

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
WILLA E. STEWART-SETSECK**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Willa E. Stewart-Setseck, professor, music, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
WILLA E. STEWART-SETSECK**

Willa Stewart-Setseck, former professor of voice at The University of Texas at Austin, died in Austin on May 19, 2002. She had been plagued with ill health and numerous surgical procedures, including crushed vertebrae and replacement of both knees. During the last six or seven years of her life she was also almost completely blind. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in her honor at Saint Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Austin and was attended by colleagues, friends, and students from far and near. Conrad Immel, baritone, came from California to read a beautiful eulogy, written by Paulina Stark, in remembrance of their former teacher and her profound influence on them and others. He also sang a beautiful vocal solo as tribute to his mentor and friend.

Willa Mae Stewart was born in Lockwood Missouri, on March 8, 1917. Her early musical training included lessons on the piano, the violin, and the tuba. She received a bachelor's degree in music in 1938 from Southwest Missouri State Teacher's College in Springfield, Missouri. She was also a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1942. She studied on scholarship at Curtis under Horatio Farrar, Elizabeth Schumann, and William Thorner, who also taught the great Rosa Ponselle. She later worked with Milan Petrovitch and Paul Althouse. During her studies at Curtis, she was a friend of composer Samuel Barber and was the first to sing many of the songs he composed during that time. On January 26, 1941, before graduation, she married Michael Setseck, whom she had met in New York. They lived together on Staten Island and during this period she also sang at Radio City Music Hall. They were happily married for 54 years. Michael Setseck died in 1995.

At the age of 25 she began her career with the old San Carlo Opera Company, touring through North America and singing such roles as Aida, Santuzza, Nedda, Leonora (*Il Trovatore*) Marguerite, Pamina, Maddalena (*Andrea Chenier*), and Michaela. She also appeared with the New York City Center Opera, San Francisco Opera, Chicago Lyric, and other companies in the United States. Aida was one of her most important roles and during her career she sang over 300 performances of it. In 1947 she had the good fortune to launch her European career. The opportunity arose when she was engaged to replace Ljuba Welitsch at the Vienna Staatsoper. Between 1947 and 1952 she sang at Covent Garden, Royal Albert Hall with the London Symphony, La Scala, Vienna Staatsoper, and the Baths in Caracalla in Rome. Her major roles besides Aida included Marguerite, Santuzza, Tosca, Pamina, Leonora in *Il Trovatore*, Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Maddelena in *Andrea Chenier*, and she sang a few performances of various Valkyries in Wagner's *Die Walküre*. She sang with many distinguished singers including George London, Richard Tucker, Jan Pierce, and Jess Walters. Miss Stewart also appeared in concert performances at Carnegie Hall, with the Detroit and Philadelphia Orchestras, and with the CBS and NBC Symphonies.

In 1952, at the age of 35, she was contracted to make her debut at the Metropolitan Opera and at La Scala in the coming season. Unfortunately, just at this time her mother died and Miss Stewart suffered a heart attack which forced an early retirement from her operatic career. She moved to Denton, Texas, in 1955 and accepted a teaching position at North Texas State University. There she taught a full load of students and at the same time completed her own master's degree. In 1957 she joined the voice faculty of The University of Texas at Austin. She served our University as professor of voice for 23 years, and retired from her position in 1980. From 1958-1963 she spent her summers teaching singers in the Santa Fe Opera's Apprentice Program. After her retirement, she taught one year as adjunct professor of voice at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and for many years thereafter she also taught privately in her home.

During her teaching career she produced countless winners of numerous important national and international competitions and participants in various professional opera training programs, including the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco's Merola program, Santa Fe Opera's Apprentice program, National Association of Teachers of Singing, and the Friday Morning Music Club in Washington, D.C. Five of her students were Metropolitan Regional Audition winners: Norma Newton, Carolyn Heafner, Conrad Immel, William Neill, and Kathleen Mott. Willa Stewart was highly regarded for her wide-ranging knowledge of the art of singing and for her complete devotion to her students. Professor Stewart's stellar reputation brought excellent students to our vocal program and produced a long succession of successful and respected professional singers and teachers of singing. She was famous for her dramatic personality and charismatic style. She was also a warm, passionate woman, and regularly inspired love and devotion in her pupils.

In her will, Willa Stewart made provision for a generous endowment to The University of Texas at Austin School of Music. The Willa Stewart-Setseck Scholarship for graduate applied voice students was given to provide scholarships for talented young singers. This gift is a regular reminder to us all of Willa Stewart's devotion to the art of singing and to The University of Texas at Austin.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Rose A. Taylor (chair) and Lita A. Guerra.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Fine Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on November 11, 2003. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.