

VYSO Amy Dundas Head Memorial Fund



The Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra gives young musicians like Caitlin Wood the opportunity to play the great musical works.

The music plays on

Memorial fund helps Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra musicians realize their dreams

By KIMBERLEY FEHR

PHOTOS: TIFFANY BROWN COOPER

Wherever Amy Dundas Head went, she brought the music with her. Her violin was her constant companion at family gatherings, show-jumping competitions and Christmas carolling – even at her own wedding.

“She wanted to share music with whomever she met, whatever their interests were,” recalls her father Tim Dundas. Amy, a vibrant blonde with an open smile, would diverge from her classical background into the music of the moment, jamming with jazz or Gaelic tunes – whatever people wanted to play – because for her it was about sharing.

Amy was frequently on the road at show-jumping competitions, climbing the Canadian rankings with her eye on the international circuit. Based at her family’s farm near Kamloops

where she bred horses, she won numerous professional events throughout Western Canada. She also excelled at the “kur”

competition, a dressage event where horse and rider perform a sort of musical ballet.

Her father

recalls her spending hours selecting and editing music for these performances.

In the midst of all these dreams, Amy died suddenly and tragically at 30 years old, in a stable accident – doing what she loved. She had been married to her husband, Keith Head, for less than a year.

It was such a great loss. Amy’s mother-in-law, Alice Smith, didn’t want to lose the music too. It was a passion the young couple had shared, and a passion Smith wanted to honour. After consulting with Head and Dundas, she established a memorial fund in Amy’s name to support a deserving player in the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra, where Amy’s exuberance and encouragement had made her a role model.

Music was, after all, Amy’s first love. At age four, she started playing the violin with the Suzuki Program. There were Kiwanis Music Festivals, and busking on Granville Island, and then, at 14, she joined the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra, playing in the first violin section for four years. When she was 17, Amy won the concerto competition, and on her birthday played as the soloist in the Bruch G minor violin concerto. »



Conor Stuart (left) and fellow
VYSO member Kevin Kang.



Amy Dundas Head with her
horse Fanny.

She fit in with the youth orchestra the way she fit in life, relating to members and teachers of all ages with her bubbly, upbeat persona. While she was studying music at UBC, her career was cut short by a repetitive strain injury, but she never stopped playing. “This fund helps to keep things going that Amy would have liked to con-

tinue doing,” says Dundas, “and to some extent it mitigates the loss to know that her desires and ambitions are living on in others.”

Because the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra held its endowment fund at Vancouver Foundation, it seemed natural to establish the Amy Dundas Head Memorial Fund there as well. “Vancouver Foundation has shown interest and kept in touch. We were able to meet with the staff personally in Vancouver and talk about Amy and get the fund established,” says Dundas.

Mark Sachs, past president of the Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra and a Vancouver lawyer, says Vancouver Foundation is a great concept – pooling resources for charities and managing the funds under one roof. “Compared to our other fund that we have at a bank, the Vancouver Foundation management fee is very low,” he says.

A few years ago, Sachs adds, the orchestra found itself in financial difficulty. One thing compounded another – a tour went over budget, a government grant didn’t come through – so they turned to their membership, asking those who could contribute to pay in. They raised what they needed to get out of the hole, and launched a campaign to get their funding in better order, with help from one of the parents – Ross Beaty – who led the campaign with great success.

Over two years their endowment grew from \$200,000 to \$1 million as of 2006, thanks to some money magic from the B.C. Arts Renaissance Fund, which Vancouver Foundation also managed. Created by the provincial government with a \$25-million gift, the B.C. Arts Renaissance Fund matched the money raised by the orchestra, effectively doubling fundraising efforts. “It did provide a wonderful boost to our funds,” says Sachs. “Now, that’s one-sixth of operating funding that we don’t have to ask for. And we are less reliant on grant programs.”

With their fund sitting at about \$1.3 million, it takes the pressure off so they can concentrate on their *raison d’être* – developing and nurturing young orchestral talent.

Based at St. James Community Square in Kitsilano in part of an old church complex, the orchestra offers four levels for different abilities and ages, from eight to 22 years. “From the kid’s point of view, it’s great to have the opportunity to play with other musicians after many years of solitary practice wondering



what it's all for. And they always get revved up for the performances," says Sachs.

For young musicians like 19-year-old violinist Conor Stuart, the orchestra was a place where he made some of his best friends. Having joined at age seven, he is one of the orchestra's longest-serving members.

"Playing in the orchestra is a completely different musical experience, a completely different way of listening," he says. "Just trying to contribute to what everyone around you is playing – it is a collaborative effort with everybody working towards the same thing."

The orchestra allows him to play music he can't play alone. "It gives us the opportunity to play many of these great musical works," he says. "Playing them, you begin to appreciate how everything works, why they sound so compelling, why these pieces are so enduring. You notice so much more about the music than when you are just listening."

In an ideal world, Stuart would make his living as a composer – he's in his third year of music composition at UBC with a solid backup plan: a dual degree in civil engineering, which means a total of eight years of school.

So every little bit helps. In 2007, he received over \$600 from the Amy Dundas Head Memorial Fund, an award that goes to a senior orchestra string player with musical proficiency and a character reminiscent of Amy – a role model



Roger Cole directing the VYSO at St. James Community Square.

who inspires and encourages others. "As a composer or as a performer, I just want to keep the music going in my life," says Stuart.

The music, the notes, the melodies, the symphonies – that's the dream of young musicians. Amy had to give up her musical career, but her violin was a part of her, and the music flowed on through her life, in the people she touched, the songs she shared and the joy that travelled with her wherever she went.

Her life ended far too soon, but the music plays on, in her memory. **VF**

To find out more about the Amy Dundas Head Memorial Fund, contact Kim McPhee of Vancouver Foundation at 604-688-2204. To donate online, visit www.vancouverfoundation.ca and click Donate Now.