

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITA BETTINA BJORKSTEN-ORSECH

She was born Bettina Feitler on July 26, 1908 in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany. From early youth, her mother, an accomplished pianist, instilled in Bettina and her younger brother a love of art and music. The Feitler home on Bettinastrasse was a haven for musicians and artists, especially those fleeing to the West; among them were the young Polish brothers, Alexander and Mischa Schneider, future members of the Budapest String Quartet. The family also hosted composers Alban Berg and Paul Hindemith. In their home were displayed works by contemporary artists and abstract expressionists such as Emil Nolde and Otto Dix.

Bettina excelled at the piano despite a finger injury that prevented her from pursuing a career on that instrument. After graduating from the Munich Academy of Music, she studied in Switzerland with Ria Ginster and made her debut in Basel. By 1936, Bettina was well embarked on a musical career in Europe when the rise of Nazism caused her to migrate with her family to Brazil. In 1938, she sailed to New York City where she married Johan Bjorksten; they moved to Chicago where daughter Sybil was born, and later to Philadelphia where son Oliver was born.

In 1948, the family settled in Madison, where Johan, a chemist, founded Bjorksten Research Laboratories. Bettina was apprehensive at first about the cultural life in a small midwestern city; but her fears were put to rest when she learned that Rudolf Kolisch was leading the Pro Arte Quartet on the campus, and Danish pianist Gunnar Johansen was artist-in-residence. The three of them became lifelong friends.

In the 1950s, Bettina was invited to join the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Music, where she ultimately achieved the rank of full professor. Her students, many of them non-music majors, went on to notable careers in many different fields. Her performing career combined her great interest in the classical masters with music of 20th-century composers. She sang Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with the Pro Arte Quartet in concert and on public television.

Bettina was a soloist with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in the Poulenc *Gloria*, the Mahler Fourth Symphony, the Bach *St. Matthew Passion* and the Mozart *Requiem*. With university ensembles, she sang roles in the Brahms *Requiem*, the Bach *Christmas Oratorio* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. She toured the state in lieder and chamber programs with faculty pianists Paul Jones, Gunnar Johnsen, Leo Steffens and Howard Karp, and in a voice faculty quartet, which over the years included Karl Brock, John Paton, Dale Gilbert and Lois Fisher. During the residency of pianist Paul Badura-Skoda, she and the Viennese artist performed several lieder recitals.

In 1958, she married Madison orthodontist Dr. George Orsech.

In the 1960s and '70s, she was heard by Wisconsin Public Radio's statewide audience on two series of programs on the recorded art song literature. Long after the broadcasts, she continued to receive appreciative comments from listeners and requests from voice teachers for taped copies to use in their own teaching. A CD recording was produced from her performances between the years 1973 and 1978.

Outside academia, Bettina generously shared her rich intellectual heritage as well as her musical training. She relished opportunities to perform in lecture-recitals with colleagues from speech, theater and the visual arts. Programs such as *Romantic Women and the Arts*, *Mother and Child in Art and Music*, and *All Things Beautiful* were popular with community groups throughout the state. As a member of Phi Beta, a

professional fraternity for the creative and performing arts, she performed frequently and served in several offices. She also mentored the collegiate chapter.

Travel to international music meetings took her to Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Balkans, the near East, Japan and Korea. She read voraciously and was conversant in philosophy, comparative religions, politics and international relations. She was also a connoisseur of children's books.

Privately, she was a member of the Madison Symphony Orchestra, Madison Opera, Chazen Museum of Art, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Audubon Society, Friends of the Arboretum and Euterpe Music Club.

Bettina became a Quaker in Philadelphia in 1942 and joined the Madison Society of Friends in 1948, where she served regularly on committees that care for those with needs. She was a longtime member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and was always very generous to causes that support peace.

Following mandated retirement in 1978 at age 70, she maintained a studio in her Arbor Drive apartment for professional and amateur singers, and she performed her last solo concert at age 79.

Over the years, she maintained a close relationship with Edgewood College near her home, and in retirement, she was a guest lecturer in Edgewood's *Living and Learning* series. She was also invited to give one of its "Eloquence and Eminence: Emeritus Faculty Lectures."

Bettina was a gracious and welcoming colleague to new voice faculty members and attended concerts with great interest and acumen until her death. Her presence at a recital was always followed with her loving and perceptive comments as well as inquiries into the well-being of the performer's family.

Bettina moved to Oakwood Village Retirement Center in 2000, and her beloved Bechstein piano, a gift from her father at birth, moved there with her, as she continued to teach and coach into her nineties. The Bechstein now resides at the School of Music.

She was predeceased by her daughter Sybil Joan Rennenkampf, grandson Andrew Bjorksten, first husband Dr. Johan Bjorksten and second husband Dr. George Orsech. She is survived by her son, Dr. Oliver Bjorksten, his wife Wista, grandchildren Julia Rennenkampf, Jon Bjorksten, Brad Bjorksten, Sybil Bjorksten Gohari, and eight great-grandchildren. She is further survived by a multitude of grateful and admiring students.

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