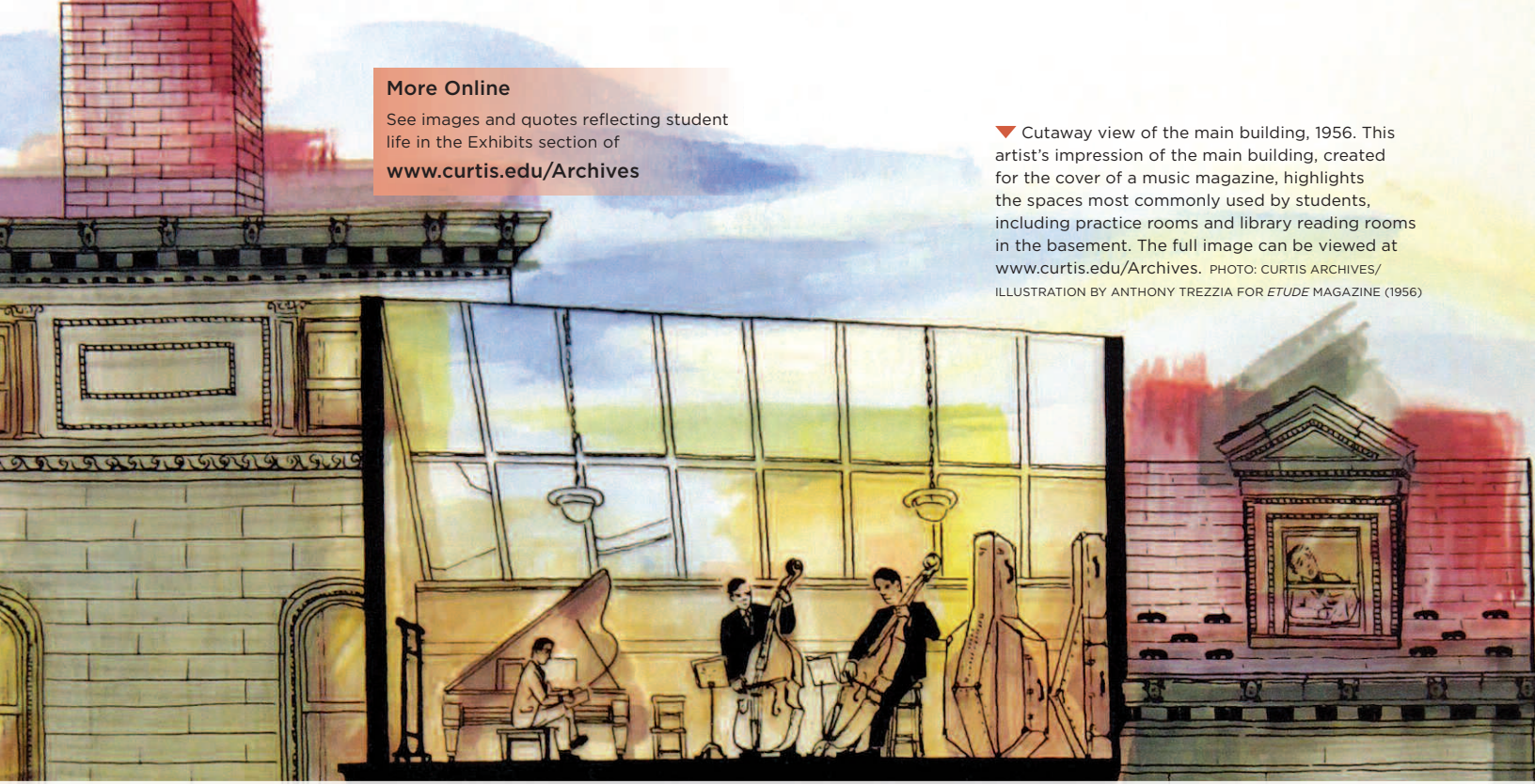


More Online

See images and quotes reflecting student life in the Exhibits section of

www.curtis.edu/Archives

▼ Cutaway view of the main building, 1956. This artist's impression of the main building, created for the cover of a music magazine, highlights the spaces most commonly used by students, including practice rooms and library reading rooms in the basement. The full image can be viewed at www.curtis.edu/Archives. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/ ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY TREZZIA FOR *ETUDE* MAGAZINE (1956)



“A Near-Utopian Community...”

BY HELENE VAN ROSSUM

An archival exhibit focuses on student life through the decades.

For more than 90 years, Curtis students have attended school to study, practice, rehearse, and perform. But when they were not in lessons, rehearsals, a practice room, or a classroom, how did they spend their time? Where did they live? What did they do in their leisure hours?

These everyday, social aspects of student life are, almost by definition, underrepresented in Curtis's historical record—documented informally (if at all) in student snapshots or oft-repeated anecdotes. Last summer the Curtis Archives assembled an exhibit on student life, and in the process collected archival materials from alumni and conducted oral histories focused on student life in various eras. These provide a glimpse into the daily lives of Curtis students through the decades.

Helene van Rossum was the archivist at the Curtis Institute of Music from October 2011 through February 2015.



Adding to the Archives

By definition, archival collections contain few tangible relics of student life. The Curtis Archives seeks personal photographs, memorabilia, and recollections of alumni to supplement our records. If you can help, please contact the Archives at archives@curtis.edu.



FOUNDER'S CHOICE

During Curtis's early years, student life was determined to a great degree by the founder's personal involvement with the school. Although tuition was eliminated in 1928, many students faced financial constraints. Mary Louise Curtis Bok arranged for daily meals in a cafeteria, instituted the weekly tea and annual Christmas party, and financed summer retreats for students to continue their studies with Curtis faculty. When she entered the common room, students were expected to stand up to show respect. Throughout Mrs. Bok's lifetime there was a dress code at Curtis.



▲ Mary Louise Curtis Bok addressing students, 1938. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/FRITZ HENLE ESTATE

“[Mrs. Bok] wanted to make sure that everyone was well-fed, so the upper floor of [1720 Locust St.] was a magnificent cafeteria where you could get a hot meal for 15 or 20 cents. She hired a live-in housekeeper who planned the meals and acted as a major-domo to make sure the buildings were properly maintained.”

—Diana Steiner (Violin '57)
in *Mother Started It* (2009)



▲ Students on Rittenhouse Square, c. 1930. From left to right: (sitting) John Hreachmack (Flute '35), Jeanette Weinstein (Piano '36), Bella Braverman (Piano '35), Schima Kaufman (Piano '26); Cecille Geschichter (Piano '37); Jascha Brodsky (Violin '34); and, behind them, Max Aronoff (Viola '34). PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GIFT OF BELLA BRAVERMAN BOOKBINDER (PIANO '35)

“The common room was always full of students moving around, going to classes or sitting between classes and chatting with each other. Jane Hill, the registrar, was in the room to the right of the entrance. When Mrs. Bok would arrive at the Curtis, [Jane Hill would] come out of the door and say, “Everybody get up!”

—Eleanor Sokoloff (Piano '36)



▲ Lunch in the fourth-floor cafeteria in Knapp Hall at 1720 Locust Street, 1938. (Eleanor Sokoloff is seated second from right.) PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/FRITZ HENLE ESTATE



“We had a race to see who could have the fastest time racing [through the main building]—we went down, and raced across the basement to the last exit on the other side of Curtis, and raced up to the first floor, and got back to the staircase. So we would shave our time down from two minutes to one minute and 38 seconds.”

—Arnold Steinhardt (Violin '59)

◀ Voice students having fun, 1946. From left to right: Theodora Brandon (Voice '48), Edith Evans Frumin (Voice '48), and Estelle Harrop (Voice '48). PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GIFT OF JANE PHELAN VOGEL (VOICE '47)

TIGHTER TIMES

After the Great Depression, Curtis director Efrem Zimbalist introduced a period of austerity: cutting programs, reducing the number of faculty and students, and selling the building at 1720 Locust Street, which put an end to the cafeteria. During the Second World War, 35 students were drafted, of whom fifteen later returned to Curtis. Students socialized in the library, the basement, local luncheonettes, and the lodgings they had rented nearby.

“I, at least in retrospect, consider the Curtis social unit akin to a near-Utopian community. Curtis was the nearest to a one-world, non-prejudicial, peer-supportive society I could imagine. There were no lines drawn for race, color, religion, age, ethnic origin, financial status, geographic origin or language.”

—Joseph Rezits (Piano '48) in *American Music Teacher* (2002)

▶ Curtis students and staff at the Balalaika, a local establishment, in 1947. From left to right: Ethel Nice, secretary to the director; Jane Hill, registrar; Blanche Burton-Lyles (Piano '54); Isabelle Vengerova, piano faculty; Joseph Rezits (Piano '48); Sylvia Zarembo (Piano '51); Helen Hoopes, secretary of admissions; Harriet Shirvan (Piano '54); Harriet Serr (Piano '51) PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GIFT OF JOSEPH REZITS ('48)



◀ Students in 1959 at 408 S. 22nd Street, where for three decades, Curtis students rented rooms in the two top floors. From left to right: Richard Lesser (Clarinet '59), Michi Ishikawa (Piano '61), Lynn Kahle (Cello '59), James Caldwell (Oboe '61), Susan Willoughby (Bassoon '61), and Artemus Edwards (Bassoon '60). The cutaway diagram on the wall, created by Edmund Moore (Tuba '60), depicts all rooms rented to students at that time. Other “408” residents over the years included Leonard Rose (Cello '39), Leonard Bernstein (Conducting '41), John Dalley (Violin '57), and Arnold Steinhardt (Violin '59). PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GIFT OF SPENCER CROCKETT (BASSOON '61)



▲ Playing chess and reading the newspaper in the basement library, 1974. From left to right: Huei-Sheng Kao (Violin '77); David Loeb, composition faculty; Gregory Cantwell (Voice '74); Larry Witmer (Trombone '74) PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GIFT OF PAUL FEJKO

◀ Tea in the common room, seen in 1974 from the recently installed glass walls around the stairs. To the left of the entrance is the receptionist's desk, where students reserved practice rooms and picked up messages and schedules. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GEORGE KRAUSE

MUSICAL ISLAND

Curtis students were well aware of the sweeping changes that took hold on American campuses in the 1960s. In the 1969–70 school year they added their voice to nationwide student protests with an outdoor performance. They also petitioned for the appointment of a student counselor and a say in the selection of chamber music, which had thrived after Rudolf Serkin succeeded Efrem Zimbalist as director in 1968. In general, however, the school remained the small island of musical study that it had been in the previous decades. Student life was still concentrated in the common room—where students leaned over the balcony to communicate with friends on the floor below, or sat on the stairs to arrange their schedules—or in the basement library.

“When I arrived at Curtis in the fall of 1969, I discovered that girls were not allowed to wear pants to school. My friends and I accepted this as part of the conservative nature of the school, but we were shocked that winter when, during the worst snowstorm of the year, a girl showed up at the door of Curtis wearing a nice tailored pantsuit, and was sent home by the lady at the front desk. That was the last year of the unspoken clothes rules. Early in the year, one soprano brazenly showed up to Wednesday Tea wearing velvet hot pants, and was not sent home or even reprimanded. Within a few months we were regularly wearing pants to school, except for Tea and lessons.”

—Lucy Chapman (Violin '74)

▶ Social life was often linked to chamber music, either at Curtis or at students' apartments. From left to right: Randall Cook (Oboe '74), Christopher Millard (Bassoon '75), Lucy Chapman (Violin '74), and Cynthia Raim (Piano '77) PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/GEORGE KRAUSE



“It felt important to us to join the students protests across the country [against the Vietnam War and invasion of Cambodia], and to do our share in trying to speak through music by performing Mahler's First Symphony on Rittenhouse Square. The orchestra was made up of some Curtis students as well as the larger community of freelancers and students from other music schools in Philadelphia.”

—Judith Serkin (Cello '73)

EVERYDAY EVOLUTION

In the 1980s and 1990s, student life evolved considerably. The accreditation of the school in 1993 made students eligible for federal student aid to supplement their Curtis scholarships. A student council was formed and an orientation week for incoming students was instituted. The orchestra traveled to the Evian Festival and toured more widely, contributing to close friendships among students.



AND TODAY...

In the past decade, student life has continued to evolve. The 2011 opening of Lenfest Hall, which provides housing for half the student body as well as full food service, has provided new gathering spaces and traditions; and today Curtis is more directly involved in student activities than ever before. And with social media, selfies, and spontaneous videos, daily documentation of student life poses less of a challenge than in decades past.

“[Evian] was a two-and-a-half-week residency in a beautiful area. The nice thing about it was the schedule gave us an opportunity to do a lot of nice things in that area of the country. ... And when you’re at Evian or Verbier and having meals together, you had an opportunity to meet people that you wouldn’t normally be with.”

—Paul Bryan (Trombone '93)



◀ Hoagies on Rittenhouse Square, August 1995. During orientation week, incoming students were welcomed with a speech and introduced to faculty and staff, culminating in a hoagie picnic on Rittenhouse Square—a tradition that has continued in the annual President’s Picnic. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/CHRIS CLARK

▲ Students boarding buses en route to the Evian Festival, 1984. The Curtis Symphony Orchestra served several residencies at this French music festival in the 1980s. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES

“[In the student lounge] ping-pong was the big thing. We had ping-pong tournaments to the degree where there were charts, where they would play down to try to get a champion.”

—Jennifer Higdon (Composition '88)



◀ Students in front of Lenfest Hall, 2015. Curtis students Adé Williams (Violin), Erika Gray (Viola), and Henry Woolf (Flute) strike a pose in front of the new building inspired by the 1946 photograph shown on p. 24. PHOTO: CURTIS ARCHIVES/HELENE VAN ROSSUM