

Violet Gould's Operetta School

CHRISTINE PODAS-LARSON

Violet Gould entered stage left and stood in front of the plush curtain. With her white-blond hair coiffed, a hint of pink on her clear cheeks, and her signature violet lipstick, she wore a chiffony dress and clutched a small nosegay of violets.

"It came to me in a dream," she dramatically sighed as she stepped to stage right and laid the flowers on the piano. Almost in a trance, she described her vision of children singing operettas. With a flounce, she exited.

The curtain opened to a Royal Navy set and a troupe of children lustily singing about "sailing the ocean blue" on their "saucy ship" to open a full production of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's operetta HMS Pinafore.¹

Violet Gould believed "singing is fun."² She lived that motto throughout her own vocal career and passed the joy along through the Violet Gould Operetta School, which engaged an estimated 1,000 children in staging operettas and delighting audiences in St. Paul for more than two decades from 1952 to 1974. Her school was no *Our Gang* (*The Little Rascals*) seat-of-the-pants backyard company. To the dazzled eyes of her students, Violet opened the curtain to what real theater could be, producing major operettas with professional stage direction, creating vivid sets and costumes, hiring makeup technicians, and engaging in substantial promotional campaigns. Eileen O'Shaughnessy, who went on to design costumes for the Jawaahir Dance Company, played the mother in a 1961 production of Englebert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* opera at St. Mary's Hall at Laurel and Howell Avenues. "I realized then what all went into it . . . the professionalism involved," she recalled.³

The fulfillment of Violet's dream for children and her deep knowledge of musical production

arose from her training and experiences as a professional singer and voice teacher, as well as her pure grit and determination.

"The Girl With the Golden Voice"⁴

Violet Adyelynn Gould was born around 1907 in Pierre, South Dakota. Her mother, Laura Hentzelman (1882-1960), came from a prominent family in Davenport, Iowa; Laura and her children sustained close ties to the Davenport community through the years as attested to by local newspaper articles that breathlessly followed Violet's career. Violet's father, Charles H. Gould, also of Davenport, was a "genial tri-city salesman," who transferred to South Dakota shortly after marrying. The Gould marriage did not last. Charles was gone by 1910, leaving Laura with her daughter and seven-year-old son, Leroy. Laura relocated from Pierre to Sherman, South Dakota, and made her living as a musician and by renting rooms in her home.⁵

Violet attended school in Minnehaha County (near Sioux Falls) and was a student in the McClarinnon School of Expression, run by the wife of the local minister. In 1919, her mother remarried widower James A. Helmey, a pharmacist from Minnesota who owned stores in Dell Rapids and Sherman. In 1926 when Violet was about eighteen, James, Laura, and the children moved to St. Paul.⁶

For two years, Violet attended the Conservatory of Music at Macalester College, studying voice under its director, Harry Phillips (who was also on the faculty of the MacPhail School in Minneapolis) and Malcolm McMillan (a prominent chorister who led the Orpheus [choral] Club). She lived with her parents in duplexes in St. Paul's Merriam Park neighborhood and held various clerical positions—her longest employment was as a proofreader with St. Paul hardware wholesaler Farwell, Ozmun, Kirk & Company.⁷

In the late 1920s, Violet began to study voice with Agnes Rast Synder, "acknowledged to be



Agnes Rast Snyder, Violet Gould's voice teacher, appeared in numerous Civic Opera productions, including the starring role of *Carmen* in 1934. Gould also garnered a coveted debut role in the production. Photograph by Kenneth M. Wright Studios for St. Paul Civic Opera Association's production of *Carmen*, in Civic Opera program collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

one of the leading contraltos of the north west," who performed with the Schubert Club and Minneapolis Symphony and was heard frequently in WCCO broadcasts. Snyder possessed a voice of "beautiful quality, well controlled and produced with ease."⁸ She had studied with Rudolph Weyrauch of the Wiesbaden (Germany) Opera and Frank Bibb at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. At the time Violet began study with her, Snyder was on the faculty of the Minnesota College School of Music, located at Harvard and Delaware Streets in southeast Minneapolis. Later, she joined the University of Minnesota faculty and, in 1933, was appointed assistant professor of voice at Carleton College in Northfield.⁹

Under Snyder's coaching, Violet developed as a dramatic soprano, with a "voice of wide range and resonance." She sang with "an easy graciousness which her audiences like[d] immensely."¹⁰ One review dubbed her "The Girl with the Golden Voice."¹¹

The St. Paul Civic Opera: Violet's Musical Home

Violet remarked that "with many . . . , it was almost imperative to go to New York City or even Europe to study music, but she found what she needed in St. Paul."¹² In 1933, the year of its formation, Violet discovered her musical home—the St. Paul Civic Opera Association. Snyder was among its founding board of advisors and likely had a hand in Violet's inclusion in its inaugural roster of artists. The following year, Snyder starred in the Civic Opera's production of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, and Violet had her breakthrough chance. In the role of Frasquita (*Carmen's* friend), Violet was a smash hit, causing *Quad-City Times* critics to swoon in their praises: "Miss Gould scored a decided triumph," and her dressing room was a "bower" of congratulatory roses. A wonderful future was predicted.¹³

The Civic Opera made a deep impression on Violet. Organized in the midst of the Great Depression, it fed a community hunger for good opera at affordable prices. Backed by prominent St. Paulites, it had, from its start, a purpose that was both cultural and civic: it was considered a community asset and an artistic service to the city. During those financially challenging times, it provided employment to artists and was supported by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) under the Federal Music Project. In the program of its opening production, the Civic Opera affirmed the need for the genre, concluding that, "there is a definite niche for opera and the time is psychologically ripe to fill it."¹⁴

Violet was, from its inception through the early 1960s, a mainstay in the Civic Opera's productions and summer Pops concerts. Following her debut in *Carmen*, she appeared in operatic roles as varied as Antonia's mother in Jacques Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* and Nettie Fowler in Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *Carousel*, both in the 1953 production and later, in 1962, with Broadway star John Raitt as the headliner. She felt the part of Nettie was "made for her . . . I do feel like Nettie



Violet Gould's work was noted in Twin Cities newspapers and in South Dakota and Iowa publications. When she debuted in *Carmen* with her teacher Agnes Rast Snyder, the Davenport newspaper printed this photograph and raved about the performance of a "hometown" girl. In *The Daily Times*, October 2, 1934.

when I sing her songs” [like] ‘June is Bustin’ Out All Over’ and ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone.’”¹⁵

For the Pops, Violet sang everything from Bizet and Giacomo Puccini to Victor Herbert and perennial hits such as “The Land of the Sky Blue Water” by Charles Wakefield Cadman and “By The Waters of Minnetonka” by Thurlow Lieurance. The Pops concerts featured musicians from the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra and were produced in the St. Paul Auditorium in conjunction with ice shows by the St. Paul Figure Skating Club. They drew huge crowds (as many as 7,000) from throughout the Midwest. Presented every summer from 1937 to 1962, the Pops ran from mid-July to early September. Each of two or three weekly programs was organized around a theme: “Marvelous Minnesota,” “A Night in Old Vienna,” “Rodgers and Hammerstein,” “Victor Herbert and Jerome Kern,” and so on. The program featured soloists singing two pieces in each act with the orchestra playing two more, followed by an ice show around the same theme. When the Pops began in 1937, it presented a season of nine programs. By 1957, it staged twenty-five. Violet was on the program at least once each summer.¹⁶

Beyond the opera, she sang on KSTP radio broadcasts and performed in numerous civic programs. Her broad repertoire included Broadway hits, operatic arias, sacred pieces, and international music, such as art songs based on the poems of Rabindranath Tagore. She formed the Violet Gould Quartet (based at Central Presbyterian Church), which performed citywide, including at the Hallie Q. Brown Center. Violet was in demand as a church soloist for Hamline Methodist Episcopal Church, First Church of Christ Scientist, and other local congregations. She took on private voice students and coached a thirty-member glee club.¹⁷

An Independent Woman and Civic Leader

By the mid-1950s, with income from her singing engagements and voice students, Violet supported herself fulltime with her music. A single woman, she moved into her own apartment—a duplex on Portland Avenue near St. Thomas College—that served as her studio and seemed “exotic” to her voice students.¹⁸

Inspired by the Civic Opera model, Violet saw music as “an important part of our civic life”¹⁹ and later carried that ethic into her operetta school and her leadership roles in the city’s cultural organizations. She served on the opera’s board of directors from 1954 to 1967, one of only two single women early on. She was a director of the Minneapolis Symphony’s annual fund drive and on The Schubert Club board of directors, leading efforts to make performances accessible to young people at reduced ticket prices and encouraging her private voice students to participate in the club’s Student Section. Respected for her vocal discernment, she was repeatedly named a judge for the Upper Midwest Metropolitan Opera auditions.²⁰

The Operetta School, 1952-1974

The pièce de résistance of her musical entrepreneurship was the Violet Gould Operetta School, founded in 1952. Arising from the vocalist’s dream, its purpose was

to bring to children . . . living operettas to stimulate and satisfy a taste for music, dramatics and operettas . . . and to provide young singers . . . training and experience through participation in actual performances. . . .²¹

Reflective of her Civic Opera ethic, her productions shared operetta with wider audiences at affordable prices.

Children ages four to twelve came to the school through Violet’s connections in the Twin Cities’ musical community, word of mouth, from the ranks of her private students, and from the sheer excitement parents and children experienced in attending performances. Many in the original operetta school were children of musicians involved with the Civic Opera. Initially, the school and performances were held in the hall of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church at Laurel and Howell, then in the Volunteers of America building (at Rice Park) and Women’s City Club, and, finally, in the auditoriums of St. Paul Academy and Summit School. When it began in 1952, the operetta school enrolled sixty children per production. Violet ultimately pared that to thirty, “a more manageable number.”²² In 1961, children were charged \$1.50 per week tuition.²³

Over time, she refined the school's mission statement:

provide each child with an avenue for self-expression; to encourage and guide the child's creative imagination; and to grow . . . in social understanding and cooperation.²⁴

Children would attend the school every Saturday for two to three months, learning an operetta's entire score and all the parts before the roles were cast—often double and triple-cast to give more participants big roles and to provide backup in case of illness. Then, the curtain went up for one to two weekends of performances. She produced three operettas each year. The productions would go on tour to schools, churches, and social clubs throughout St. Paul and further afield to Hastings, Hudson, and White Bear Lake, and even to the ballroom of St. Paul's Lowry Hotel.²⁵

For the operetta school repertoire, Violet chose widely recognized standards, such as Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* and *HMS Pinafore* as well as contemporary works based on fairy tales. These included *Rumpelstiltskin*, from the Hans Christian Anderson story, adapted and written by Jane Dalton with music by Don Wilson; *Johnny Appleseed* by Carmino Carl Ravosa; and *Adventures of Pinocchio*, dramatized by Theodosia Paynter with music by G. A. Grant-Schaefer. She even took on *Mozart the Boy Wonder*, featuring the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and arranged by J. Michael Diack, with children balancing ornate wigs on their heads as they glided about the stage in bustled skirts and silk breeches.²⁶

Violet also made every effort to carve out a place at the adult table for her school. It was formally recognized as an associate of the Metropolitan Opera's Central Opera Service, a national outreach program. An *Opera News* article heralded the wonders of opera in the Twin Cities, highlighting Opera Week, when the Metropolitan Opera would perform at Northrup Auditorium and made special note of "a lady named Violet Gould [who] runs an operetta school for small children."²⁷

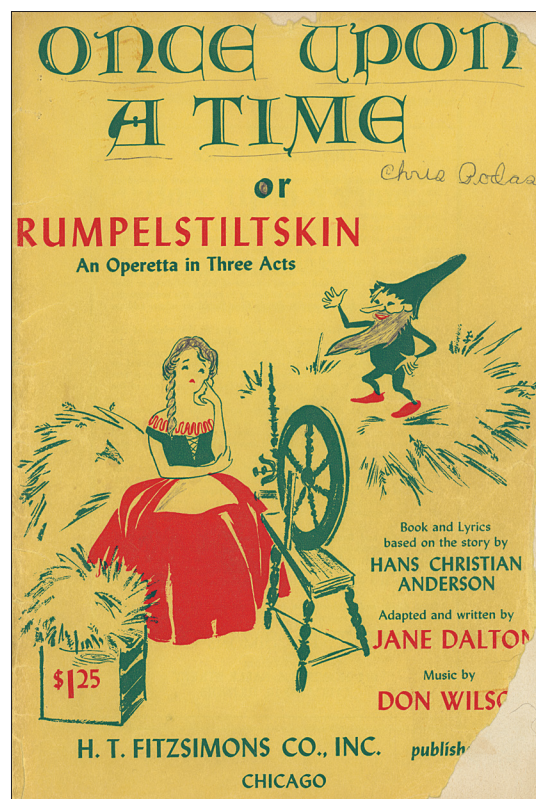
Violet even nurtured relationships with local newspapers. The school received significant



The Violet Gould Operetta School presented *HMS Pinafore* in 1959. (L-R): Linda Kelsey, who later became a Hollywood actress, starred as Josephine. Jonette Lucia took the role of Capt. Corcoran, and Billy Axelrod served as the comic relief as Sir Joseph Porter, the "Admiral of the Sea." In *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 2, 1959, from the collection of Christine-Podas Larson.

media coverage throughout its history, with regular listings for upcoming art events alongside professional offerings. Virtually every production garnered feature coverage, with pictures—often on the front page of the Society and Arts sections—in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *Dispatch* and the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*.

A special treat for many students was the opportunity to perform in Civic Opera productions. When Puccini's *La Boheme* needed a clutch of street urchins, the casting call came to the operetta school. Among many other productions, students also were featured in *Carousel*, with the



Students in Violet Gould's Operetta School performed a variety of children's operettas, including *Rumpelstiltskin*. Copyright © 2021 by Fred Bock Music. All rights reserved. In the collection of Christine Podas-Larson.



The 1960 production of *Pinocchio* starring Joan Jardine as Cricket, Mary Mirras as Pinocchio, and Hartley George Blomquist as Geppetto was a hit. In *Minneapolis Star*, September 14, 1960, from the collection of Christine Podas-Larson.



In 1961, sisters (L-R) Eileen, Terry, and Molly O'Shaughnessy starred in *Hansel and Gretel*. Molly would go on to lead St. Paul's Montessori Center of Minnesota. In *Pioneer Press*, February 11, 1961, from the collection of Molly O'Shaughnessy.

chance to meet and score Raitt's autograph, and in *Damn Yankees* with Alan Young (star of the *Mister Ed* television series) as the lead. These opportunities left lasting impressions, recalled former operetta student Linda Kelsey. "We were among professional actors and actresses . . . it was a real thrill." As these opportunities arose, Violet always encouraged her students to "remember whom you represent."²⁸

Many operetta school students starred in their high school musicals and plays and community



Besides performing in opera and producing children's operettas, Violet Gould Mather liked to attend performances with friends. (Pictured L-R): Here, Mrs. Ray Wachtler, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Blomquist, and Violet and Ralph Mather attend a Civic Opera production of *Showboat*. In *Minneapolis Star*, February 17, 1961.

theater, and some continued with professional acting careers. Because of Violet's association with Mady and Max Metzger (*see online sidebar*), the St. Paul Opera Workshop became a performance destination for some of her teenage students who had aged out of the operetta school. Thomas Foster of Edina was chosen to be a member of The Julliard School's first class in drama. He listed the operetta school as part of his artistic resume in making his application. Joan Jardine, a member of the school from 1959 to 1963, was the star of Cretin High School musicals her sophomore through senior years and participated in numerous community theater productions. Karla Strom was on Ted Mack's *The Original Amateur Hour*. Kelsey, the star of the school's 1959 production of *HMS Pinafore*, also participated in the Civic Opera productions of *Wizard of Oz* and *La Boheme*. She graduated with a degree in theater from the University of Minnesota, starred in the Guthrie Theater's production of *The Tempest*, and moved to Hollywood, starring in popular TV shows such as *Lou Grant* and garnering Emmy nominations. Today, she lives in St. Paul and remains a mainstay of Twin Cities' theater.²⁹

A Partner for Violet: Ralph Mather

In November 1958, Violet, at age fifty-one, married Ralph J. Mather, who was nineteen years her senior. They met through the Civic Opera, where Ralph had served on the board of directors since 1939. Their wedding took place in the Summit Avenue home of then Civic Opera board chair Julian Gilman. Ralph was a resourceful and prominent businessman; he spent his career (1927 onward) at Brown & Bigelow as creative director and special sales representative. The St. Paul-based company produced advertising novelties and calendars. Ralph was credited with the idea of featuring Minnesota tourist locations on playing cards that were distributed nationally.³⁰

Born and raised in Springdale, Iowa, Ralph was a graduate of Cornell College. He was an avid horseman who rode over 1,000 miles on horseback in the Canadian Rockies and served as president of the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies. He was involved in local horse shows and recruited Violet to sing the national anthem at show openings at the Minnesota State Fair. Ralph's first marriage (1916-1933) to Adele



Violet Gould Mather presented her student, Christine Podas-Larson, with a signed photograph from Egypt in 1966. In the collection of Christine Podas-Larson.

Bray of Montana ended in tragedy. She died in a boating accident near Ely while with Brown & Bigelow's founder, H. H. Bigelow.³¹

Married for nineteen years, Violet and Ralph served together on the Civic Opera Board of Directors until 1967. They shared a zeal for travel. He had once owned Mather Travel, and Violet approached journeys abroad with entrepreneurial gusto. She led trips to Europe (one a forty-four-day-sojourn that included tulip time in Holland) and followed the adventures by presenting slide shows accompanied by her musical narratives.³² Together, the couple traveled, from the Canadian Rockies to Hawaii, from Europe to Egypt. Ralph survived Violet by less than a year, dying on April 22, 1978, at age ninety.

A Mentor to Young Artists and Entrepreneurs

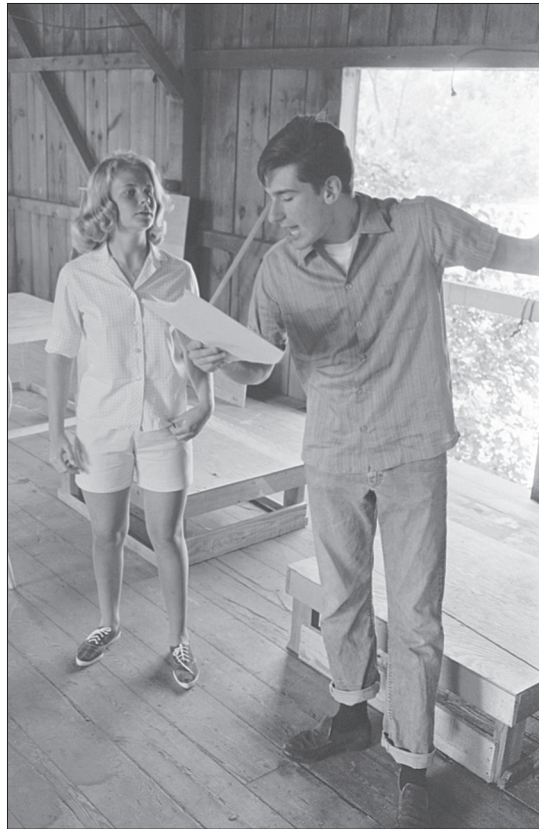
Violet got behind people . . . she took young people seriously.³³

In 1964, Nancy Todora, a recent Monroe High School graduate and Violet's private voice student, won a scholarship to Oberlin

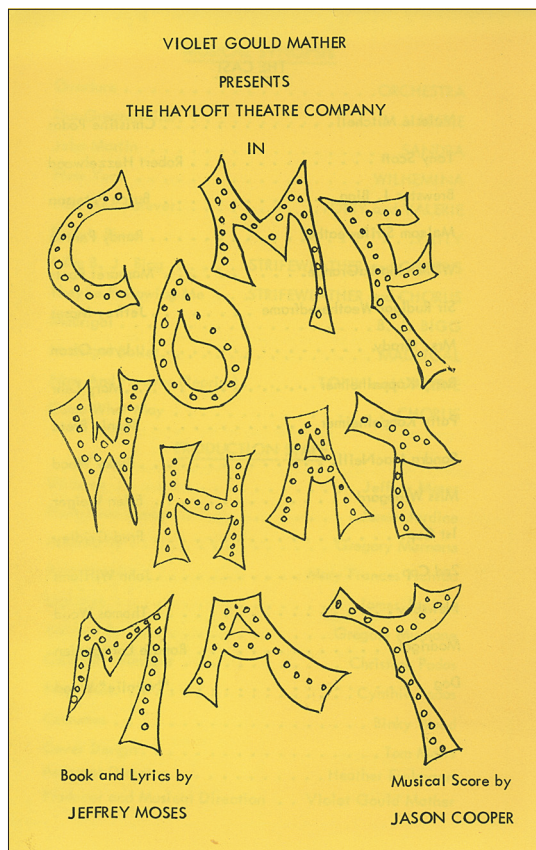
Conservatory of Music in Ohio—one of the nation's premier schools. But there were limitations: Nancy would need funds for any expenses beyond tuition and room and board. Violet presented this challenge to several other voice students, who leapt into action. From their efforts, The Hayloft Theatre Company formed, and their original musical, *Come What May*, played in the Thurston and Jane Wood barn in Sunfish Lake, Minnesota. It was billed as a Violet Gould Mather Production. Hamline University theater major Jeffrey Moses and University of Minnesota music major Jason Cooper wrote an original script and score. Word of the enterprise spread rapidly through Violet's student network and Todora's friends. The cast and crew included students from Monroe and Central high schools, Convent of the Visitation School, Summit School, St. Joseph's Academy, Cretin, and St. Thomas Academy. In the mode of operetta school productions, *Come What May* received extensive media attention, including a full-page feature in the *St. Paul Dispatch*.³⁴

The production played to sold-out houses and achieved its goal. Thanks to lively ticket

Fifteen-year-old Chrissy Podas, the author of this article, was a longtime member of Violet Gould's Operetta School. Here, as lead actress in *Come What May*, she received stage direction from student director Jeffrey Moses. In *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, August 17, 1964, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.



The 1964 original production of *Come What May* starred sixteen young cast members and twelve production staff. Program from the collection of Christine Podas-Larson.



sales and special gifts from audience members, Todora had a healthy fund to support her Oberlin education. She later returned to the Twin Cities, starring in the Minnesota Opera's 1976 production of Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and the 1980 production of Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.³⁵

Come What May gave those involved real experience and insights into enterprise organization, fundraising, and theatrical production. In addition to their roles in the cast, troupe members served as company manager, composer, playwright and lyricist, and stage and lighting designers. The company literally built the stage within the barn. Summit School and St. Paul Academy continued to use the venue for productions for many years.

Unforgettable

Former students, most now in their sixties and seventies, have vivid memories of Violet and her impact on their lives. Her name conjures the violet-hued aura that surrounded her. As Christmas gifts, they recall bestowing violet powder puffs, pens, linen hankies, and other tchotchkes. Her holiday tree was flocked violet and festooned with amethyst ornaments. They clearly and fondly remember lyrics to operettas and sing them at the drop of a hat.

Violet's ideals of community, cooperation, and love of music had profound and lasting impacts. Students learned through real experience at young ages what it takes to make a show. "She was a trip," commented her former voice student and Hayloft Theatre partner Wood Rockwell. "She gave her students exposure to real adult theater and musical performance."³⁶ Her ventures to support youth-led musicals fostered a new generation of theatrical professionals and nonprofit leaders.

Violet and Ralph moved from their Macalester Groveland duplex to Kellogg Square apartments in the early 1970s, as both experienced declining health. Even then, Violet continued to sing, forming a group of young male vocalists to back up her performances in the facility's reception room. She died on September 14, 1977.³⁷ Those who attended her funeral at House of Hope Presbyterian Church smiled as the casket passed—it was encrusted with glittering violet jewels.

“What matters is to continue singing and it’s surprising how many places there are to sing if you want to.”³⁸

—Violet Gould, March 22, 1953

Acknowledgments: The author is grateful for the insights and assistance of Linda Kelsey, Binky Wood Rockwell, James Jardine, Eileen O’Shaughnessy, and Molly O’Shaughnessy; librarians at the Minnesota Historical Society’s Gale Family Library, George Latimer Central Library’s St. Paul Collection, and University of Minnesota Elmer L.

Andersen Library. Thanks especially to Molly Larson for her editorial assistance and insights and to photographer Andy King.

Christine Podas-Larson is the founder of Public Art Saint Paul. She was a student in the Violet Gould Operetta School from 1958 to 1962; was in the cast and served as company manager of Hayloft Theatre in 1964; and participated in the St. Paul Opera Workshop production of Showboat in 1965.

Read our supplementary sidebar, “Violet Gould’s Civic Opera Musical Circle,” online at:



NOTES

1. From the memory of Linda Kelsey, interview with author, November 20, 2023, and described in a feature article by Marcia Black, “Voice Teacher Turns Dream into Children’s Operettas,” *Minneapolis Star*, February 23, 1968, 27.

2. “‘Carousel’s Nettie’ Says Music Is Fun,” *Pioneer Press*, March 22, 1953, 24.

3. Eileen O’Shaughnessy, interview, with author, February 1, 2024; *The Story of Hansel and Gretel* program, 1961, in Christine Podas-Larson program collection.

4. “Former Sherman Girl Will Sing Over Radio,” *Argus Leader*, August 11, 1929, 15.

5. “Violet Goald [sic],” South Dakota, US, 1856-1918, https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/178718:6996?tid=&pid=&queryId=a035edc5-337f-4e55-9436-c27d9c631ab3&_phsrc=red197&_phstart=successSource; “Violet A. Gould,” *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, Pierre City, South Dakota, 1910, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/157410565:7884>; “Laura Hentzelman,” *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Davenport, Iowa, 1900, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/16064875:7602>; “Davenport Doings,” *Rock Island Argus*, April 4, 1902; “In the City,” *The Daily Times* (Davenport), April 4, 1902, 5; “Laura Hentzelman,” *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, Pierre City, South Dakota, 1910, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/157410565:7884>.

6. “Miss Hentzelman Weds in Sioux City, Nov. 8,” *Quad-City Times* (Davenport), November 19, 1919, 10; “James A. Helmey,” *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Sherman, South Dakota, 1920, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/12682546:6061>.

7. “Carousel’s Nettie,” 24; “Harry Phillips, Music Leader, Dies in Hospital,” *Minneapolis Star*, March 21, 1928, 6; “Music Notes,” *Minneapolis Star*, November 11, 1928, 40; *St. Paul City Directories* (St. Paul: R. L. Polk & Co., 1926-1858), multiple years.

8. “Minnesota College to Dedicate Organ,” *Star Tribune*, February 25, 1923, 51.

9. “Mrs. Rast-Snyder Messiah Soloist,” *Willmar Tribune*, February 8, 1922, 8; “Agnes Rast Snyder Here Next Friday,” *St. Cloud Times*, February 8, 1932, 6; “Agnes Rast Snyder on Carleton Faculty,” *Minneapolis Star*, September 16, 1933, 8; “‘U’ Symphony in Concert Friday,” *Minneapolis Star*, November 27, 1937, 29; “Agnes Rast Snyder Appears in Recital at St. Paul October 23,” *Star Tribune*, October 25, 1922, 79; “Agnes Rast-Snyder Is Re-engaged as Teacher,” *Star Tribune*, July 23, 1922, 59.

10. “Quota July Dinner and Business Meeting Is Held at Country Club,” *Quad-City Times*, July 11, 1930, 4.

11. “Former Sherman Girl Will Sing,” 15.

12. “Carousel’s Nettie,” 24.

13. Program for the Civic Opera’s production of *Samson and Delilah* by Camille Saint-Saëns, December 8-9, 1933, and in subsequent Civic Opera program credit lists, St. Paul Civic Opera Association, program collection, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter, Civic Opera program collection); Steve Trimble, “Curtain Up in 1933: The Legacy of the St. Paul Opera Association,” *Ramsey County History* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 4; Cast list in Civic Opera program for *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, Civic Opera program collection; “Miss Gould Appears In Opera In St. Paul,” *The Daily Times*, October 24, 1934, 8; “Violet Gould Scores Triumph in St. Paul Role In ‘Carmen,’” *Quad-City Times*, October 24, 1934, 6.

14. Gerald James Olsen, *The Birth, Life and Death of the St. Paul Civic Opera Association*, thesis to the graduate faculty of St. Cloud State College for the degree of Master of Arts, St. Cloud, Minnesota, June 1971, 14-18. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a national program initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to put the country back to work during the Great Depression. The Federal Music Project was one dimension of the WPA, and its Minnesota division sponsored the Civic Opera Orchestra; *Samson and Delilah* program, 1933, Civic Opera program collection.

15. *Martha* program, 1934, Civic Opera program collection; *Carousel* programs 1958 and 1962, Civic Opera program collection; John K. Sherman, “St. Paul Civic

Opera Rides Superb 'Carousel,'" *Minneapolis Star*, February 14, 1962, 14; "Carousel's Nettie," 24.

16. "Orchestra Soloist," *The Daily Times*, August 4, 1939, 10; Kathleen C. Ridder, "Escaping the Heat on a Hot Night: The St. Paul Figure Skating Club and Those Popular Summer Pops Concerts," *Ramsey County History* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 4-12; "Soloists Featured in Tonight's 'Pop' Program," *Pioneer Press*, August 9, 1938, 14; Informal chronology: George S. C. Campbell, *24 years of opera in Saint Paul by the Saint Paul Civic Opera Association and 20 years of Pops*, in St. Paul Civic Opera files, Minnesota Historical Society; "Soloists Featured in Tonight's Pop Program," *Pioneer Press*, August 9, 1938, 14; Ridder, 12; "Orchestra Soloist," 10; Pops concert programs 1937-1956, collection of the Elmer L. Andersen Library, University of Minnesota; "Ice Revue to Star Soloist from 'U' Faculty," *Star Tribune*, August 7, 1960, 89.

17. "India Will Be Subject of Club Meeting," *The Minneapolis Journal*, February 26, 1939, 20; "Hallie Sunday Evening Salon Presents Violet Gould," *St. Paul Recorder*, March 7, 1947, 2; "Miss Gould Appears," 8.

18. Kelsey interview.

19. "Carousel's Nettie," 24.

20. "Symphony Drive Seeks New 'Fans'" *Star Tribune*, September 12, 1954, 1-3; "Saturday Is Deadline for Opera Additions," *Star Tribune*, January 24, 1960, 59; "Judges for Auditions Are Announced," *Star Tribune*, January 27, 1964, 12.

21. *HMS Pinafore* program, June 5-6, 1959, in Christine Podas-Larson collection.

22. Black, 27; Diana Ashmun, "Staging Children's Opera? You Need a Strong Bench," *Minneapolis Star*, September 14, 1960, 43.

23. *The Story of Hansel and Gretel* program, 1961, in Christine Podas-Larson collection.

24. *Pinocchio* program, 1960, in Christine Podas-Larson collection.

25. Various news briefs about the operetta school and performance locations; "Star Calendar—St. Paul," *Star Tribune*, September 18, 1958, 58.

26. Various operetta programs in Christine Podas-Larson program collection; "The Boy Mozart," *Pioneer Press*, January 3, 1971, 2.

27. "Twin Cities: Opera in the Making," *Opera News*, October 28, 1961, 18-21; Ashmun, 43; Margaret Armstrong, "Reasons Are Many for Supporting Opera," *Minneapolis Star*, May 19, 1961, 32. *Opera News* was a publication of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

28. *Song of Norway* program, January 1957; *Carousel* program, February 1962; and *Damn Yankees* program, April 1962, Civic Opera program collection; Kelsey interview.

29. "Seniors Awarded College Help," *Minneapolis Star*, June 22, 1968, 16; Author's recollection and conversation with James Jardine, March 2024; "Experienced Singer, 12, Seeks Show-Biz Future," *Star Tribune*, July 5, 1965, 9; Civic Opera programs for those productions; Kelsey interview. Linda's older brother, Don, directed *HMS Pinafore* and several other operetta

school productions. Her younger brother, Tom, was only four years old when he sang and swabbed the "deck" of the *HMS Pinafore*.

30. "Ralph Mather and Bride in Chicago," *Star Tribune*, November 16, 1958, 81; "Julian Gilman, St. Paul Executive, Dies," *Star Tribune*, November 4, 1952, 30; "Departmental Ditties," *Star Tribune*, November 11, 1957, 24.

31. "Cornell Alumni Elect Officers," *Star Tribune*, November 11, 1957, 30; Helen de Haven, "All Agree They Love Horses," *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, August 24, 1958, 76; Memory of horsewoman Laura Williams, as told to the author, 1966; "Searchers to Patrol Shore," *St. Cloud Times*, September 21, 1933, 2; "Party Feared All Drowned in North Lake," *Albert Lea Tribune*, September 19, 1933, 1. It was reported that Ralph and Adele Mather, Herbert Hues Bigelow, and Charles Ward (then Brown & Bigelow's vice president) had planned a joint camping trip. As the day of their departure arrived, Ralph Mather and Ward stayed in St. Paul to address an issue at the company. Bigelow and Adele Mather traveled to Ely to make final arrangements. They set out with a guide on Basswood Lake in a storm. Their canoe capsized, and all three drowned. The story shocked St. Paul society; "Ward, Bigelow's Cellmate, Elected Head of Company," *Minneapolis Star*, September 27, 1933, 11. Bigelow was a multimillionaire, though he had spent time at the US Penitentiary, Leavenworth, following conviction on a tax charge. His cellmate was Charles Ward. When both men were freed, Bigelow brought Ward into Brown & Bigelow. He worked his way up to an executive position. Upon Bigelow's death, Ward was named the company's president and inherited one-third of Bigelow's estate (estimated between \$3 and \$10 million in 1933).

32. "Manager Named," *Star Tribune*, March 6, 1952, 23; "Travel Ad," *Star Tribune*, February 11, 1962, 74; "Beautiful People," *St. Paul Dispatch*, April 2, 1972, 1; "Words and Music," *Star Tribune*, June 21, 1964, 77.

33. Binky Wood Rockwell, interview, with author, February 2024. Binky Wood Rockwell has been a mainstay of many Twin Cities' theater companies, including the Children's Theatre Company, and has served in leadership roles for the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, and the League of Women Voters.

34. *Come What May* program, August 1964, Christine Podas-Larson collection; "Friends Take Over Barn to Put on Benefit Show," *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 15, 1964, 18; Irv Letofsky, "Benefit Musical May Put a Song in Soprano's Heart," *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, August 16, 1964, 1B-2B.

35. Roy M. Close, "Rare Czech opera is lively, entertaining," *Minneapolis Star*, October 11, 1976, 2; Kathy Grandchamp, "Charming prince carries off a cautious 'Merry Widow,'" *Minneapolis Star*, November 11, 1980, 19.

36. Wood Rockwell interview.

37. "Mather," *Minneapolis Star*, September 15, 1977, 97.

38. "Carousel's Nettie," 24.

Honoring Minnesota's History Scholars

Sixty-four “Team Minnesota” history scholars competed at National History Day (NHD) at University of Maryland–College Park in June. Over nine months, students in grades six through twelve identified topics related to the theme, “Turning Points in History,” and created detailed research projects for school, state, regional, and national competition.

“Ramsey County Historical Society applauds all students and teachers who participated in the 2024 History Day competitions,” said Chad P. Roberts, CEO and president of RCHS. “As an organization committed to the preservation and presentation of history, we understand the challenges involved in researching and presenting complex community history. We appreciate their efforts to create projects that bring these stories to the world.”

“Team Minnesota” returned home with ten medals, two affiliate awards, and seven honorable mentions.

Minnesota NHD Medal Winners

- **First place senior group performance:** “Then They Came for Me: The Separation of the German Church and the Resistance Against the Nazi Regime” by Colten, Dexter, Sawyer, Sedona, and September, Christ’s Household of Faith School, St. Paul;
- **First place junior paper:** “The Creation of the Birth Control Pill: A Turning Point for American Women’s Education, Economics, and Role in Society” by Zania, Open World Learning Community, St. Paul;
- **Second place senior individual website:** “A Turning Point in Native American Spiritual Rights: The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978” by Margaret, East High School, Duluth;
- **Second place junior individual documentary:** “Sunny Days: A Turning Point in Children’s Television” by Maeve, Murray Middle School, St. Paul;

- **Third place junior individual exhibit:** “Griswold v. Connecticut: A Turning Point in Privacy Rights” by Scout, Murray Middle School, St. Paul;
- **Third place junior group exhibit:** “Click It: Buckle Up America” by Harrison, Miles, and Parker, Sunrise Park Middle School, White Bear Lake;
- **Third place junior individual website:** “Life is a Highway: How the Interstate Highway System Transformed Everyday Life in America” by Steven, Olson Middle School, Bloomington;
- **Sixth place/outstanding affiliate entry for junior group documentary:** “The Seven Countries Study” by Charlie, Emmett, and Peter, Murray Middle School, St. Paul;
- **Seventh place/outstanding affiliate entry for senior group website:** “The Six Who Sat: A Turning Point in Long Distance Running” by Alayna and Renn, Mankato West High School, Mankato;
- **Ninth place junior individual performance:** “Ida Tarbell: A Turning Point in Journalism, Politics, Business, and Law” by Grace, Salk STEM Middle School, Elk River.¹

The Minnesota Historical Society is an affiliate sponsor of National History Day, and RCHS was proud to support a few county scholars thanks to donations from board and committee members Anne Cowie, Jo Emerson, Timothy Glines, Deborah Lee, Marc J Manderscheid, Richard H. Nicholson, Chad P. Roberts, Ellen M. Turpin, and Helen Wilke.

“We celebrate the work of these students,” Roberts said, “and look forward to supporting the 2025 researchers as they take on the theme, ‘Rights & Responsibilities in History.’”

NOTE

1. “Minnesota Students Take Top Honors at National History Day Competition,” press release, Minnesota Historical Society, July 17, 2024.

See a complete list of Minnesota projects and the scholars who attended 2024 National History Day online at:



Note: Minnesota Historical Society and Minnesota History Day policy is to list participants' first names only.