

Canadian Composers Portrait Series
Jean Coulthard Documentary

Produced by Eitan Cornfield

JEAN COULTHARD : I feel that music is my whole life. When I write music, I'm releasing my inner self. I would hate to waste a lifetime obsessed with fashionable styles of music-writing of the moment.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Coulthard spent a lifetime marching to the sound of her own drummer, ignoring the fashionable styles of the moment. In her lifetime, she heard her work judged both as old-fashioned and ahead of its time. It was a lifetime that spanned most of the twentieth century. Coulthard was born in 1908, making her a contemporary of Shostakovich, Barber, and Messaien, and only a little younger than Aaron Copland. She was born to compose, but was forced by circumstance to fight a long battle to realize her destiny. She was always a believer in the civilizing influence of music.

DON MOWAT: Her voice is a voice that's very much needed in Canadian music. It's a voice that always has been needed in Canadian music, this quality of lyricism and passion.

JEAN COULTHARD: Unless music is able to reach the heart in some way, it loses its compelling power to minister to human welfare.

EITAN CORNFIELD: For a time, when modernity and innovation were qualities to be valued above all else, Jean Coulthard's music was viewed as unfashionable. It was easy for Canada's mid-century musical establishment to view Coulthard's music as somehow irrelevant. It wasn't just her quaint notions about the uses of music or the fact that she expressed her musical ideas with traditional means. She was also marginalized for being a woman.

DAVID DUKE: She was not particularly minded to blame her late development on gender, but I think I do, and I think anybody interested in the lives of women who've composed, need to be very aware of how convoluted and protracted her apprenticeship period was, before she felt she was an established composer.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Coulthard's story begins in the Edwardian world of turn of the century Vancouver.

JEAN COULTHARD: Vancouver in those days was a very charming small city of about 100,000 people who all loved the mountains and the sea. My mother was something of a musical pioneer in the west, having come to Vancouver in 1904, after her marriage to my father, a doctor. She was one of the few Canadian graduates of the New England Conservatory in Boston, and she played and sang beautifully. She is credited with introducing the music of Debussy to Vancouver audiences as early as 1908. I remember especially as a very small child her playing *Le Jardin sous la pluie* or *The Garden in the Rain* of Debussy.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: For 1918, 1920, 1925, Ravel was still alive. Debussy was only just dead. This was brand, new music.

EITAN CORNFIELD: William Bruneau is Jean Coulthard's biographer.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: If you could make new music, and it was this beautiful, the temptation would be to go out and try it yourself. Why not? The mother was an innovative, curious person, so my inclination is to say that in the innovation of the mother, she saw a model, and may have imitated that model, and beginning to write some compositions of her own, and the other thing was that the family was an extremely emotionally secure place for her. She was lucky in her family. I don't see any reason in the evidence to come to any other conclusion. She had a happy family life. That's just the end of it, and on the basis of that kind of emotional stability, you can experiment, so that's another reason why she could become, emotionally speaking, an artist, and a creative artist at that, not just interpreting, but making the very stuff of the art, in this case, composing music.

JEAN COULTHARD: I think I was determined I was going to be a composer, absolutely, and I remember mother, asking her one day to listen to something, and the poor darling was very busy with something else, and said, she couldn't listen just then. She was busy, and I went away weeping, because she wouldn't listen. I was dependent on her for encouraging me to go on, I think, too.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: Very few of us can say of our parents that they're our closest friends. She truly saw her mother as her closest friend, with Babs her sister a close second. The father was a helpful, but not very strong presence.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Coulthard was lucky to have a supportive and nurturing family. Vancouver's tough frontier economy didn't place high stock in artists. For an aspiring young composer, there were few role models.

JEAN COULTHARD: When I was a young woman, a very young woman, there were no composers that I know of in British Columbia. My mother took me out to see a charming old friend of hers, and of the family, really, a chap called William Dichmont, and he wrote little song ditties, such as 'I know where I'm goin', I know who's goin' with me', and mother was so amused, because when we came out of the house where he lived, I said: "Mother, you don't consider that man a composer, do you?". I was horrified. I was thinking about great compositions, even in those days.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Coulthard's mother had established herself as one of Vancouver's finest pianists. In 1910, she founded the Vancouver Women's Musical Club, and began teaching out her home in the upscale neighbourhood of Shaughnessy.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: Mrs. Coulthard and the two daughters Jean and Babs ran a very large piano-teaching studio. In fact, there were three pianos in the house at one time, often going all at once, and that would mean that there were three lessons going on at the same time. The 'girls', as they called themselves, were teachers from age seventeen onward, roughly, in both cases, so that the house was a maelstrom of musical activity from one end of the week to the other. Jeannie ended up teaching, as her mother had, in a couple of private girls' schools, in town, as well, to make a few extra bucks. They needed the money. Walter was not penniless, exactly, and they had been well enough off to buy a good house in a good part of town, but maintaining that lifestyle was pretty hard, so that meant they had to earn the money, and that's how they did it, with an intensive commitment to teaching.

DAVID DUKE: She was a perfectly ordinary young woman of her time.

EITAN CORNFIELD: David Duke is a composer and musicologist. He studied with Jean Coulthard at the University of British Columbia.

DAVID DUKE: She went to dances. She went to parties. She danced at the Hotel Vancouver, and knew jazz and popular music, and considered it a perfectly normal part of her social life. She wasn't interested in it as a musician. As a musician, she was a typical young musician, which is to say a crashing snob. There is a marvellous portrayal of her called *The Diary of a Young Composer*, where she writes, as so many young people do, a surprisingly candid and really wonderfully evocative portrait of herself.

PATRICIA FAGAN (reading from Diary): “Wednesday night, February 25th, 1931; last night we heard Rachmaninoff play a long orthodox program, save for one fragment of Mettner in B minor, which swept over me like a breath of fresh air. I liked his playing, but did not have a real thrill throughout.

More and more, I am becoming interested in flawless performances. Rachmaninoff's performance of *God Save the King* was enough to make any British gentleman's blood boil, but then he is a Russian. Truly, I could not believe my ears. I noted his angular attitude at the piano, and his quick escape after the concert. As we were standing in the lane, into the car, hat pulled down, off with the light, and vanished.

After the concert, Babs and I had a long talk by the fire until almost one o'clock, and we decided that we can only get pleasure from a concert, in the strict sense of the word, up to a certain point, the main reason being that as long as there is a large collective body of people listening to the artist, he must play down to their tastes, and if the individual in the audience is above that plane, he had best stay home from the concert, and that if one loves the pure beauty of fresh new music, no performance of the old or cheap, no matter how flawless the performance may be, can give a thrill lasting a week

I had my lesson today with Mr. Chubb. He obliged me by his listening to my piano sonata throughout, and criticized it in a worthwhile manner, and I am in a cloud ever since.”

JEAN COULTHARD: He was the organist of Christ Church Cathedral, and my mother sent me to him to have theory lessons, and learned about the formation to music, you see, realizing that I was talented, and he was a great inspiration to his students in those days. He was the only one that sort of encouraged my composition, really.

PATRICIA FAGAN (reading from diary): “December 19th, 1930; this morning, I had an inspiring lesson with Mr. Chubb. Having written two fugues, I feel weightier. I wonder why. I happen to be the first pupil of Mr. Chubb's who has written two, so he told me. That describes the musical state of Vancouver, B.C., without another word.

Peter Warlock is dead this morning. I think it was suicide, and I'm sorry. I always liked the sound of him, as he once wrote, so Mr. Chubb told me, that music was half his life. Some of his contemporaries laughed, I believe, and called him priggish. I can appreciate his feeling, because I never feel happier than when composing something, be it ever so humble.”

EITAN CORNFIELD: The composer, organist and teacher Frederick Chubb attended Cambridge where he studied composition with Sir Charles Stanford. When Jean had exhausted what Chubb had to offer, it was only natural that she looked past him to the sources of his tradition. She resolved to save her teaching money, and to go to

England. She'd study with Ralph Vaughan Williams, the most famous English composer of the day.

JEAN COULTHARD: I think I was nineteen, when I first went over there, because my father's younger brother – he had several brothers, but this is the youngest one called Dr. Howard Coulthard. He was a medical doctor in the first World War, and he fell in love with England, and had a house in a place called Roehampton, which is a little district – or was, in those days, just outside of London, so that you could take the bus up to the Royal College and the Albert Hall, and all these fascinating places, where I wanted to be, quite easily, you could get there; and I stayed with him, during that winter, and a bit longer, attending the Royal College, and wonderful productions that they used to put on at the Albert Hall.

DAVID DUKE: When Coulthard came back from London, she had learned an incredible amount from London. First of all, she learned that she loved Europe. She felt that she was in the centre of things. She got to hear first-rate performances. She went to the opera. She bought music. She conducted. She played timpani. She did wonderful things, but she really didn't learn the nuts and bolts of being a professional composer. She was treated as a sort of glorified dilettante by Vaughan Williams, and he was nice to her, and all of that, but there is a quite sad little passage in the diary about sitting back in Vancouver and realizing that, no, we didn't really learn very much. It was a sense of wasted opportunities.

PATRICIA FAGAN (reading from Diary): “Wednesday, January 23rd, 1931; I saw a part of Vaughan Williams' London Symphony today. I remember at my lessons with him, there was never time for him to do any of his compositions over with me. Half an hour, and my time was up. I was too young to insist. I never felt the thrill of inspiration at his lessons, though he twice patted me on the back, like any old man might, and would say, ‘now, you are beginning to do well’.

I think perhaps I was frightened by his knowledge, and retired into a shell of inferiority, and he, instead of trying to encourage me out, gave me the feeling that, indeed, he must never find out how little I knew. One day, he remarked on the pretty clothes I wore, and said how sweet of me to cheer up an old man in a dingy college room, and wearing a light green dress -- I gasped.

When I went out, I remember wishing fervently my music had called for a few remarks, instead of my spring frock. He would treat me as if I was a little girl. No, he treated me as a little, little girl, and that was younger than I was.”

JEAN COULTHARD: I had saved up my own money to go to England, before that, teaching young students and so on, and I had paid a great deal into the college, for my fees. Fortunately I had got my board free, at my uncle's, you see. I think they couldn't have me any longer, and the family would have had to pay for me for the rest, and I don't think they had the money, and besides, mother wisely realized there's a big job to do at home. She needed me to teach her junior studio here, and I had lots of little pupils to come home to, and that was wonderful.

EITAN CORNFIELD: It was 1929. Money was tight, and Jean was needed at home. These were tough times for everybody, but they were going to be particularly hard on the Coulthard household.

DAVID DUKE: She comes back to Vancouver. There's nobody here who can really do that much for her, in terms of, she has a teacher – a good teacher who is able to

get her through London and Toronto style exams, but she really doesn't want to write fugues in eight voices. She wants to be an impressionist or post-impressionist composer, and that sort of English-style focus on a rather dated curriculum isn't doing very much for her. Then, their economic problems, her father's health starts going. He is not able to hear, and that interferes with his practice, and then, her mother dies.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: Well, her mother was the force, the emotional basis that made possible her commitment to music as a profession in a city where there was no such category. I don't think she was ever in doubt that she was going to be a composer, but it would have been hard to realize it, to make a reality of it, and to have the gumption to write a string quintet in 1932, for example, out of the air, thinking that it's going to be pretty hard to find anybody even to perform the thing, unless you had that kind of background. That's part of the thing.

The other thing is that her mother was her best friend, so she lost, in the death of her mother, from the complications of appendicitis, her best friend, and the chief source of the emotional and social energy that makes possible commitment to a profession that doesn't exist. So the blow was absolutely enormous.

Her diary comes to crashing halt, just days after her mother's death. No more pages are written until finally several months later, one final paragraph is written where she says, 'it has been a year since my mother died, and, of course, my whole mind has been transformed by this'.

PATRICIA FAGAN (reading from Diary): "Indeed, I am not the same person: older and not wiser, which is too bad. I have just completed a new threnody in remembrance of the anniversary of mother's passing from us. I felt the idea so heavily that I'm not sure if the music is disappointing. It went Russian on me, I think.

The pupils all did well in exams this year. It has been a hard year to pull through, to have to adjust oneself to the absence of one who is our inspiration, comfort and the light of our house is not easy. Mother was the essence of everything good to me.

Unfortunately, young people take things for granted in a parent, but I can honestly say that the last year of mother's life, I learned not to take her for granted. She taught me and helped me much. Since mother left, I have seen the faces of other young people's tired mothers, and I have realized how selfish young people are, even if they are loved by their parents, and are a comfort to them. It seems to me to be the way of things."

EITAN CORNFIELD: Her mother's untimely death was the central event of Jean's life, the sense of loss never left her. She would express it in a stream of works that reflected the darker, brooding side of a composer too easily typecast for her sunny English disposition.

PATRICIA FAGAN (reading from Diary): "Very soon I have been engaged to Don a whole year. The future seems cloudy as to marrying, but I am not worrying, as we are so happy in each other, and if we are meant to marry, it will happen -- please God.'

EITAN CORNFIELD: It's hard not to connect Jean's marriage to Don Adams with the death of her mother eighteen months earlier. One was a response to the other. Late in 1936, Jean and her husband travelled to New York to visit his parents. While she was there, Jean decided to take some lessons with Aaron Copland.

DAVID DUKE: Copland was a wonderful event for her. First of all, she had just been married, and she was showing off her new husband to her grandparents who by this

time had settled in New York, and she looked up Copland, and she showed him scores. He made criticisms. He showed her scores.

Apparently, Copland has the young couple up to his loft, and plays the *1930 Piano Variations*, not a nice piece; a great piece, but very modernist, straight ahead sort of composition, and as they leave, the new husband Don Adams says: “Jeannie, if that’s modern music, promise me you won’t write any”; but it’s the sense of being connected again, of having somebody from the real world of music, somebody slightly older, eight years older, but already the most important home-grown modernist in the United States, saying ‘welcome aboard’.

EITAN CORNFIELD: When war broke out in Europe, North America became safe haven for many of Europe’s musicians and composers: Stravinsky, Milhaud and Schoenberg went to the U.S. Benjamin Britten came to Canada, and so did the Australian composer Arthur Benjamin.

His arrival in Vancouver in 1939 turned out to be a real break for Coulthard. She was thirty years old. Ten years had passed since she had studied with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Though she had been composing, her pieces were mostly for voice and piano. After all, the rather staid Vancouver Symphony Society would never have considered playing the music of a local girl. When Arthur Benjamin started up the Vancouver Sun Promenade Symphony Concerts, all that changed. He championed Coulthard, and encouraged her to develop as an orchestral composer.

JEAN COULTHARD: Well, my first recognition, I think, came through Arthur Benjamin when he lived in Vancouver. He began a series known as the Prom Concerts down in the old Georgia Auditorium. He helped young composers in that he performed some of their orchestral works. He did one or two of mine. One was a concert form of a ballet suite called *Excursion*, and he gave us great encouragement. It was wonderful those few years he was here. He was here actually eight years in all, and I worked with him quite a bit during that time, but up to that time, there really wasn’t a chance in Vancouver to get an orchestral performance.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Don Adams spent the war years in the Canadian Navy. He was stationed first in British Columbia, then later in Halifax. Meantime, Jean travelled as much as war-time conditions would allow. She went for criticism to Darius Milhaud in Oakland, Arnold Schoenberg in Los Angeles, and Béla Bartók in New York, and in 1943, a daughter, Janie, was born.

With her husband stationed in Halifax, Jean decided to wait out the war with her in-laws in New York. Again, she turned the time to her advantage. They could babysit while she studied with Bernard Wagenaar.

JEAN COULTHARD: The person that I got the most from in my student years was a man called Bernard Wagenaar, and he taught at the Juillard School in New York, and I was over the student age by the time I reached him, but he had the gift of imparting musical form too and what to do. You get these wonderful ideas, and what do you do with this thing, and I’m eternally grateful to that man, because he really started me off.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: The relationship between Jeannie and Bernard was private. She couldn’t be a full-time student at Juillard. How could she be? She had a baby, and she didn’t need a degree, anyway. In 1944, she was past the age of – or stage of wanting to do a formal program. She just wanted the meat and potatoes. She wanted the goods, and Wagenaar with his classical Dutch training and a long tradition of

delivering exactly that, the goods, and he had done it for other women composers, including Canadian women composers, before, by the way – Pentland being one of them – was just the guy, so it blossomed quickly into a friendship, and Mrs. Wagenaar was fairly suspicious of Jeannie, I think, from the very beginning, because she figured that maybe Jeannie was in more than just the music.

In the late thirties, the pictures of her that Vanderpant made, the famous portraitist of the day in the city of Vancouver, leave the impression of a patrician woman with elongated features. I wouldn't call her cute or pretty exactly, but beautiful, no doubt about it, willowy and tall. Her sexuality is an interesting question, because I don't think she was terribly sexed, so I'm surprised that Mrs. Wagenaar would even have a second thought about this, but of course she could have made the mistake of just looking at her, and saying, 'gee, she's quite beautiful, this could be a problem', but in my view, it was never really a problem.

The sensuality in this woman's personality and psyche come out in the music, so if you look at *Spring Rhapsody* and hear Maureen Forrester singing those songs, then you might want to think twice about letting your husband spend any time with Jean Coulthard, but it's – I wouldn't say sublimated, but it's expressed in a pretty exotic manner, in the music.

JANE ADAMS: Well, she was very tall. She was very elegant, very slender.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Coulthard's daughter Janie Adams.

JANE ADAMS: She always complained she had a big nose, but she didn't. It suited her face beautifully, very heart-shaped face, very wide, beautiful blue eyes. She wore her hair back, off her forehead, and in the early years, it was braided in a dark brown braid over the top. She wore black, very striking. Yes, she was very beautiful.

EITAN CORNFIELD: In 1945, Coulthard is finally back in Vancouver with her husband and baby Janie. The city is exploding with pent-up energy after the war years.

DAVID DUKE: All of a sudden, she gets a job, and it's a job that she has not even know that she lusted after, but she has wanted for so long. She becomes one of a tiny number of instructors at the newly established department of music at the University of British Columbia, and she takes this position very seriously.

Now, she is almost forty, and I think I have to mention that. This is somebody who has an extremely protracted apprenticeship, extremely protracted. There are lots of male composers who are starting to wind down by forty. I can think of many in the Canadian pantheon, but Coulthard is just really getting started. If we were to have, through some catastrophe, everything written before the *Piano Sonata*, the *Cello Sonata* and the *Oboe Sonata* of 1946 through 1948, if they would all vanish, we would still be able to construct everything that we really need to know about Coulthard.

We would miss some lovely pieces, but the career really gets going only at that moment, and I think anybody interested in the lives of women who have composed, and the social context, the career paths, all of those sorts of issues, you need to be very aware of how convoluted and protracted her apprenticeship period was. There's an important lesson in this, and I don't think enough people are aware of how long she worked, before she felt she was an established composer.

EITAN CORNFIELD: In a burst of new-found confidence, Coulthard completes her first mature works, the sonatas for piano, flute and cello. She has finally

arrived, but has to squeeze her composing between a full-time teaching load, and her third career as the head of the household.

The balancing act is seen as quite charming by a features writer for the Vancouver Province, who writes, on June 4th, 1949: “All my life I’ve heard about long-haired musicians. Now, at last, I’ve met one. Although a large part of Ms. Coulthard’s life is spent at composing and at her job as lecturer in composition at UBC where she has been for two years, she spends as much time as possible as Ms. Adams, who presides over 5726 Sparling, does the shopping, and sees to the comfort and welfare of her husband and daughter.”

When Jane looks back on it all, she still doesn’t quite know how her mother pulled it off.

JANE ADAMS: This would have been in the, probably late forties, as a child. She was always composing or teaching. The sounds that came out of the music room were never orderly sounds. They were always off-tone or very strange and nothing ever came together, but she would be there diligently, for hours at a time.

I can remember coming down from an afternoon sleep, so that might even be earlier. That might be three, perhaps, and I would come down, and there would always be a student in the music room, and somebody’s lesson would be finished. I think she programmed me to go to sleep at a certain time, and then, she would teach, and when I woke up, she would be ready.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: Between 1946, right after the war, and 1999, or perhaps late 1998, Jean would write three to four and a half hours a day, just as habitually we eat three meals a day, and take a walk with the dog, which she loved to do, particularly towards the end of her life, just as habitually. Without a question, she would put the three to four and a half hours in, come what may. The baby would have to scream and yell, if necessary, for an hour or two, until she would get to sleep. Don might have to go hungry. There were consequences, but if you’re going to make music and get anywhere with it, that’s the way it has to be.

EITAN CORNFIELD: That’s certainly the way it has to be, if you’re a pioneering woman composer on the west coast. After all, there were only a couple of full-time composers in all of Canada, and they were men living in Ontario and Quebec. Jean wasn’t even sure if it was possible for a woman to be the equal of a man in the field of composition.

JEAN COULTHARD: No doubt, at some point in one’s life, you’ve been willingly or not drawn into an argument about women composers, and the equality of the sexes, and I might say that someone could even be my husband, because if the feminine sex is really equal to the male sex, why have there never been any great women composers? It’s a formidable argument, as to date, there certainly has not been a feminine version of our famous musical B’s. This would certainly seem to prove that women composers are rare birds to begin with, perhaps more rare than sculptors or poets; but I think that women, whether consciously or not, they do start out with a few strikes against them, shall we say.

Here’s an idea. When one remembers that in old Greek mythology, going back that far, woman is the muse, rather, the inspiration for the art, and never herself the artist.

DAVID DUKE: The gender thing may not seem all that easy to get to begin with. You think, well, this is a woman who had a certain privileged status in society, and

who was able to study with some of the greats, you know, ‘what was taking her so long?’; but the reactive nature of a female composer in their twenties and thirties, especially one that wants to have a family, that has the sorts of financial responsibilities Coulthard has between ’33 and the start of the war, as a teacher, there is no time; and, quite frankly, I don’t think that, had Coulthard tried to compete like a man, whatever that means, send pieces to composition contests, to present oneself to the one or two possible university centres that were teaching composition in those days in North America, and say, ‘I want a doctorate in composition’, I don’t think she would have gotten in, because of her gender.

She was not particularly minded to blame her late development on gender, but I think I do. I think it’s a significant factor, and I’m concerned that young women now in the 21st century seem to think that it’s an equal playing field, because I don’t think it is equal yet, and I think if people paid more attention to the fifteen years between twenty and thirty-five, in the way male composers are still produced, and the way they are able to pick up and say, ‘well, thank you, I’ve got to go to Cornell for my doctorate’ and so on and so forth, I don’t think women yet are in an equal situation.

JANE ADAMS: She did her wifely duties, the cooking, the cleaning, a little bit, always seemed relaxed about getting to her music room. I don’t know how she did it. It certainly never appeared to me that there was ever a crisis about something not working or – I think her family was equally important to her, as the music. It was the other side of her life, and I think she balanced them both very well, probably a cost, but it was a cost she was willing to accept in her life.

I think maybe she could have done much more, if she hadn’t had all of us, but would she have been a happy and complete woman? I think a lot of us women who are involved in the arts need that other side of life to support and promote and help us. It’s a lonely life, you know, being an artist, because you do it all on your own, come out of your cubby-hole once or twice a year, and take a look around. It’s nice to have feedback at home.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: She didn’t just overcome. That’s too heroic an explanation, I think. She was clever. She had a husband who did well, and she had her own money, and as Virginia Woolf said, ‘you need a room of your own’. In this case, you need an income of your own, and I just think that she was pretty practical, and in some ways ruthless.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean could use what she earned from teaching for her own purposes, and continued to travel and study. In 1956, she took a sabbatical from UBC. She travelled to France, where she soaked up the musical life, and began to work on a violin concerto, and an opera based on Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native*.

The scale and emotional range of Coulthard’s compositions continued to grow, but back at UBC where many of the faculty were American trained males with a distinctly modernist bent, she was still regarded as old-fashioned.

WILLIAM BRUNEAU: The musical establishment in Canada would have in some cases been interested in the American example, and wanted to appeal to professional colleagues, who were at work in the great American musical centres, but this was not Jean’s way, at all, and that must have meant that there was a big distance between herself and those Canadian colleagues who were trying to make a name for themselves in the United States.

In Canada, we have another problem, of course, and that is that the musical centres where a lot of decision-making about recording, publication and publicity take place, were Montreal and Toronto, and above all, Toronto, after the mid 1950's. Those decisions then were being made something like 4,000 kilometers from Vancouver.

It was hard for Jean or any other western composer to get a word in edgewise, as it were. Their attitude was one of friendly patronizing interest some of the time, and sheer ignorance at other times, I must say. I wouldn't call it open antipathy most of the time, but the ethnic, historic and professional ties that brought the Toronto musical establishment together – and it was mostly a brotherhood, not a sisterhood – meant that Jean was de facto like many other western composers, and certainly women composers – and I think of three right away – Archer, Pentland and Coulthard – excluded.

EITAN CORNFIELD: At one time, the head of the department, Harry Adaskin, even tried to fire her, but Jean fought back. She appealed to the president of the university who had been part of her mother's social circle. Not only did she get to keep her job, she ended up receiving tenure in a non-tenure position.

It is true that Coulthard perceived much of the new music with antipathy. She even saw the more extreme works of the avante-garde as expressions of a streak of male violence. She remained true to her heart and her teaching and her composition, and she paid the price.

JEAN COULTHARD: We've always conceded to women the power to pour oil on the troubled waters, to pacify, perhaps compromise, to take a middle road. So, perhaps as a new generation of composers, as women, we could temper this violence in music. I for one have self-styled myself as a non-violent composer. In this great age of scientific development, I feel the human values remain the same, and unless music is able to reach the heart in some way, it loses its compelling power to minister to human welfare.

JANE ADAMS: I can remember one time, it was a very hot summer. I was in Montreal, and I was in the most horrible traffic jam on St-Urbain Street, and it was in the heat of summer. It was about 35 degrees, and this beautiful music came on the radio, and I thought, oh, that's so lovely. It's so calming, and I listened a little more, and a little more, and I thought, that has got to be Mum's music, and I – I couldn't believe it. At the end of it, it was so peaceful, and it calmed me down, and I just wish everybody in that traffic jam had heard it, and it was *The Bird of Dawning*, and it was so beautiful. I remember sitting there, and I burst into tears. It was wonderful.

JEAN COULTHARD: I don't feel, as many younger composers do, that music of the past should be debunked completely, and a new system evolved, that it is a nineteenth century attitude and therefore should be scorned, that our future music should grow naturally out of the past. I do not see any logic in breaking down our forms and musical language which has taken several hundred years to build up.

I think that music should evolve from what has gone before, as in other forms of life and art, or it doesn't make for logic. These words in themselves, I feel, 'logic, integrated, coherent' mean a great deal to me in music composition, and in my teaching, I try to instill these principles as part of development and growth in any student's work.

Let me put it this way. Rather than avoid the traditional moulds music can be poured into, such as sonata form, variations, and many other forms, fugue form, et cetera, I feel it is so necessary to use what is given to us in our heritage. This problem of form is always the severest challenge to a composer's craft and inspiration, and it can be solved

differently for each personality and composition alike. Therefore a composer using these forms need not feel he is being unoriginal or that he is besmirching himself.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Don Mowat was a CBC radio producer who worked closely with Coulthard for many years. He commissioned some of her most important pieces, and saw to it that the best of Jean's senior composition students got radio airtime. Mowat welcomed Jean as an antidote to what he heard as academic sterility in a lot of the new music.

DON MOWAT: Her voice is a voice that's very much needed in Canadian music. It's a voice that always has been needed in Canadian music. I think at the time when she was doing a lot of her writing, this was not coming out in Canada in its music, this quality of lyricism and passion, and a sense of the place with this dynamic range and this gentle quality, this sort of tension between tradition and the present reality of the space she's living in. It's really a sensibility that is much freer than we think it is, and has a lot more range to it.

JEAN COULTHARD: I've always liked to compare in my own mind musical forms with nature forms: plants, flowers, trees, recurring every new season, and each one a little different in the new version; yet the same form principle is underlying in the particular species.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Coulthard's approach to music was organic in both the literal and figurative senses. It was inevitable that the west coast landscape of ocean and rugged mountains would infiltrate her work.

JANE ADAMS: She would take a trip, for instance, over to the island with me, and we saw the wonderful cathedral grove, the original rain forest over there, and she came back, and she immediately composed a work about that; and then, we went up to Hernando Island up the coast once, and there was a wonderful meadow called Baker's Front on the south-facing side of Hernando, and she came home and wrote a piece about that, and also of course *The Pines of Emily Carr* which has very much to do with the west coast and *Western Woods* is another one she has written; so I think things that were very dear to her became part of her music, and I don't think it was for posterity. I think it was just her way of expressing herself.

JEAN COULTHARD: Yes, I think there is a unique musical field in the different regions of Canada, despite the common trends of thought in all the arts in our sophisticated scientific age. Perhaps it is true that I and others who were born and brought up in the far west, the land of sea drifts and snow-capped mountains, will produce music of a different colour and flavour from the easterners. Perhaps it is still too soon to tell.

DAVID DUKE: This may seem paradoxical, but as a regionalist, she felt she was a better Canadian. She wanted to express the uniqueness of her environment, because that was contributing to the greater amalgam of being a Canadian artist, and she was very concerned – I would even say obsessed, with the notion of the arts in Canada, and was a great patriot.

The phrase 'impressionist' comes up, and there's nothing wrong with using 'impressionist', because of course she learned so much from Debussy and from Ravel, and there are some quite impressionist sounding works.

I think her tone poem *Endymion* is very, very much an homage to Debussy, but in other nature works, we're veering towards a type of expressionism. I'm thinking of

Sketches for the Western Woods, the *Sonata for Two Pianos, Of the Universe*, and *The Pines of Emily Carr*, where the depiction of nature – it's pathetic fallacy nature – becomes a manifestation of the personality, and the intensity is not the sort of decorative surface of impressionism, but it's the emotional truth of expressionism.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Coulthard retired from UBC in 1973. For 25 years, teaching had been her passion. She had a lot to be proud of. Among her pupils were some of Canada's finest young composers.

DON MOWAT: I think if you knew Jean, you knew her as a creative artist whose life was divided into perhaps three parts: one was the composer; one was the wife and mother; and one was the teacher; and the teaching part, in a way – in a way was the core of the whole business. She related to younger people so well, and they were family. They weren't students. There wasn't a division in the classroom. They were collaborative artists, trying to find new voices for themselves and for each other, and she worked like that in a practical way with their music. She believed they had something to say that ought to be on the air.

I remember the first composer probably was Michael Baker, and she said, 'Michael Baker has written these pieces, and don't you think we should get them on the air?' --and Lloyd Burritt, and David Duke, and Sylvia Rickard, Joan Hansen, David Norwell, Chan Ka Nin who is Francis Chan in those days – terrific.

EITAN CORNFIELD: She may have missed her students, but retired life did have its advantages.

JEAN COULTHARD: It got pretty heavy sometimes in the university, and my composition suffered, but there were always the long summer holidays, you know, that you could work, and then I retired from the university, and then, I began my musical life, because I could do full-time on my work then.

DAVID DUKE: To make sense of her burgeoning output in the sixties and seventies, she developed a gentle fiction which is that, 'really, I have two types of music'.

JEAN COULTHARD: Rather than dividing my music into periods as some composers do, I prefer to think of it, being in two main streams of thought, that have continuously run parallel to each other throughout my life. To develop this imagery, first, is the rippling lyrical nature of sunlight glinting on the watered stones of a small brook. The other is more brooding, the depth of one's being reflected in the deep fiords of our west coast.

DAVID DUKE: What she meant was. 'there's my Gebrauchsmusik. There's the music I write for children, for my friends the Ralstons, for the Vancouver Bach Choir, for that nice bassoon player'. Remember Saint-Saens line: "I write music the way an apple tree bears fruit".

A lot of Coulthard's music-making from the sixties on falls into that classification, and once it was done, she hoped it would give delight to the performers, and to audiences. She acknowledged that a certain smaller percentage of her works were very tough nuts to crack.

EITAN CORNFIELD: One of those tough nuts to crack was her 1972 masterpiece, the octet *Twelve Essays on a Cantabile Theme*. Don Mowat.

DON MOWAT: The octet was a very important work. It was a very dense work. It has a lot to it. You have to listen to it two or three times. It's not Vaughan Williams, at all. It's very much Jean in that it has got a lot of passion and a lot of

lyricism in it, but it's also Jean in the sense that she is reaching out far beyond the tradition into new territory, and it's sly and it's witty and it's passionate, and all those things that you wouldn't guess were possible in the lady at a superficial glance.

DAVID DUKE: She did outlive her critics I think is the phrase Bill Bruneau uses. When Jean Coulthard was approaching her eightieth birthday, she told me that, you know, she would be very happy to compose seriously hard-working up to eighty, and then, she would be quite content to stop, and the eightieth birthday came and went, and we were still writing. In fact, I think she was as surprised as anybody that she lived to such an old age, and was able, with some difficulties, to keep being productive and doing what she loved until her 92nd birthday.

If she had died in 1970, I think she would have wondered if she had made the right choices way back when, but as the seventies gave way to the eighties gave way to the nineties, and her nineties, she felt that she had done the right thing with her life, and felt that she had made a contribution.

JANE ADAMS: The end was very unexpected. I had moved her into a nice place called Hollyburn Manor. She had a beautiful little apartment in there, and there was nursing care on the side, should she need it, and she took a fall in the hallway, and we don't know whether it was a stroke that caused the fall, or the fall caused the stroke, but she had her dinner that evening, and I realized that she wasn't well. There was something wrong, and I arranged for an ambulance to take her to the hospital, and she was fine, and spent the evening in the hospital, but the next morning, when I went, I realized the stroke – it had a been a stroke, and perhaps there had been another one, and she really just drifted off to sleep, and she slept for perhaps the last three or four days, and then peacefully died.

- transcribed by Mara Zibens