Arts and Leisure: Even Anne Gray's a bit amazed by her new book

by Valerie Scher

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ANNE GRAY - Step into author Anne Gray's home and you immediately know that classical music is important to her. Two pianos dominate the living room. Magnets of great composers adorn the refrigerator and the radio is tuned to a classical music station. CNS Photo by Eduardo Contreras. Two grand pianos dominate the living room. Magnets of great composers adorn the refrigerator. The radio is tuned to classical a music station.

Yet nothing is more indicative than her new book, "The World of Women in Classical Music," which traces women's musical achievements from prehistoric times to the present day.

At 1,055 pages (including bibliography, discography, glossary and index), it's nearly three times longer than her previous musical tome, "The Popular Guide to Classical Music." And it includes not just composers and performers but administrators, musicologists and philanthropists.

"When I began working on the book, I didn't have a clue that I would devote 15 years of my life to it. I kept finding more information," says the London-born author and longtime resident of the upscale San Diego community of La Jolla. "What I've accomplished is really unbelievable."

Especially since she doesn't have extensive training as a musician or scholar. Gray received her bachelor's in music, speech and drama from New York's Hunter College, a master's in English from San Diego State University and a doctorate in human behavior from (now defunct) La Jolla University.

"I've always been motivated by classical music," says the amateur pianist and devoted concertgoer. "It has given me what I could almost call a lining - a lining against all the darker things in the world."

Her father was a jeweler and watchmaker who repaired the heirloom watches of presidents Truman and Eisenhower; her mother was an accountant. While their musical taste centered on Strauss waltzes, young Anne began learning about music by singing and acting in school plays and taking piano lessons, starting when she was 8.

She vividly remembers the move to New York when she was 14 ("I wrote poems while sailing over on the Queen Elizabeth") and her post-college sojourn to Hollywood to become a movie star.

"It never went very far," says Gray, who was put off by casting-couch shenanigans. "I was, and still am, a very old-fashioned girl."

Moving to San Diego, she became a teacher and often incorporated music appreciation into her classes at San Diego elementary and middle schools. She also taught freshman English at a community college.

Gray met her husband of 41 years, Charlie Bubb, on a blind date.

"I thought he was a young punk sailor and he thought I was an old maid schoolteacher - but we didn't tell each other that until later," says Gray, the mother of their two grown sons, Charles, 36, a fifth-grade teacher, and Adrian, 33, who works for the federal government. "Because we became friends, it worked out much better than falling madly in love right away."

Gray, who once wrote a self-help book titled "How to Hang on to Your Husband," first combined her love of music and writing in "The Popular Guide to Classical Music" (1993). Two of the chapters were devoted to women.

"That was a real eye-opener," recalls Gray. "I didn't know that there were women conductors beside Sarah Caldwell."

Realizing that women in music deserved an entire book, she set to work before the "Guide" was published. Her husband - the son of a former principal trumpeter for the San Francisco Symphony - helped with research after his 1999 retirement as a deputy marshal for the county.

Gray's office was a small room off the hallway, where she wore out several computers. She also conducted countless interviews, traveling as far away as New York, London and Vienna.

"I don't want this book to languish on a library shelf," says Gray, who hopes that "The World of Women in Classical Music" will be used in college courses and appreciated by readers. "It's one huge enlightenment."

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