



## CELLO

### In Memoriam: Ed Volker and Phyllis Young

by David Holmes

#### Ed Volker

As most of you know, Ed Volker, the proprietor of House of Note for many years, died recently. As a Saint Louis Park resident, I had regular contact with Ed over the past 20 years. I always enjoyed talking to him and to his awesome staff (Ruth, Ingrid, Krasimir, Jeff, Paul, and others) when I dropped in to get something I needed. Although Ed could sometimes seem a bit cranky, beneath that exterior was a kind and soft-hearted person. At his service there were a number of testimonials from family verifying this. When the North Star Cello



Academy had a workshop with our 50 cello students, I asked Ed if he could provide something from House of Note. He generously donated 50 \$10 dollar gift cards to House of Note to give to the participating families. Under Ed's ownership, House of Note always provided unwavering integrity and civility to my many cello families who patronized his shop.

Ed's memorial service was attended by several hundred people. One of my favorite stories, mentioned by both his son and daughter, was about the time House of Note was involved in an emergency gluing of Yo-Yo Ma's cello fingerboard when he was in town for a concert. Ed, who was not a trained musician, was a bit bent out of

shape about having to open House of Note for this. However, he did, and he brought his television along to watch the Twins (a passion of his) while Yo-Yo's cello was being fixed. Ma offered front row seats for Ed to attend his concert the next day, but Ed declined since he had season tickets to the Vikings (another passion of his, apparently). Ed noted to someone that Yo-yo hadn't paid for the repair before he left. However, a month later, Ma sent money and a signed picture thanking House of Note for fixing his cello.

[Sarah Duffy also wrote about Ed in her article on page 8. *ed.*]

#### Phyllis Young

The cello world also lost an amazing pedagogue recently—the brilliant, energetic, and one-of-a-kind Phyllis Young. My first 21 years were spent in Texas, so I knew of Ms. Young in a roundabout way, both through her books and through my dad, who was at the University of Texas working on his master's degree in theory and composition at the same time that Ms. Young was a cello student there as well (circa 1945). They both lived in the married housing unit, and she told me once that all the couples shared one bathroom, so the lines were incredibly long in the mornings. Those were the days!

When Ms. Young came to Minneapolis about 15 years ago, she worked with some of my students. Since we were planning on performing an Apocalyptica (the original rock cello group) arrangement of a Metallica song, I sent her their recording. She later emailed me that one of their pieces had nearly scared her dog to death. For her teacher workshop here she brought several duffel bags full of teaching accessories including sponges, rubbery creatures, ribbons, dusters, bracelets, tennis balls, dowel sticks and goodness knows what else! Ms. Young's teaching was fueled by a boundless creative imagination. Early in her teaching career she had the epiphany that cello playing and how we use our bodies in our daily lives should be connected—that we all have a common "vocabulary" of movements that

we can call upon to help us learn cello.

I have known many former students of Phyllis Young and in retrospect I wished I had gone to study with her at the University of Texas. I auditioned there, but the University of Houston offered me quite a bit more money, which swayed my decision. (I'm not sure why it never dawned on me to work on my master's degree with her—duh!) I think that during the 1970s I had the unfortunate notion that I should study with a big name, as in an "artist teacher," which of course, Ms. Young really was. I just didn't know that. Were her astonishing teaching skills overlooked somewhat at the time because of sexism? That cultural blockade, strong as it is, couldn't long hold down someone with her undeniable talents. I have greatly enjoyed her two books, which have provided so much cello teaching brilliance and raw fun to me over the years.

I have spoken to several of Ms. Young's former students to glean what made her so remarkable. Elliott Cheney, who studied with her in the 1970s, said that she always made her students believe in their abilities



to succeed as cellists. I imagine that the confidence she instilled in students came from her interpersonal warmth as well as her extraordinary teaching acumen. Another student, Ruth Einstein, told me of a lesson

when Ms. Young's unyielding focus on getting her to play one note with beautiful vibrato drove her to distraction. Ruth said Phyllis was a "force of nature."

That irrepressible energy is reflected in her obituary:

**Young, Phyllis.** One of the Butler School of Music's most distinguished emeritus faculty members has passed away. Phyllis Young, Professor Emerita of Cello and String Pedagogy, who was the first holder of UT's Parker C. Fielder Regents Professorship in Music, died on Wednesday, November 8, 2017, in Austin at the age of 92. She was born Phyllis Casselman on Oct. 20, 1925, to Velma Stewart and Philip James Casselman, in Milan, Kansas, and raised in Conway Springs, Kansas. Deciding to pursue a career in music, she earned B.M. and M.M. degrees in cello performance from UT Austin, where she studied under her beloved cello professor Horace Britt. She also studied at the Paris Conservatory and the Chigiano Academy in Siena, Italy. She was a UT Music faculty member from 1953 until her retirement in 2007 and was

one of the first women at UT to be promoted to full professor. In addition to her private cello studio, Mrs. Young established the Texas Cello Choir and directed the renowned UT String Project for 35 years, seeing it become a world-wide model for programs that train string teachers and young string players. Her former students hold positions in major universities, schools, and orchestras in the U.S. and abroad, including the New York Philharmonic. Professor Young was President of the American String Teachers Association 1978-80 and spent additional two-year terms as President-Elect and Past President. Her first book on string pedagogy, *Playing the String Game: Strategies for Teaching Cello and Strings*, published in 1978, went through multiple printings and was translated into more than half a dozen foreign languages. Her second book, *The String Play: The Drama of Playing and Teaching Strings*, appeared in 1986, and she authored numerous articles in professional journals. She gave hundreds of invited workshops and master classes in more than 33 countries around the

world and in most states of the U.S. Mrs. Young received many honors and awards for her work, including the Distinguished Service Award of the American String Teachers Association in 1984. She was honored in 2000 by Indiana University's Eva Janzen Memorial Cello Center with the title "Grande Dame du Violoncelle," and in 2002 she received the Paul Rolland Lifetime Achievement Award from ASTA and the National School Orchestra Association. She is listed in *Who's Who in America* and similar publications and was the subject of a doctoral dissertation done at Boston University in 2010. Beginning in 1945, for 46 years Phyllis was married to James M. Young, a World War II Air Force veteran and one of the founders of Tracor, who died in 1991 after many years of disability from multiple sclerosis.

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