, to Mexico, and then to Washington, D.C. At the University of Monterey, the audience responded to their concert with a prolonged standing ovation, shouts of bravo, and a cascade of flowers on the stage. This would be the last tour the group made with their



Taylor String Quartet, from left: Lucille, Leonard, Lyndon, and Lowell. From *Lake Union Herald*, August 14, 1973.

mother.⁸

Perhaps Elaine Taylor's finest performance was her last, given in April 1978, when she played the Faure *Piano Quartet* at the Sheraton Hotel in Chicago at the Music Teachers National Convention with three of her children, the only guest performers invited to play at the meetings.⁹

A few days later, while returning to the Andrews' university campus on a Friday afternoon, Taylor was in a car accident that claimed her life. It was a devastating blow to the family and shocking news on the campus and to others who had known her through the years. Nine college and academy campuses sent floral tributes for the service commemorating her life.¹⁰ Stunned by their loss, the family subsequently gave several concerts which funded an endowed scholarship in her name at Andrews University.¹¹

Sustained Excellence

The Taylor Quartet was managed by sponsors including the Fine Arts Foundation of Chicago, the Great Lakes Performing Arts Association, and the Alkahest Attractions in New York. It continued until 2007 in name as the resident string quartet at La Sierra University (LSU) in Riverside, California, staffed by talented musicians as well as the Taylor children, when possible.

Lyndon and Lucille Taylor, founding members, performed in the quartet with Jeffry Kaatz, Ingrid Chun, and Jason Uyeyama, teachers at LSU, and colleagues of Lyndon's from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he is principal second chair violinist.¹²

SOURCES

Johnston, Madeline Steele. "Variations on a Theme: Retirement from the Music Department." *Focus*, Fall 1995.

Minchin-Comm, Dorothy and Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse. *Encore! The Story of the New England Youth Ensemble*. Pacific Press Association: 1988.

Minner, Ray. "Elaine Taylor Killed in Auto Accident." *Lake Union Herald*, May 9, 1978.

Smoot, Joseph. "Muriel Elaine Taylor." Life Sketch and Eulogy. April 1978.

NOTES

1. Lyndon Taylor, email message to author, September 12, 2016.?
2. Quoted in Madeline Steele Johnston, "Variations on a Theme: Retirement from the Music Department," *Focus*, Fall 1995, 5.?
3. Joseph Smoot, "Muriel Elaine Taylor," Life Sketch and Eulogy, April 1978, 2, 3.?
4. Lyndon Taylor, email message to author, September 12, 2016.?
5. Ibid.?
6. Dorothy Minchin-Comm and Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse, *Encore! The Story of the New England Youth Ensemble* (Pacific Press Association: 1988), 66-68.?
7. Lyndon Taylor, email message to author, September 12, 2016.?
8. Smoot, 3.?
9. Ibid.?
10. Ray Minner, "Elaine Taylor Killed in Auto Accident," *Lake Union Herald*, May 9, 1978, 6.?
11. Lyndon Taylor, email message to author, September 12, 2016.?
12. Ibid.?