



*Sir David Willcocks  
and Lydia Adams*

## *Lydia Adams, C.M.*

*By Linda Beaupré*

When Lydia Adams was recently named as a new member of the Order of Canada, there was much rejoicing. Lydia is well known to the Canadian choral music community and beyond, and has touched singers on every level from untrained amateur to professional, and from child to adult. Lydia has a magnetism that comes from a genuine wish to share the joy of making excellent music, from her incredible level of musicianship, and from her talent in drawing out a high standard of musical excellence from her performers. Singers and instrumentalists of all ages and levels of ability unfailingly find that singing or playing for Lydia is an uplifting musical experience. She has the gift of taking any musical piece and immediately elevating it to its highest level. New compositions, whether by amateurs or professionals, take on a more musical shape. In the process of working with Lydia, many singers are inspired to higher musical ability and dedication. Her innate musicianship helps the inexperienced to sing more musically, and often those who are new to choirs are inspired to take voice lessons and to learn to sightread.

Growing up in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, Lydia had two very strong mentors: her mother, Florence Adams, a church musician and a musical force within the Glace Bay community; and Marguerite MacDougall, an amazing performer and piano teacher (who also taught Stuart Calvert, another Glace Bay musician whose name many will recognize). After completing her degree at Mount Allison University, Lydia began five years of post-graduate work in England at the Royal College of Music and

the National Opera Studio. It was in England that Lydia began her professional career, as she quickly became a valued pianist with the Royal College of Music and the Bach Choir of London, both under Sir David Willcocks. Sir David also occasionally offered Lydia extra experience, when he would have her take over conducting in rehearsal at a moment's notice. When Lydia returned to Canada she had already been contracted to play for the Elmer Iseler Singers (EIS) under their namesake, Dr. Elmer Iseler. Sir David and Elmer greatly valued Lydia's high level of musicianship and her joyful personality, and each quickly became personal friends and valued mentors to Lydia.

Lydia's long relationship with Elmer Iseler began when she played for an adult summer camp of the Nova Scotia Choral Federation, which Elmer was conducting. Elmer was quickly smitten with Lydia and offered her a position as accompanist with EIS...which he held for her until she finished her studies in London. Years later, it was a natural succession when Lydia took on the conducting of EIS, carrying on Elmer's tradition of encouraging new Canadian music through commissioning and performing. Lydia is now in her 25th year as conductor of the Elmer Iseler Singers.

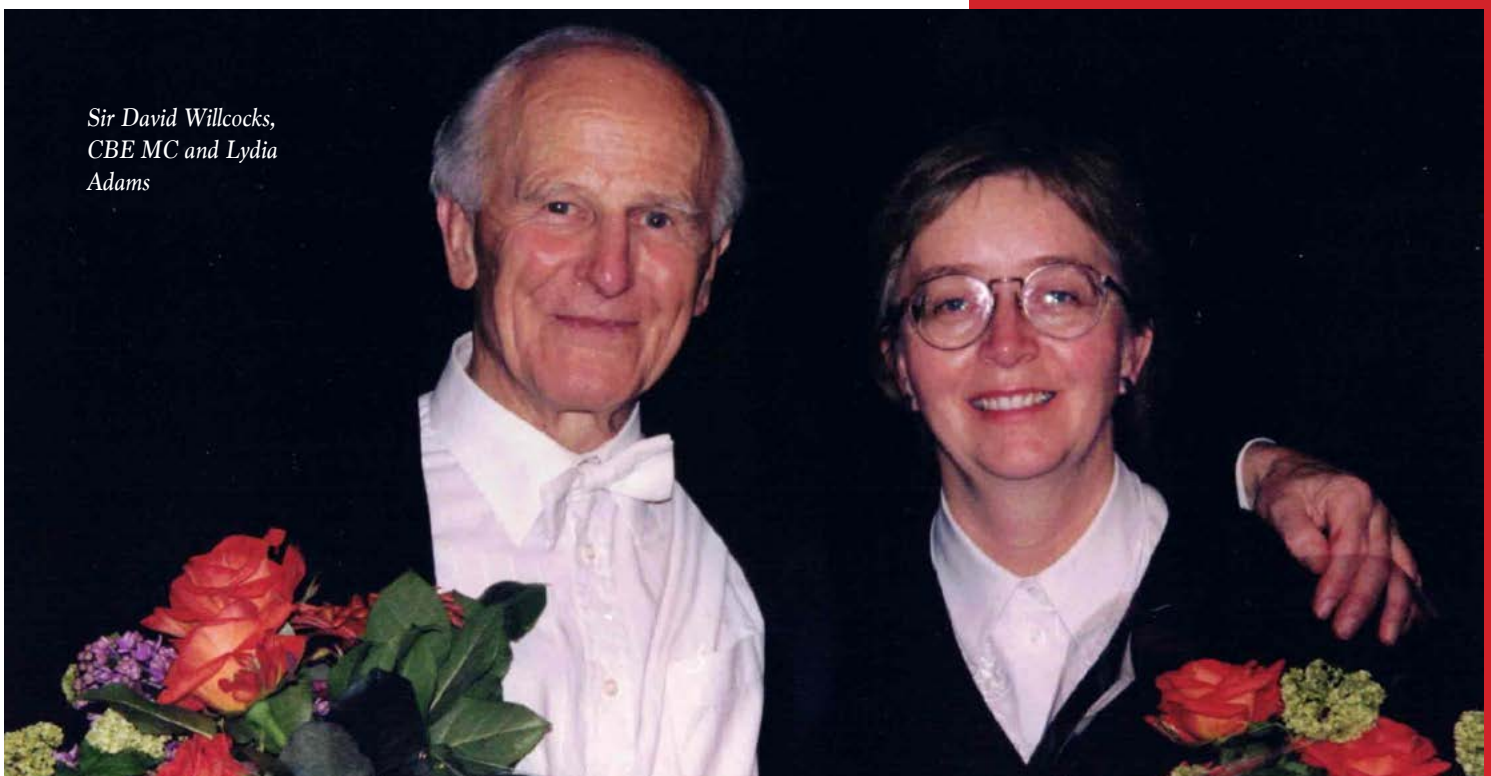
While working with EIS, Lydia began conducting the Amadeus Choir (AC). Over her 35 years with the AC, the choir grew to its current stature as a well-known choir on the Canadian scene, performing, recording and commissioning many new Canadian works. In 1987, Lydia borrowed an idea from Sir David, who ran an annual competition for a Christmas Carol, with one winning piece to be sung each

year by The Bach Choir. Lydia adapted this into the annual Amadeus Song Writing Competition.... a 30-year success that engendered hundreds of new compositions. Lydia expanded the idea to include several separate categories for all ages, and in each of the 30 years of the annual competition, compositions were submitted by children, teens, adult amateurs and professionals. The top prize for each of the winners was a certificate and a modest amount of cash, but the best part was a performance of the work by the Amadeus Choir, along with a recording of the performance. Chanukah song categories were soon added and later, briefly, a solstice category. If a song was a simple melody needing accompaniment, the winning composer had the added perk of either Lydia or Eleanor Daley writing an accompaniment for the song. Lydia or Eleanor would gently work with young composers if a rudimentary arrangement needed a little tweaking to make the song work in performance. Many of the songs were absolutely remarkable, and up to 9, or 11, or even 13 new songs might be performed in a single concert. Many winning songs were ultimately published and thereby shared well beyond those initial performances.

Lydia's gift of bringing outstanding premieres of new works to audiences and championing new compositions has become a hallmark of her work. Through an instinctive understanding of the composer's wishes and a superlative level of musicianship, Lydia inspires each performer to feel the essence of each new composition from the first notes of the initial rehearsal. She has a generosity of spirit that she brings to her treatment of both the performers and the music. The hundreds of works that Lydia has premiered include the world's first Cree opera, "Pimootewin: The Journey," by Tomson Highway and Melissa Hui;

"Music of the Land," by Kathleen Allan, featuring a children's choir, dancers and throat singers; "Om Saha Navavatu," a meditative work by Timothy Corlis based on Vedic mantras; and "Nur: Reflections on Light," by Hussein Janmohamed, based on Islamic chant. Lydia's own choral arrangements include two of the most beloved songs of Canadian choirs: "We Rise Again" by Leon Dubinsky and "Here's to Song" by Allister MacGillivray.

Lydia has received many honours in her career, including Honorary Doctorates from the University of Cape Breton and her alma mater, Mount Allison University; the title "Ambassador of Canadian Music" from The Canadian Music Centre; and the Ontario Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts. It is with great pleasure that we congratulate her on this prestigious, very well-deserved award, that of becoming a member of the Order of Canada.



*Sir David Willcocks,  
CBE MC and Lydia  
Adams*

## NOTE FROM LYDIA:

*Dear colleagues: Thank you so much to Matthew and Choirs Ontario, and to Linda for writing this very kind article. I am greatly honoured to have been appointed to the Order of Canada.*

*Matthew kindly gave me an opportunity to say a few words when I realized that Linda was going to miss one extremely important part of my choral voyage - and that is Linda Beaupré.*

*The truth of the history is that Linda was with me from the very beginning of my tenure with the Amadeus Choir, and was an integral part of building the choir.*

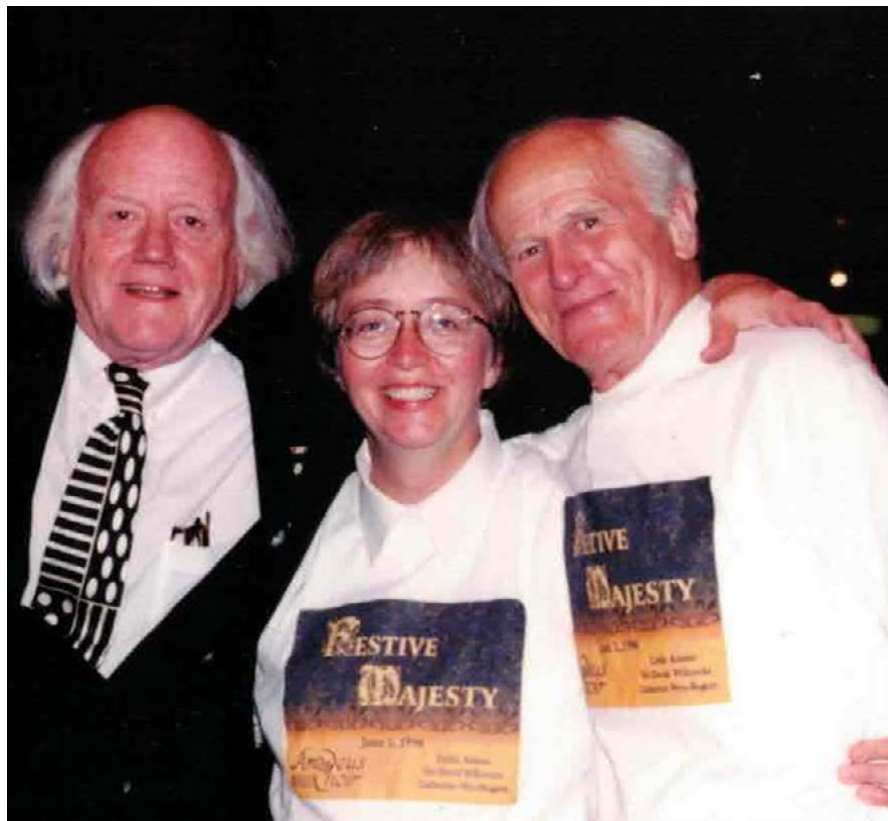
*Linda supported me in taking on the choir, and became the choir's first (unpaid) administrator, organizing the choir and doing all the applications for Charitable Status, etc., etc. She founded and developed the Bach Children's Chorus into one of the finest choirs in Canada, beginning with a small group of children of Amadeus singers. Its original name was The Amadeus Children's Chorus of Scarborough. She co-founded the Amadeus Song-Writing Competition with me, and this competition would not have had the impact for so many emerging composers, from age 4 years to international professionals, had it not been for Linda and her stunningly beautiful performances with the BCC of so many carols and other works written for children's voices.*

*That is the short list of what she did.*

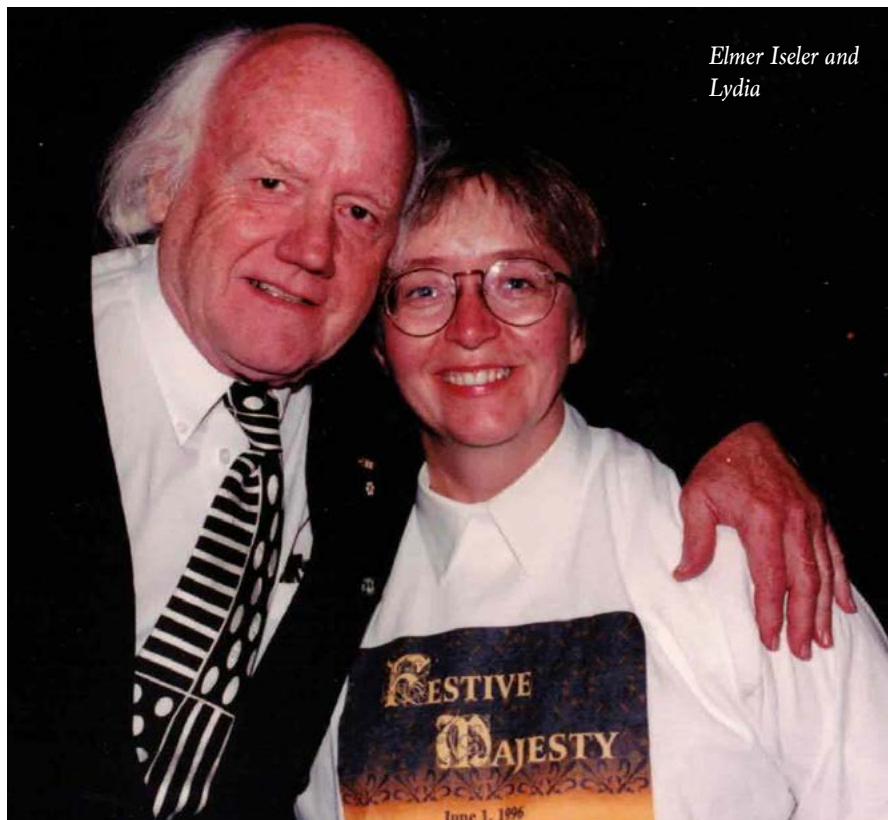
*All to say that I did nothing on my own - it all happened because of such marvellous people with me, and Linda and her friendship, work and artistry, enthusiasm and excellence, was a huge part of any success that might be attributed to me. I just thought that should be noted.*

*Thank you, Linda!*

*Best wishes to you all for a brilliant choral season ahead!*



*Sir David Willcocks, Lydia Adams, Elmer Iseler*



*Elmer Iseler and Lydia*

*All photos: Maura McGroarty*