



## VIOLA

### Karen Tuttle 1920-2010

by Annette Caruthers

Karen Tuttle's death on December 16, 2010 at the age of 90 closed her 50 years of unprecedented influence on viola teaching. Obituaries published by the New York Times, Curtis Institute of Music, Juilliard and other institutions tell her life story, often colorfully. The New York Times ended their item with, "Besides her daughter, Ms. Tuttle is survived by her husband, Morton Herskowitz, a Reichian psychiatrist, and two grandchildren. Ms. Tuttle was married twice before, at the ages of 18 and 25. Both marriages ended in divorce, the second one in spectacular fashion. Ms. Tuttle was practicing one day when her husband ran an incriminating finger over the furniture and thrust it, dust-covered, under her nose. Ms. Tuttle hit him over the head, though not, thankfully, with her viola. *She used a frying pan.*"

Karen Tuttle first toured the Western United States as a violin soloist at sixteen. As skilled as she was, Ms. Tuttle contemplated giving up music altogether. The violin can cause injury, and she was fast becoming a casualty. Then she attended a concert by the virtuoso violist William Primrose and was entranced by his relaxed approach to his instrument.

She asked him for lessons. Mr. Primrose agreed on two conditions: that she play viola, and that she move to Philadelphia, where he was on the Curtis faculty. She

agreed at once.

While working with Primrose she studied how he played from a technical viewpoint. Primrose eventually was so impressed by Tuttle's ability to explain and analyze his playing that he would refer those who asked him technical questions to her for explanation. His playing was very intuitive, and he often couldn't explain how he did it.

Tuttle also became acquainted with the violinist-physician D.C. Dounis. From him, Tuttle claims she more deeply understood just what it was, physiologically speaking, about William Primrose's playing that seemed so "right." Dounis was well-known for his scientific study and teaching of proper and healthy use of the body and mind in conjunction with string-playing technique.

Later Karen Tuttle developed her understanding into the Coordination Technique, which involved Tuttle's insistence that her students acquire healthy physical habits with the instrument, along with connecting emotionally with the music's inherent characters and conveying these emotions from a deeply-felt well of personal experience. She believed that this is only made possible by understanding one's own emotional life and dismantling the physical barriers that inhibit one's full expression of emotions.

Karen Tuttle was also a pioneering female musician. She was a member of the

Curtis faculty from 1944 until 1955. In that year she performed and studied chamber music with Pablo Casals at the Prades Festival. She made her New York debut in 1960. One of the first women to play in major string quartets, Ms. Tuttle was a member



of the Schneider, Galimir, and Gotham string quartets. She was also the first female member of the NBC Symphony!

Tuttle's teaching career really took off in the 1970s, and in time she taught at Curtis, the Peabody Conservatory, Juilliard, the Manhattan School and the Mannes School, as well as the Aspen Festival and Banff Arts Centre. Because of her careful study of physiological, psychological and technical aspects of playing and expression, Tuttle became probably the most influential viola teacher of her time. Her concepts are being passed down to younger generations with great benefit to students of her students.

For more on Karen Tuttle and her influence on viola teaching, *Coordinated Effort: A Study Of Karen Tuttle's Influence On Modern Viola Teaching* is available from author Matthew Dane: [www.daneviola.com](http://www.daneviola.com). A Karen Tuttle Coordination Workshop will be held June 17-19, 2011 at Oberlin Conservatory. Information can be found at: <http://new.oberlin.edu/conservatory/summer/tuttle/>.

*Annette Caruthers is a violist and teacher of violin and viola in the Twin Cities. A former member of the Minnesota Orchestra and Utah Symphony, former Principal Violist of the Minnesota Opera Orchestra for many years, she is now teaching full-time from studios in St. Louis Park and Southwest Minneapolis. Her students often play on the first stands of the youth symphonies. ♪*

