EXIT INTERVIEW: ORGAN PROFESSOR CAROLE TERRY

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Organ Professor Carole Terry retired in June after 40 years on the School of Music faculty (Photo: Steve Korn)

Longtime UW organ professor Carole Terry retired in June after 40 years on the School of Music faculty. She stopped by the Music Building during fall quarter to reflect upon her life in music, her not-so-secret love of rock-and-roll, and plans for the immediate future, in which “furthering the cause of the pipe organ” (in her words) continues to figure prominently.

Q AND A: UW ORGAN PROFESSOR CAROLE TERRY

When did you begin studying and performing organ?

I was a pianist, and I was told that there weren't enough church organists to go around. I came from a small town in eastern Long Island—Southampton—and I was told that I could make some money. Organists make money (laughs)—maybe not a lot, but a little bit. So, I learned how to play hymns, and started learning how to play the organ, but also continued to play the piano. At my first church job, when I was ten years old, my mother helped me. She had the order of service on cardboard cards, and so when the next thing came up, she handed it to me. Now both of us were not liturgically raised, so if we had messed the cards up, it would have been all over (laughs). But thankfully we didn't, and I was paid the princely sum of five dollars a Sunday. But I was only ten, and I won't say how long ago that was. It was a long time ago! When I was in high school, I had a church job for four years, and I was able to play under some of the best conductors on Long Island—including the head of the Southampton Choral Society—so I learned a lot about accompanying. I got twenty-five dollars a Sunday, and it was pretty good. I was able to buy all my own clothes. I was happy.

Did you come from a musical family?
Not really. My mother played the piano a little bit. And my father sat there with me every day to help me practice the piano. And I think he was artistic in his own way. He painted and he made things, and I think deep down he had a love of music, as well as my mother. And so, they encouraged that. I had a record player when I was really young, and I danced around the room to recorded music, and I continued to do that into my teens with all of the musicals from Broadway that we could go see because New York was only an hour, hour-and-a-half away. I loved *West Side Story*

**Who is the greatest composer of all time?**

That's a tough one. As an organist I'm supposed to say J.S. Bach. He is the greatest composer for a variety of reasons. He was able to write in so many different styles—in Renaissance style, and Baroque style, and he foreshadowed the Classical style. And if I had to pick another one, just because I would love to, that would be Johannes Brahms. Because of the passion and the zeal with which he wrote his symphonies and songs and chamber quartets, and so on. A different genre than Bach, but ever so emotional. I think Bach was emotional too, in his cantata works, and in a way, he foreshadows the passion of the Romantic period, and the Classical period.

**What do you like best about being retired?**

Not looking at the clock so much. I would say I still am on the school's schedule, and if I go to bed early like I did last night, I get up at 4:30, and I'm answering emails from former students and other people. What I really like is sleeping in when I can and not looking at the clock.

**What do you miss about teaching at the School of Music?**

I really miss being around all my faculty and staff friends and of course my wonderful students. I love to go up and down the halls, and I love to go and see people in the office, I like to come and see you, I like to say hi to Rhonda Kline and Michael Partington on the ground floor and anyone else I run into. If I don't know somebody, that's a face I need to make friends with. I know that there's a lot of students that I don't really know, but I always say hello because I feel that the School of Music needs to have that friendly vibe to it.

**What is something you don't miss?**

I don't miss deadlines. I don't miss faculty meetings. The anxiety of worrying about things that are out of my control. That I really don't miss.

**A faculty colleague once said or did something that you will never forget.**

A colleague recently described me in an email to a colleague of his as “my beloved colleague of many years who is now retired,” and I was so taken by the use of words that I wrote him back. Also, let me say that I have always loved my piano colleagues. They have been so supportive of me, and they appreciate the fact that I love piano music, and they've always said that, and I love the fact that over the years they have got to know organ music more and more. In fact, Robin McCabe once studied the organ, so there you go. One time I said to her, “There's no Debussy for the organ. I am really jealous.” And she said, “That's right, there isn't. Oh, that's terrible!” And I said, “Well, we've got others. We've got Bach, we've got Buxtehude, we've got Mozart, we've got Brahms, Duruflé, Messiaen....

**What is the greatest lesson you have learned from a student?**

That I need to slow down and be very analytical in my presentations in lecture classes and also in lessons. I've gotten very exuberant, and I get so worked up sometimes that I just need to calm myself down. And that exuberance they love, but sometimes they just needed slow and steady as she goes. I could see it in their eyes: “Just take it back a couple of steps. You're going a little too fast. You've got lots to say, but let's just put the brake on a bit.”

**Do you have any words of wisdom for a new faculty colleague?**

Be kind to others. Make sure your students are well taken care of. Treat them as you would your family. My own kids sometimes were a bit jealous. They knew I had all these other students, and I took very good care of them. And they said, 'Well, Mom, you have us, but you also have your other children.' Well, they are. They're my kids. And they're wonderful.

**Beatles or Stones?**
I think that the Stones are hard-drivin’ and I love that kind of, well...shall we say...down and dirty. Gritty! I love that! I think of them as being someone that is just always from the gut. They're always from the gut. Rhythmic...throbbing. Just throbbing. But let me just say, I love the Beatles, because they are kind of like the Bach of the rock-and-roll world. And I had every album of theirs. What the difference is between those two is that I saw them progress, I saw them evolve, and take on new types of songs, new styles, and so on that I didn't see the Stones do. So I guess if I had to pick the one, I'd pick the Beatles. But I still like the Stones.

If you were stranded on a desert island, what music would you want to have with you?

I think what comes to mind is one of two things. It would either be the cello solo from the Brahms Second Piano Concerto—the whole piano concerto, but especially the cello solo—or some blues, like Champion Jack Dupree, John Lee Hooker, Leadbelly, Bessie Smith, or Billie Holiday. I love the blues. It's one of my favorite, favorite things. And the reason I like it, and I told my students, you've got to listen to jazz, you also have to listen to blues, because you learn how to do rubato, and it's really hard to teach rubato to people—pushing and pulling the beat. Taking a little time and giving it back and so on. That is what the blues is all about. You listen to those singers and those musicians and you know how they just work in between the cracks of the beat, but they always land in the right place.

What is something about you that might surprise those who don't know you well?

I love rock music, and I used to usher rock concerts when I was a student at Southern Methodist University. We got in free, and we had to put people in their seats and sometimes that was not easy. So I had the opportunity to hear the Who, the Band, Iron Butterfly, Jimi Hendrix (twice). I went to hear Elton John, and Elton John jumped up onto the piano with his red jumpsuit—which I saw in the new movie about him the other day, which I was actually privy to seeing him do—James Taylor, Carole King, and I could go on. And the Rolling Stones. And the Beatles, back in 1964 in Shea Stadium, but I wasn't ushering that. I was a young girl. And I won't say how old. I wasn't screaming, I was absolutely laughing at what was going on. They were on the second base of a baseball diamond and women were jumping over the fence and running toward second base, and policemen were running to catch them, and others were fainting, and people were carrying them out. It was Beatlemania.

What is your proudest achievement at the UW?

Raising money for the organ in the Walker-Ames Room and subsequent organs that we got here. Improving the facilities at the school for the organists. I also feel very proud of the fact that I placed people in really good jobs around the country, specifically Robert Morgan at Stanford University, who is university organist at Stanford, Eunsung Kim, who is at Seoul Theological University, and others, unnamed, that I am very, very proud of. And I feel that I did my best for them, and I'm very happy that they were able to land good positions.

What are your plans for the immediate future?

I'm going to go around the country—I haven't organized all this yet—but I've been still performing, and I'll be playing at the national American Guild of Organists convention in July next year. I'm going to be doing workshops and lectures at various universities, specifically on the works of Bach and Mendelssohn and also on the physiology of organ technique, of which I am very, very interested. You know: How do you play using your body correctly on the organ, because the organ is just so darned complicated.

What happens to organ studies at the UW now that you are retired?

I'm very gratified that Joseph Adam has taken over and is teaching the students who are here now. I will finish some of the students out who have not completed their DMAs because I feel like I have given them tutorials, and I've seen them through, and I want to make sure that they finish under me. And I'm hopeful that we will still be able here at the School of Music to produce organists that can function in the community as accompanists, church organists, directors and so on. I think that people in the community—organizations who hire organists—will further the cause of the organ in order to help themselves and the School of Music because they need to fill positions.

Words of advice for current and former students?

Be true to yourself. Make sure you're always honest and tell people what you're really thinking. Practice hard. Know that the way you practice and the way you live your life work together. If you are frantic, your practice
will be frantic. If you don't analyze the pieces, you'll go to do things in an non-analytical manner, and you'll take too much time. I think younger people don't tend to think it out first, and there is a lot of wasted time. And as you get to be my age you realize there is only so much time in life. Think before you put your hands on the keys. Sing. Study. Analyze.

Any words of advice for your faculty colleagues?

Be fair to one another. Look out for the good of the school and the students first and foremost. They are the ones that make up the population and the body and the heart and the emotion and the mind of the school. Anything that's done with programs and people should always keep the students in mind.

How will you remain involved with the Seattle organ community now that you have retired?

I will be at American Guild of Organists meetings, I will be playing at Epiphany Parish as the artist in residence, and I will continue to help them with whatever is needed with their music. I'm going to be teaching over there at the Epiphany Music Academy, so I'll be teaching young organists, and I'd like to further the pipe organ that way, to bring some very, very, young people into the fold and teach them how to play the organ. I'm very excited about teaching young people. I think I can keep my zeal going and keep my interest in teaching by looking at a younger group, and they'll fire me up. And that I will like.

Carole Terry hosts the Halloween Organ Concert on Sunday, Oct. 27, 7:30 p.m., in the Walker-Ames Room of Kane Hall. Admission is free.