

## In Honor of Karen Tuttle as She Retires

By CAROL RODLAND

As I pondered how best to honor Karen Tuttle, world-renowned violist and pedagogue and my own beloved mentor, in this publication on the occasion of her retirement from Juilliard, I was overcome with emotion and gratitude. This woman opened a whole new world to me the moment we met, and continues to have a profound impact on my life and work to the present day. Since I chronicled my own personal odyssey with "Tut" (as so many of us affectionately call her) in the April 2000 issue of *The Juilliard Journal* in celebration of her 80th birthday, I will keep my own reminiscences to a minimum here and will provide instead some information about her extraordinary life, for those of you who are not well-versed in "Tuttle-lore," and include some memories from her former students.

While Tuttle openly discusses with her students the details of her life's history and the people and philosophies that contributed to her development as an artist, I would like to express my gratitude to Matthew Dane, whose doctoral dissertation, *Coordinated Effort: A Study of Karen Tuttle's Influence on Modern Viola Teaching* (Rice University, May 2002), provided an excellent source for checking the accuracy of the facts as I remembered them. Matthew, who is assistant professor of viola at the University of Oklahoma, never studied with Tuttle, but in this excellent document, he chronicles her life and interviews nine of her former students (this writer included) who are active in the teaching field.

Karen Tuttle was born on March 28, 1920, in Lewiston, Idaho, to Eunice, a choir director, and Ray, a country fiddler. Upon completing the eighth grade, she decided she had had enough of traditional schooling, and turned her energies fully to the study of the violin. This decision to quit school was the first in a lifelong series of pivotal decisions she made based on instinct and "gut feeling" about what was "right" for her. Tuttle has always been marvelously free-spirited. If something rings true for her, she responds with a resounding "Oh, yes!" and pursues it wholeheartedly. If it is physically painful or somehow unnatural, it is "wrong."

So, school felt wrong and music felt right. I can picture her telling the next part of her story: She assumes a horrifically tense violin-playing posture, twisting her neck sharply to the left, raising her shoulders, grotesquely poking out her wrists, and severely contorting her face. "This is how I used to play." Quite successfully, by all accounts; she had a manager, toured the West Coast, and did some high-level freelancing in Hollywood, all of which were somewhat uncommon for women at that time. But with all of this physical discomfort, she was not fully enjoying her life as a violinist. She claims she would have eventually quit, had the next moment of "Truth" — her fated meeting with the legendary violist William Primrose — not come when it had.



Karen Tuttle

She first heard (and, more importantly, saw) Primrose play in Los Angeles, as violist of the London String Quartet. His ease with the instrument so enthralled her that she approached him immediately and asked to study with him. He agreed, but only on the condition that she switch to viola and move to Philadelphia, since he taught at the Curtis Institute there. She happily did both. After all, "Truth" must always be pursued, according to Tuttle doctrine, even if it means trading the E-string for a C-string.

Primrose was, of course, a phenomenal violist, and played with great physical ease and virtuosity. He was truly a "natural," by all accounts. He taught by example, but if anyone wanted or needed a technical explanation, he very quickly began sending them to Karen Tuttle, because it was she who could articulate what he actually, physically did to achieve his beautiful sound and virtuosity. For this reason, even before she graduated from Curtis, Primrose appointed her to be his assistant—a position she kept even after graduating and moving to New York City to begin her career as a performing violist. When Primrose left Curtis in 1951, Tuttle took over the viola and chamber music departments, which she headed until 1956.

When she moved to New York City, she played a great deal of chamber music, and was a member of the Gotham, Galimir, and Schneider Quartets. She also became the first woman to join the NBC Orchestra. Her marriage in 1957 to Reichian psychoanalyst Dr. Morton Herskowitz resulted in a move back to Philadelphia, where she lives to this day. Her teaching positions over the years have included professorships at the University of Albany, Philadelphia Musical Academy, Peabody Conservatory, Mannes College of Music, Manhattan School of Music, a return to Curtis in 1978 (where she still teaches), and a stint at Juilliard from 1987-2003. During the summers she has taught at the Aspen Music Festival and the Banff Center for the Arts.

Tuttle loves to tell stories about the six people who revealed essential "Truths" to her. In addition to the aforementioned William Primrose, this diverse list includes the oboist Marcel Tabuteau, the cellist Pablo Casals, the violinist Alexander Schneider, the violinist/medical doctor Demetrios Constantine Dounis, and the psychoanalyst/doctor Wilhelm Reich.

From Tabuteau, the great French oboist who was principal oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra for more than 40 years and who also taught at Curtis, Tuttle claims she learned about "grouping," how notes should be organized in a phrase and why. Through her, those of us who never met Marcel Tabuteau experienced this legendary musician's spirit and musical genius, not only through her stories, but also because she is a terrific mimic!

Tuttle admits to a sometimes tumultuous relationship with the renowned Alexander Schneider, with whom she played in the famous Schneider Quartet for a number of years. She revered and respected his musicianship, but was not always enamored of his physical approach to playing the violin. Despite their frequent and spirited arguing, however, she considers him to have been an important influence on her. It is because of their intense professional relationship that we have those spellbinding Haydn quartet recordings! Again, through her stories (and her wonderful imitation of his Russian accent), she brings us closer to a master some of us did not have the privilege of knowing.

## **Favorite Memories From Former Students**

Tut taught us to question everything and everyone—even her!—during lessons. She also taught us how to teach; not only did she want us to verbalize everything in order to make sure we really got it, but she required us to make comments in studio class about our fellow students' performances. Tut treated each student with a fresh perspective: Even if I was the fourth Brahms sonata of the day, she approached me and our work together with great enthusiasm and energy. No matter what we were working on, it was ALL important and there was something to be learned.

—Susan Dubois, associate professor of viola at University of North Texas

Serendipity led Karen Tuttle's path to cross mine when I was a sophomore at Peabody. Her revolutionary proposition that musical health is defined equally through body mechanics and spirit, and that both elements are reflected in sonority, was an immediate call for action—a challenge gratefully acknowledged which has accompanied my work to the present. Karen Tuttle's initial attempts to sensitize her students to "body resonances" were extreme: we removed our chinrests and cut holes in the left shoulder of our shirts in order to better feel the vibration of the instrument! She taught us the essential—that to perform is to tell the news, and to tell it well requires aesthetic transparency, a generous spirit and the courage to remain vulnerable.

—Kim Kashkashian, professor of viola at the New England Conservatory

It was through Schneider that Tuttle met another of her key mentors, the cellist Pablo Casals. Schneider organized the famed Prades Festival in France, in which Tuttle participated, and it was there that she met and eventually studied with Casals. His ease and comfort with the cello, as well as his unique mastery of and passion for the music of J. S. Bach, were among his many gifts to her. Tuttle's reverence for Casals inspired me and many others to listen to his recordings and to devour any books we could find about him. Casals' approach to teaching interpretation, which included very specific identifications of a piece of music's inherent characters, is an integral part of the Tuttle teaching method. Again, she provides us with a deeply personal connection to one of the music world's giants.

While in New York, Tuttle also became acquainted with the violinist-physician (some would even call him "guru") Demetrios Constantine 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. Some of Tuttle's own fame and unique successes as a teacher are connected to the teaching of healthy physical habits in conjunction with technique and effective and communicative music-making.

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The last person on the list, Dr. Wilhelm Reich, was not a musician. As Matthew Dane points out in his dissertation, Tuttle views Reich as the "ultimate" in connecting the physical to the emotional, so essential in musical performance. Tuttle's insistence that her students acquire healthy physical habits with the instrument is not solely for reasons of physical comfort and injury-free professional longevity. She also feels that connecting emotionally with the music's inherent characters and conveying these emotions from a deeply-felt well of personal experience are of paramount importance. She maintains 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. Thus inspired by Reich, she encourages students to journey inward, to "work on" themselves, in order to live fuller, richer lives and thereby enhance the power of their artistic expression. Her nearly 50 years of marriage to her beloved husband, Morty, himself a Reichian psychoanalyst, have continually deepened these beliefs in Reich's philosophies.

Karen Tuttle's extraordinary pedagogy consists of many ingredients—her deep and inspiring love of music; her unique physical approach to the instrument; her warm, loving, and generous personality. She tirelessly helps us become the best performers and teachers we can be. She also insists we learn to become good colleagues. Cut-throat competition and the resulting alienation were not tolerated in her studio. Instead, we were encouraged to engage in lively discourse, constructively criticizing when necessary, but always being supportive of each other. The magnificent result of this is that we, her students, have become a family of sorts. I count some of my Tuttle "siblings" among my closest friends and most cherished colleagues.

Karen Tuttle's students hold prominent positions throughout the field of music—as principal and section players in major orchestras, soloists, quartet players, and professors in conservatories and universities the world over. Even non-violist colleagues who studied chamber music with her count her among their "major teachers," so profound was her influence on them!

While Tuttle will no longer be teaching at Juilliard, she will continue to participate in the annual Karen Tuttle Coordination Workshop (initially founded by Jeffrey Irvine at the Cleveland Institute of Music), which will be hosted in June 2004 by Susan Dubois at the University of North Texas. She also will continue to teach master classes at various music schools around the country.

There is, of course, so much more to say—but I will stop here, and finish with a resounding and heartfelt "thank you" to our beloved Tuttle—for all that she has done and continues to do for countless people around the world, and for all that she is. She has enriched more lives in more profound ways than she will ever know. We all feel so privileged and deeply grateful to have her in our lives.

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