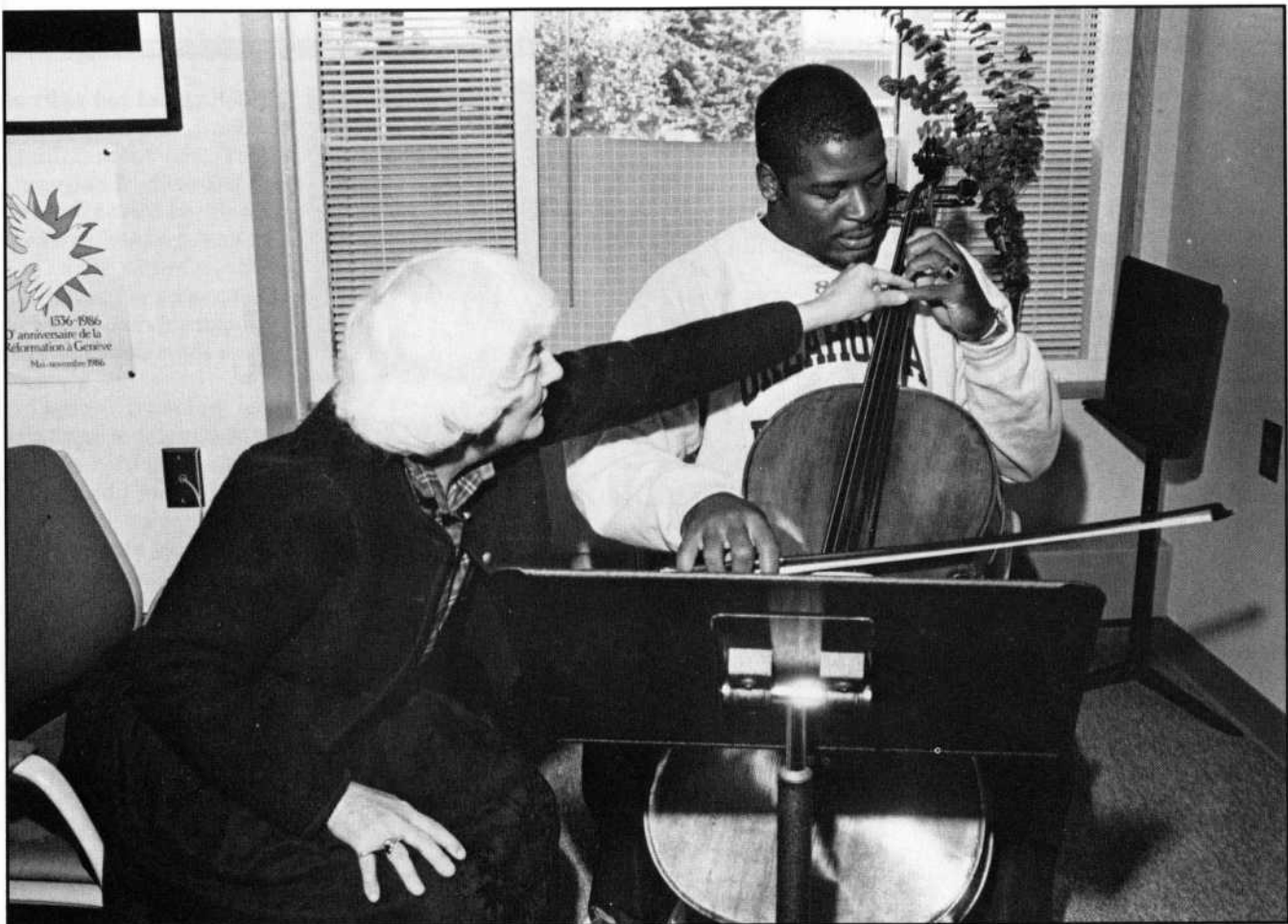


*Some of them may teach,
a few of them may go on to concert careers.
No matter what their ultimate destinations,
students leaving Marjory Cornelius' studio
will have gained a . . .*

MENTOR FOR A LIFETIME



By MARGARET FRENCH



With her trademark snow-white locks shining from the cello section, Marjory Lunt Cornelius is easily spotted amid fellow members of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra. Keeping pace with this OU music professor, however, demands more than the conductor's baton. Her daily schedule resembles that of a country doctor in a one-doctor town.

Precise planning allows Marge Cornelius to juggle teaching duties with a wide range of performing and service activities. In the aforementioned OKC Philharmonic, she is reprising a role she occupied with the present orchestra's forerunner, the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra, for some 25 years. She plays with the internationally celebrated Quartet Oklahoma, teaches at the unique, nationally recognized and highly successful Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, pursues annual

summer adventures abroad and directs the Gabor Rejto Memorial Cello Fest at OU. In addition to her University classes, she maintains a private studio of students she is grooming to continue at the college level.

Guided to the rich, lower-tone cello, she theorizes, by a contralto mother and low bass father, Cornelius notes that she "doesn't remember caring about anything else." She began cello lessons at 11 and her college education at the tender age of 15. Her educational background evokes a period of stricter formality.

"It was the end of an era," she recalls of her experience at Bethany College, a Swedish Lutheran school in Lindsborg, Kansas, "when most all the music faculty was European or European-trained."

The young inspired student's fervor for her passion began early. She worked traveling shows and Saturday night jazz performances, playing wherever she could while earning a double major

This photo with future NFL standout Keith Jackson was no publicity stunt. He was—and is—a serious cellist whom Marge found a delightful student.

in music education and performance with minors in history, English and sociology. She also received a master's in music from North Texas State University.

While teaching general music in Norman Public Schools, she launched what was to become a lifetime career at the University of Oklahoma. A part-time position "evolved" over 28 years into a full professorship, chairmanship of the string area and upcoming service in OU's Faculty Senate.

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students all over the country, all over the world—many of them playing, teaching. It is extremely gratifying.”

Cornelius sometimes visits those students on other continents. Former student John DeVore, who lives in Geneva and plays with the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande, has a “huge” private class, and in the summer he offers the Festival de Violoncelle.

Off goes the Sooner, her 25-pound cello “B” (“I wouldn’t dare risk the *best* cello”) in tow.

“I go to Geneva and teach, or sometimes we go out in the country, near Mont Blanc, and I might spend another couple of weeks in another village tucked up in the Alps, at St. Jeoire, France.”

Cornelius has validated her European passport for 12 years, first making the trip for an international string teacher’s conference in Salzburg and another in Graz, Austria. She has toured central Europe with OU’s Irv Wagner and his popular Broadway Gala many times (*Sooner Magazine* Fall/Winter 1990). With the d’Archange Trio and Quartet Oklahoma, she has undertaken several major European chamber music and orchestra engagements.

“We have had wonderful European tours,” she remembers of Quartet Oklahoma’s dates that included England, Ireland, Wales, Switzerland, Germany, France, Austria, Italy and Spain. “The d’Archange Trio spent one three-week period concertizing in Seville, in the south of Spain, Portugal and England.”

She has performed in concerts that have been recorded for broadcast on Munich, Berlin, Madrid and Dublin radio and Bavarian radio and television. Upon hearing one of her performances, an Austrian conductor invited Cornelius to his festival nestled in the tiny village of Erl-Tirol “about an hour to lunch in Munich, Salzburg or Innsbruck.” A chamber music tour often precedes or follows the three-week International Orchestra Festival, of which she is now a six-year veteran.

Providing ample exposure is Quartet Oklahoma, in which she has played since 1985 alongside violist Wayne Crouse and violinists Alison Neufeld and Michael Ma, all fellow OU faculty members. In addition to the European



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tours, the group has performed in concert and presented clinics in public schools locally. Selections from the Academia Filharmonica concerts and Quartet Oklahoma concerts have been broadcast seven times on the popular “Performance Today” segment on National Public Radio.

Because the consummate teacher also is an earnest student, the native Kansan squeezes in study periods for herself as well. At Oxford University, she studied with Kato Havas, a “little Hungarian grandmother who is pure dynamite and has wonderful ideas about string teaching.” While in London, she coached with Joan Dickson at Royal College; but her principal

teacher, she notes without pause, was the late Gabor Rejto, born in Budapest, protégé of the great Pablo Casals.

“Gabi,” she fondly remembers, “immediately put me at ease. ‘Of course, you can do anything you want to do,’ he encouraged. ‘Come. We’ll just get right to work.’”

Continued

For musicians to earn a living, they must be well trained and versatile. Here Marge teaches a University techniques class for non-string majors.



The relationship flourished, and Cornelius repeatedly journeyed to Rejto's summer studio at the Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California, for tutelage and special projects.

Rejto returned the favor. Every three years, he visited OU, where he conducted master classes and worked with Cornelius' charges, some of whom she ferried out to his graduate program for further nurturing.

"The students adored him," she smiles. "He was an inspiration—full of stories and just wonderful.

"He was very strict in the lessons. When it came time to play, you had to deliver and defend what you were doing, but he knew how to teach. Of course, teaching is leading someone forward and helping them want to learn what comes next.

"He had such *concepts*," Cornelius remembers of her mentor, who instilled in her lessons and principles far beyond exemplary teaching.

"You take the student where he is and build on what is there, always respecting his dignity. That is exactly what Gabi did for me, and he was always supportive. We became very dear friends. He was one of the finest human beings you can ever imagine. I do my best to teach like Gabor," she confesses proudly.

To honor the memory of the man with whom she apprenticed for 15 years, Cornelius founded the OU Cello Fest. Rejto's son Peter, a prominent cellist from Arizona, delighted her with his second visit as guest artist for last spring's cello gathering, now in its sixth year. An outgrowth of the festival is the Gabor Rejto Memorial Scholarship, which she subsidizes and presents to a deserving and exceptional OU student who most embodies Rejto's philosophies.

This year 50 musicians attended the fest; some were college students, some high school. Teachers statewide also participated.

"A young man showed up," begins Cornelius, eyes dancing. "'I'll bet you don't remember who I am,' he told me. 'Fifteen years ago, I was in the class, and I just had to come down for Cello Fest and play in the cello choir.'"

She has no trouble understanding the desire of this man, now an Oklahoma City attorney. Cornelius, whose

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favorite music is "really what I'm playing at the moment," performs in several community orchestras. Although she "cut back a bit last year," she has performed with groups from Our Lady's Cathedral, Christ the King, Nichols Hills Methodist and the Lawton Philharmonic.

And then there is the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, in which Marge quite understandably feels a tremendous sense of pride. The orchestra comprises 84 members, including second chair cellist Cornelius and 15 other University of Oklahoma faculty members, all of whom, she says, are "in there with our shoulders to the wheel putting an orchestra together."

The current group of musicians—several of whom played in the previous orchestra—picked up last year where the defunct symphony had left a void in the community amid labor-related strife. The "new" orchestra is operating not in the red, but with an *endowment*.

"We're putting a lot into this," admits Cornelius, only to add quickly, "it must be that way for it to work—to exist."

An exhaustive Philharmonic schedule last year included nine classics, five pops, three family concerts and several "runouts," in which the orchestra plays in Chickasha or perhaps Tahlequah. The performances, which produced 150 pieces last year, required 100-125 "services."

"Rehearsals," elaborates Marge on the term. "... the nights you teach until 6:30, eat a sandwich on the way to Oklahoma City for a 7:30 rehearsal and don't arrive home until 11 or 12."

When the Philharmonic season is concluded, the last exam and the final jury scored at semester's end, Cornelius hurries down to Quartz Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma, where she is a perennial faculty member of OSAI, now in its 14th year. There she and a group of her peers join their counterparts in ballet and modern dance, writ-

ing, mime, acting, painting, orchestra, print making and photography for an intense, two-week fine arts camp for high schoolers.

"The Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain affords the very finest opportunity for growth and achievement for Oklahoma's advanced students in the arts," Cornelius says, adding her interpretation of the benefits to students in her discipline.

"For the musicians, the experience of performing with other top quality students and world-renowned conductors is invaluable."

Sandwiched between professional commitments, Cornelius' personal life includes Elizabeth and Linn Ashmore, her daughter and son-in-law of Lubbock, Texas, and her "two beautiful and exceptional" granddaughters, Carolyn and Catherine. Carolyn, the eldest, accompanied Marge on her journey to Europe this summer.

Cornelius is a practitioner of the Alexander technique, which, roughly defined, is the study of balanced body movement. "Holistic cello playing," Cornelius dubs it. "Monetary value aside, you basically only have a box and a stick and some horsehair to deal with, so it is whatever is initiated with the body and heart that comes through the instrument as music. And you have to come into balance with the instrument, or the instrument becomes your foe."

In her "spare" time, Cornelius, the first recipient of the American String Teachers' Oklahoma Teacher of the Year Award in 1984, teaches in her private studio at home. The lessons are chiefly preparatory for high school students, whom she more than likely will instruct when they enroll at OU, but she teaches older pupils as well. A woman from the Philharmonic, for instance, who began studying with Marge in high school, has returned for additional private tutoring upon completion of her bachelor's and master's degrees.



Occasionally someone simply “shows up” at her office seeking lessons. While he was making a name for himself on Owen Field, Keith Jackson was busy proving himself to his private cello teacher. Not surprisingly, the well-coordinated athlete played—and continues to play—very well, Cornelius remembers of the affable Jackson, now a standout tight end with the Philadelphia Eagles of the National Football League.

Another day an OU department chairman appeared in her doorway. “I’m burning to learn how to play the cello,” he told her. “I *have* to learn how to play.” And later he confessed that “this is one of the most wonderful things that has come into my life, because it’s a project I can concentrate on, something apart from what I *have* to do.”

Cornelius teaches 25 cellists at OU on an individual basis (with the assistance of her “very first” graduate assistant, Myron Flippin). She also directs a class in string techniques for the non-

string players—“tuba, percussion, so forth, just in case they go out and are told, ‘This is a great job, and we’d love to have you, but you need to know something about strings.’”

Even the cello majors are not necessarily destined to be concert artists, she notes of the group, which includes eight honors students, four of which are Merit Scholars.

“Students these days are selecting more and more the Bachelor of Musical Arts program, where they have a two-pronged education going, with a concentration in music and the instrument, and a concentration in another interest, such as journalism or business administration, which I think is extremely healthy.

“For me it’s not just a matter of preparing someone to earn a living. It’s a feeling of contribution, and for my own person, that’s necessary.

“I have to have that feeling of investing myself in young people, because learning to play is not the end in

The OU faculty who compose Quartet Oklahoma, Michael Ma, left, Alison Neufeld, Wayne Crouse and Marjory Cornelius, have performed widely here and abroad.

itself. They have to have something else they can take with them.”

That something, she explains, is what provides the drive, what makes them want music in their lives forever.

Back on stage with the Philharmonic, Marge Cornelius (this time with cello “A”) joins in the final phrases of a Tchaikovsky piano concerto, the last stop before putting away a typically full day, one teeming with activities.

“I must say, I’ve worked very hard, and that’s fine,” Cornelius says flatly but with sincerity. “I do what I love and enjoy doing it. I love every minute of it.”

