

At a Meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on February 7, 2006, the following Minute was placed upon the records.

LUISE VOSGERCHIAN

Born: November 9, 1922

Died: March 13, 2000

Luise Vosgerchian, Walter W. Naumburg Professor of Music, Emerita, was born on November 9, 1922 in Watertown, Massachusetts. Her mother Araxy Kurkjian, whose immediate family perished in the Armenian genocide, escaped from Armenia via a long and arduous journey. "Roxy," who died in 1998 at the age of 102, was both demanding and nurturing, qualities students recognized in her daughter.

Luise studied at the New England Conservatory until 1945. In 1949 she moved to Paris, where she performed regularly and studied composition and music theory with Nadia Boulanger. Returning to Boston in 1956, with her husband Kamil Pagacik whom she had met and married in Paris, she began teaching at Brandeis University and, from 1959, at Harvard.

As a concert pianist, Luise appeared with major orchestras including the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. She regularly played keyboard parts with the BSO under Serge Koussevitzky and Charles Munch. Her commitment to contemporary music was evident from her long association with new-music groups such as Musica Viva. Among the composers she worked with over the years were Paul Hindemith, Aaron Copland, Harold Shapero, Irving Fine, Lukas Foss, Karel Husa, Walter Piston, Arthur Berger, Luciano Berio, John Adams, Ivan Tcherepnin, and Leon Kirchner.

When Luise joined the Harvard Music Department, performance was relegated to extracurricular activity. Luise was put in charge of a new program, Basic Piano, and it came to life. Undergraduates decided to stay in the department as long as possible; they knew that they were learning musicianship from a superb craftswoman. Consequently, Professor Tillman Merritt asked Luise to join him in teaching Music 51 (Theory I). Impressed with the electricity in her teaching, he turned the course over to her. In 1971, to the delight of colleagues who felt the department was overdue in recognizing performance, Harvard took the unusual step of elevating a lecturer to full professor. Vosgerchian's professorship marked the start of a transformation within the department. Incoming talented performers, whether concentrators or not, were drawn to Luise's tutelage and, through her, to closer contact with the work of the department as a whole. The study of music gained a new dimension: performance informed by insightful analysis.

Luise's teaching was lively, intelligent, and inspirational. Easily able to impart the tangible aspects of music, her most extraordinary talent was for teaching the intangibles. She placed great emphasis on developing a student's ear by employing a fusion of analytical and intuitive skills. She believed that each of her students had a unique perspective; she convinced them to trust equally their ear, intuition, and intellect. The greatest tribute to Luise is the vast number of her students who have made significant contributions as composers, scholars, and performers. All would echo what Yo-Yo Ma has said on many occasions, "she was one of the most important influences in my life."

"Miss V" expected students to work as hard as their ability and training permitted; anything less was

contemptible. She reserved the sharp side of her tongue for those who did not take their music seriously. Of course, this was just another facet of her tremendous enthusiasm. She was in love with music, and woe to anyone who failed to maintain the standard that love exacts. Always outspoken and noted for her directness—perhaps to a fault—Luise took pleasure nonetheless in recounting the story of one student who, after a rather frank critique, said, “Miss V, you need a crash course in tact.”

Beyond the time spent in musical meditation with devoted music concentrators, Luise gave equally to students in other fields; their lives were made more meaningful by what can only be described as “Vosgerchian Encounters.” By far the greatest number of these students—who were not musicians—were those in Luise’s very popular Core courses: Structure and Form Through Music and Movement (with Claire Milardi), The Development of the String Quartet, and Shorter Keyboard Works of the Nineteenth Century. Luise brought musical repertoire to heretofore musically uninitiated students with astounding results. If ever there was a person made to teach in the Core program, Luise was that person. She had a gift for conveying the essence without the encumbrance of technical jargon.

Luise’s analytical skill was evident in her playing as well as in her teaching. Her superb musicianship was just what showed on the outside. When she played you heard the music, not the performer; she was the window through which the music passed, undistorted.

A singularly charismatic musical persona, Luise journeyed forward as inspired performer, interpreter, and student of the great masters past and present, pausing from time to time to digest and refine her very special information. Intimacy thus gained resulted in the creation of an analytic skill profoundly dependent upon “vitality” and “feeling,” a skill not everywhere apparent in our time, and one that helped her to achieve—perhaps her ultimate goal—the translation of the symbols and structures of this high Art into human life-discerning value.

As a reflection of this goal, The Luise Vosgerchian Teaching Award was established in 1986 by Professor and Mrs. Ray Goldberg and the Max Goldberg Foundation in order to perpetuate the values and commitment to teaching that Professor Vosgerchian brought to generations of students. It is administered by the Office for the Arts. Among the qualities recognized in recipients of the annual award are "a selfless commitment, a constant renewal of approach to subject matter, an artistic conscience, and a sincere interest in the development of the whole person."

After her retirement in 1990, Luise remained busy with concerts and made a superb recording of two works especially close to her heart, Schubert’s late Sonata in B-flat Major and Schumann’s “Kreisleriana.” She divided her time between Watertown, her Manomet house near Plymouth, trips to Europe as Lecturer on Alumni Tours, and travels in Slovakia with her husband, visiting Kamil’s relatives or vacationing in their beloved Tatra Mountains. Luise died on March 13, 2000 after a long battle with cancer; Kamil passed away exactly three months after Luise’s death. They are survived by their two sons Stefan and Ivan Pagacik, daughter-in-law Denise, and two grandchildren, Michael and Matthew.

Respectfully submitted,

Elliot Forbes
David Hughes

Leon Kirchner
John Stewart, Chair