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## PREFACE

ALL COMPOSERS BEGIN as regional artists, before the lucky few step onto the international stage.

Born during Vancouver's pioneer beginnings, Jean Coulthard lived to participate in its busy and prosperous twenty-first century. Her life as citizen, parent, and grandparent intersected with the politics and the social development of a growing and increasingly wealthy city.

Coulthard's musical career paralleled the development of her country and city. (Coulthard pronounced her name "coal-thard," with "th" as in think, and "d" as in dark — syllables equally stressed — and *not* 'ku:ltar as the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* imagines.) In childhood she thought of Canada as part of the great British Empire. Her music took shape in tandem with the growth of Canada's cultural life, population, politics, and ambitions. In her old age, Coulthard knew Canada as a broadly independent cultural force, a

nation which in turn honoured her as one of its pre-eminent creative citizens.

Coulthard remained a patriotic, consciously Canadian artist, with an abiding love of French and British culture. As a child she saw Sir Wilfrid Laurier, a great Canadian prime minister. She could recall the reign of King Edward VII, and witnessed the visit of King George VI and the Queen to Canada in 1939. She heard her parents discuss American presidents Wilson, Coolidge, Harding, F.D. Roosevelt, and lived through the governments of Canadian Prime Ministers Wilfrid Laurier, Robert Borden, R.B. Bennett, Mackenzie King, Louis St. Laurent, Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau.

When she died, in her ninety-third year, the Canadian Prime Minister was Jean Chrétien, and Queen Elizabeth II, whose coronation she celebrated in music with *Prayer for Elizabeth*, had been on the throne for almost fifty years. Coulthard had seen a century of world wars, economic upheaval, and rapid social development. Her life helps us to see how art, music, and an important segment of Canadian society evolved in the twentieth century. To the end, she relied on her West Coast roots, taking artistic nourishment from the ocean, the mountains, and the forests of British Columbia.

Coulthard was a participant in the world of Canadian art music continuously from the 1920s until her death. She saw it all with a keen artist's eye, now and again gently sceptical, but always committed to the Canadian nation and to her beloved British Columbia.

Coulthard visited and worked with great European composers, and enjoyed the good fortune of teaching students who became life-long friends, even when they scattered across the globe. As early as the late 1930s, Jean Coulthard's music was a feature of radio broadcasts in Canada, and then in the United States and Europe. Today a wide selection of her works is available in print and on CD. Generations of students in Canada's conservatories and studios have learned her piano music, played her works for strings, and performed her vocal and choral music. Orchestras and soloists regularly program her larger works.

Her reputation has grown among students of Canadian music, especially with the recent surge of interest in women composers. There are articles on Coulthard in Canada's own music dictionary, *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Canada*. For international perspectives on her work, one can turn to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* or the German musicological dictionary *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.

*Jean Coulthard: A Life in Music* offers one way of viewing Jean Coulthard's life and music — through words, photographs, and musical examples. We take into account her vision of art, community, politics, and life. But the book is neither in-depth biography nor intensive theoretical analysis. Rather, the authors hope to introduce something of the person and musician that Jean Coulthard was. We hope to reach general readers and listeners, and the many students who might be studying her life or learning her music for performances or examinations. We have incorporated samples from Coulthard's manuscripts, brief analyses of work from each phase of her life, a chronology that connects Coulthard's life to her musical and social contexts, and a selective list of important works from her mammoth catalogue. We include a guide to published and unpublished sources and a discography of currently available CDs.



*Miss Jean Coulthard*



## A MUSICAL FAMILY

Composer Jean Coulthard spent her last birthday on the tenth of February 2000. Celebrations were subdued. Two years earlier there had been concerts, awards, a huge UBC birthday party, and special family events on the day. But in 2000 there was nothing public, although her spacious apartment (or “flat,” as she invariably called it, in the British manner) brimmed with cards and messages from family and friends.

There were flowers for a Coulthard birthday: bouquets of roses and white tulips, potted azaleas, fragrant hyacinths. And always what the English poet and gardener Vita Sackville-West called a “tussie-mussie” of snowdrops, one of the first confirmations of Vancouver’s early spring.

Coulthard could look back with satisfaction at a long, productive, and essentially happy life, more than a modicum of fame, the



*Jean Coulthard's baby book*

affectionate support of a large, influential circle of professional colleagues, and most significantly, a loving family.

She had been born ninety-two years earlier on a wet, dark morning in pioneer Vancouver. She came into the world at home, on the tenth of February 1908, in Vancouver's residential West End. By then, British Columbia had been in the Canadian confederation for just thirty-seven years, and the transcontinental railway was little more than twenty years old.

Jean was the first child of Dr. and Mrs. Walter Coulthard (née Jean Blake Robinson). Her sister, Margaret (Babs), followed three years later in 1911. The Coulthards were deeply rooted in an Upper Canadian sensibility. Their family particularly valued formal education. Both Coulthard grandfathers held university degrees — a rare thing in Canada before the 1960s — and both were Presbyterian ministers. Grandfather Robinson enjoyed a successful preaching career in Ontario and Quebec, then in the United States before retirement in Manhattan in the mid-1930s. Grandfather





*Vancouver, 1911*

*Vancouver Public Library, VPL 5207 (Photo: Philip Timms)*

Coulthard ministered in Ontario nearly all his adult life. Their children, Jean Coulthard's parents, uncles, and aunts — a dozen or so people in the close family grouping — were all professionals or in professional families. Jean's mother graduated with a musical diploma from the New England Conservatory, and her father was a graduate of the University of Toronto.

In the photographic evidence of Jean Coulthard's life, we see the much-loved child of an affluent, colonial Edwardian family. In old age, Coulthard confirmed this view:

My earliest recollections are being pushed in a little buggy for a walk in the park or to one of the English Bay beaches. My pusher was a Scottish nurse well starched into a white cap and large apron. There were no casually dressed children of professional classes in those days! I remember the borders of large trees and blue-grey sea, like rustling silk. (EC)

Another early recollection was of a sunny Vancouver, in the spring of 1911. The family still lived in a pleasant three-storey house on Broughton Street, complete with picket fence and large gardens front and back. (By 1940, that first Coulthard house was gone, replaced by a small apartment complex — and then, by 2005, enormous highrise buildings.) Photographs of the city in 1911 suggest a



*"My pusher was a Scottish nurse"*

smoky, sooty place. But that was not Jean Coulthard's recollection of it. Hers was a golden memory of childhood, of sunshine and flowers. For her the city was a clean and an easy place in which to play and grow, with trees, ocean, flowers, and music the constant companions of everyday life.

On this particular day of 1911, the flowers in question were a fine crop of early-March daffodils in a neighbour's front yard. There were three rows of them, thick and beckoning. Eighty-odd years later, Coulthard recalled how in a moment, she — as a tiny girl — had gone to work "harvesting" an entire row of flowers. She took whole plants, and always remembered their look under the bright Vancouver sun. Her arms were full and she could barely stagger under the load of yellow and green.

Her mother came out the door just in time to meet little Jean, complete with daffodils. The grown-up Coulthard's memory was of her mother's beloved face going from delight, to surprise, to horror. The maid, the mother, and the little girl contemplated the empty row on the neighbour's property. In a mother-daughter relation as close and untroubled as this, the momentary clouds on Mrs. Coulthard's face were enough to shock Jean into remembering, forever, her "mistake." She would tell the story of the daffodils all her adult life, always making the same point: "Really, the neighbours should have expected to share those pretty things!"

Family meant, as it does for most children, a whole world of habit, culture, and shared understandings. Her family culture meant that Jean Coulthard's musical efforts received early and strong sup-

port. Family culture accounts for the protective insulation that kept young Jean from the harsher aspects of life at the nation's western edge. It also helps to explain how and why a young woman with Jean Coulthard's gifts would choose the demanding life of music and musical composition. Among the Coulthards, self-discipline went back many generations.

Jean's father was as enthusiastic about literature, sculpture, the natural world, and the "art of living" as he was about his profession and his family. He gave music all the support he could at home, and helped keep it alive and well in Vancouver. A coastal man by choice, he enjoyed long sails and Gulf Island vacations, often quoting poets "at the drop of a hat." He and his family spent happy summers at a hotel on Quadra Island, between the British Columbia mainland and Vancouver Island. Dr. Coulthard loved his work, loved nature, and loved the arts.

In particular, he loved music. It was *the* building-block of family life. As Jean Coulthard put it:



*Dr. Coulthard and his daughters*