IN MEMORIAM
VERNA M. HARDER

Verna M. Harder (1912-2007) taught piano and piano pedagogy at The University of Texas at Austin from 1946 until her retirement as professor of music in 1977. She was a native of Illinois and received her formative training from Zelah Newcomb. She took her B.M. degree from McMurray College, which later recognized her as a distinguished alumna, and her M.M. from Illinois Wesleyan University. After additional study in New York, she became a member of the faculty at the latter school before coming to Austin.

A strong believer in continued study, she traveled extensively during summer vacations and on leaves of absence in this country and abroad. She studied piano with Frank Mannheimer (in London, Switzerland, Italy, and Duluth). She studied the pedagogical work of Joan Last at the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Orff system at the Piaget Institute in Geneva. There were also master classes with Guy Maier, Jörg Demus, Paul Badura-Skoda, Géza Anda, Alfred Brendel, Edwin Fischer, Rosina Lhévinne, and Beveridge Webster, among others.

While at UT, she continued to perform for many years. There were solo recitals in a number of states. She also played four-hand recitals with a colleague, Rita Pisk, and she collaborated with at least two others: the cellist, Phyllis Young, and the violist, Albert Gillis. Tours with Mr. Gillis took her across the United States, including both New York City and Yale University, as well as to Mexico City, where they played in the Palacio de Bellas Artes and also in the Sala Chopin. In 1993, Dr. Lorene Rogers, former president of UT, honored her by establishing an endowed scholarship in piano performance in her name.

Miss Harder was dedicated to the education of children—and their teachers—, and it was in that role that she made her most significant contribution and, in doing so, gained a national reputation. She established the piano pedagogy program at the university as well as The Piano Project, which consisted of students, ages four to 18, taught by university students, always under her close supervision. Her former university students and the parents and children of The Piano Project always remember with special fondness the great influence Miss Harder’s pedagogy classes had on them. Her legacy consists of instilling a deep love of music, training generations of future teachers in a musically sound and detailed pedagogy, and teaching, by example, an ethical and disciplined approach to life.

She remained characteristically active in retirement. Immediately after leaving the university, she walked from her home to Brykerwoods Elementary School and volunteered her assistance for many years to a first-grade teacher to help children who were having difficulty learning to read. Also, she and Louise Thompson, a piano teacher and friend, undertook the project of reading through all the piano works for four-hand piano. And, she traveled as much as possible—now to see the rest of the world. She always took one suitcase and when something new went in, something else was given to the needy. She much preferred traveling by freighter to any kind of organized tours. She visited the Far East; after her trip to the Middle East, she commented on the thrill of walking into Petra, the stone city in Jordan; she made a trip down the Nile; she went to sub-Saharan Africa, where a safari was made partially by balloon; she went around the tip of South America by ship, to Norway to see the fjords, to Alaska, to Turkey, Greece and the Greek islands. Her final trip was to Morocco, where she hired a driver for a tour of the Atlas Mountains.
Miss Harder was an extraordinary person. She never rode if she could walk, and she never drove if she could take a bus. Her fireplace was her chief source of heat, and she sawed the wood herself, although she allowed herself a chain saw in her later years. She loved nature, life, and art. Somehow, in this busy life, she still had the time to care for a huge vegetable garden, to needlepoint numerous pieces of furniture with colors designed by the artist, Kelly Fearing, and—as a good Roosevelt liberal—to keep a sharp eye on local, state, and national politics, which she loved to discuss.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Betty Mallard (chair), David Renner, and Hunter March.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Fine Arts, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on March 25, 2009. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB 2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.