Life at Curtis Before the War:
The Photographs of Fritz Henle, 1938
Curtis Institute of Music

This is the full text of the photo exhibit on display at the Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia. The photographs, which remain under the copyright of the Henle Estate, can be viewed online with brief captions in a different order at http://library.curtis.edu/archives/

In January 1938 the photojournalist Fritz Henle (1909-1993) visited the Curtis Institute of Music to take pictures for the photographic essay “Music: Ten Million Americans Become Musically Literate” in LIFE Magazine. The feature aimed to illustrate the increased appreciation of music due to radio, music education in schools, and American participation in bands and orchestras. When the article was published on December 12, 1938, two of the ten pages pertained to Curtis, including a full-page photo of Gary Graffman, then ten years old, with his piano teacher Isabelle Vengerova.

The remaining photos taken during his visit are displayed here, along with Henle’s photographs of the annual Christmas party in December 1938. Together, they provide a fascinating glimpse of life at Curtis between the Depression and the Second World War.

They also show that Curtis’s essential character has remained constant. In 1938, as now, Curtis embraced new ideas, learning by doing, and the nurturing of skills that were relevant to the contemporary musical environment.

Fritz Henle

The German-born photographer Fritz Henle (1909-1993), who settled in the United States in 1936, was one of the most famous photographers of his time. During his 60-year career he took over 100,000 photographs in various countries, covering many genres. He was one of the earliest contributors to LIFE Magazine, which published more than fifty features based on his images,
including the one about music in America for which he visited Curtis in January 1938.

The self-portrait shown here was taken around the time Henle visited Curtis. He is pictured with a Rolleiflex 2.25” twin-lens reflex camera, which he used throughout his career. The camera produced square images, which Henle (nicknamed “Mr. Rollei”) had to crop to the rectangular format that was required for magazines.

“Music: Ten Million Americans become Musically Literate,” published in LIFE Magazine, December 12, 1938

Life at Curtis occupies two pages, the first one with a full-page photograph of Gary Graffman at the piano with Isabelle Vengerova. The photos selected for the magazine article became the property of LIFE. (Similar but slightly different images are among the photographs in this exhibit from the Curtis Archives.)

Faculty shown here are Efrem Zimbalist (Violin), Samuel Chotzinoff (Music Criticism), Felix Salmond (Cello), Carlos Salzedo (Harp), and Marcel Tabuteau (Oboe), who is shown conducting the Woodwind Ensemble in four photographs at right. The two additional photographs show Curtis founder Mary Louise Curtis Bok and organ student Richard Purvis (‘40).

Curtis in 1938

When Henle visited the Curtis Institute of Music in January 1938, the school had been open for 13 years. According to the annual reports of the Dean, 206 students were enrolled. The faculty numbered 53, plus 10 accompanists (including several students) and 26 staff members. The main building at 1726 Locust Street and Knapp Hall, the adjacent building at 1720 Locust, looked much the same as they do now, although the recital hall (at the time named Casimir Hall) was only one story high.

Curtis could boast a faculty of famous musicians, mainly educated in European conservatories, who were teaching a new generation of American performers. Curtis’s director, the legendary pianist Josef Hofmann, had celebrated the 50th
anniversary of his American debut with a Golden Jubilee concert in November 1937, in which the Curtis Orchestra, joined by faculty and alumni, took part. Despite the challenges of the Great Depression, Curtis proudly kept up with its time. A cafeteria, built on the top floor of Knapp Hall only the previous year, allowed students, faculty, and staff to mingle. New appointments included an instructor in a new major, Music Criticism, and a teacher for Radio Class. Students performed live in weekly broadcasts over the CBS Radio network. These were simultaneously recorded by Curtis’s brand-new Recording Department. Students were encouraged to record themselves in order to study and improve their performance.

When Fritz Henle returned in December 1938, new financial constraints forced by the Depression had prompted changes. Student enrollment was severely reduced, teachers’ salaries had been cut, departments were reorganized or even dissolved, and Josef Hofmann had resigned. Still, Curtis held its annual Christmas party in the same spirit as always, with music, skits, and dancing—just one of the many traditions that Curtis has kept until this day.
Mary Louise Curtis Bok addresses students

Mary Louise Curtis Bok (1876-1970), the only child of publishing magnate Cyrus Curtis and Louisa Knapp Curtis, had founded the Curtis Institute of Music in 1924. President of the board of trustees until a year before her death, Mrs. Bok was a beloved and daily presence at the school, where she had her own office and secretary. On special occasions, she addressed the students in the recital hall, then named Casimir Hall.

Students in the front row include Leo Gomberg (Trumpet ’40), Donald Coker (Voice ’41), and Margot Ros (Piano, ’40, corner right). The two young boys in the right corner are Nathan Goldstein (Violin ’47) and Charles Libove (Violin ’40).

Josef Hofmann’s studio on the second floor of the main building

During the 1937–38 school year Curtis director Josef Hofmann was away on a concert tour to celebrate his Golden Jubilee. In the absence of the famous director, Henle photographed his office on the second floor (now the Zimbalist Room). A photo of the Russian pianist, composer, and conductor Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894) sits on Hofmann’s desk. Rubinstein had accepted Hofmann as his only private student in 1892, when Hofmann was sixteen years old. During his Golden Jubilee concert on November 28, 1937 at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, Hofmann played Rubinstein’s Fourth Piano Concerto with the Curtis Orchestra, directed by Fritz Reiner.

Fritz Reiner rehearses the Curtis orchestra

The Hungarian-born Fritz Reiner, principal conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1928 to 1931, directed the Curtis Orchestra from 1931 to 1941. Well respected but feared, he directed the orchestra when it performed for the school’s weekly radio broadcasts for CBS, and concerts in various cities. He also conducted operas and taught conducting to a small group of students. Reiner’s standards were high: He expected his students to conduct an important work “clearly and musically WITHOUT previous rehearsing with an orchestra.”
Reiner attracted very talented conducting students, the most famous of whom would be Leonard Bernstein (‘41).

**Alexander Hillsberg rehearses the student orchestra**

The Polish violinist Alexander Hillsberg, who immigrated to the United States in 1923, had joined the violin faculty in 1930 after the death of Leopold Auer, one of his former teachers at St. Petersburg Conservatory. The concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1936 to 1952, Hillsberg also pursued conducting. In 1941 he succeeded Fritz Reiner as conductor of the Curtis Orchestra, and held this position until he left Curtis in 1953.

**Marcel Tabuteau conducts the wind class**

Marcel Tabuteau, a graduate of the Paris Conservatory and principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1915, came to Curtis in 1925 to teach oboe and develop a woodwind ensemble, which he led until his retirement in 1954. Tabuteau, who is widely credited with founding the American school of oboe playing, also greatly influenced students of other instruments who took his classes and participated in ensembles he directed.

**Rosario Scalero with students**

Italian-born composer Rosario Scalero taught many Curtis students who would go on to important careers. By 1938 his students had included Marc Blitzstein (’26), Gian Carlo Menotti (’33), Samuel Barber (’34) and Nino Rota (’35). During the 1937–38 school year Scalero had eleven students, including Hugo Weisgall (’39), Constant Vaucain ’39, and Lukas Foss (’40; at the time his surname was Fuchs).

Identified students in this picture are: (second and third from left) Edward O’Gorman (’38) and Hugo Weisgall (’39); (behind Scalero) Lela Maki (’40); and (right) Sol Kaplan (’38).
A Curtis couple: Samuel Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti

In 1938 Gian Carlo Menotti (Composition ’33) and Samuel Barber (Composition ’34) were rising stars. During the preceding school year two of Barber’s works had received professional premieres: the Symphony in One Movement, by the Cleveland Orchestra under Artur Rodziński; and the String Quartet in B minor, by the Pro Arte Quartet in Rome. (The String Quartet’s slow movement would become famous in string-orchestra form as the “Adagio for Strings”). In the same year, Menotti’s opera Amelia Goes to the Ball, which was commissioned by Mary Louise Curtis Bok and staged by the Curtis Institute, was successfully premiered at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. This led to a new commission from NBC Radio for a short comic opera (The Old Maid and the Thief, 1939).

Barber and Menotti spent most of their lives together as a couple. They met as students at Curtis in 1928 and soon shared an apartment. Both men were very close to Mary Louise Curtis Bok, and in 1943 she bought them a home in Mount Kisco, New York which they called “Capricorn.” A meeting place for artists and intellectuals, Capricorn remained their home until 1973.

Baritone Howard Vanderburg (Voice ’40) at a voice lesson with Emilio de Gogorza

Emilio de Gogorza had been a leading voice instructor since Curtis’ early days, along with Marcella Sembrich; both were distinguished members of the Metropolitan Opera roster. In the 1937–38 school year, 21 full time students majored in Voice, including two students who had already graduated but continued to attend lessons and classes at Curtis.

Florence Kirk (Voice ’39) at a voice lesson with Elisabeth Schumann

German soprano Elisabeth Schumann was a new faculty member at Curtis, having arrived in the United States in December 1937. Florence Kirk was majoring in Opera with Dr. Ernst Lert, but also took voice lessons with Emilio de Gogorza and Elisabeth Schumann. She made her professional opera debut in
1937, singing the title role in Gian Carlo Menotti’s opera *Amelia Goes to the Ball* in Baltimore. At the piano is Elizabeth Westmoreland (Accompanying ’34).

**Opera class practicing a scene of Wagner’s *Die Walküre***

In this photograph Ernst Lert, appointed in 1936 to teach Operatic Acting and Stage Deportment, is rehearsing Act III, Scene I of Wagner’s *Die Walküre*. Lert, who had been stage director for Menotti’s *Amelia Goes to the Ball* in 1937, was stage director for the Philadelphia Civic Grand Opera Company’s production of *Die Walküre*, which was performed only once, on March 22, 1938. Although Curtis was not officially involved in this production, eight students were selected to perform the roles of Valkyries, including Florence Kirk ’39 and Elsie MacFarlane ’38. In this photo, however, Kirk is singing the role of Brünnhilde (standing, left), while MacFarlane might be Sieglinde, grieving for her brother on the floor.

The Opera Department was dissolved at the end of the 1937-38 school year due to budget cuts, and opera students who did not graduate were dismissed. Kirk, who also studied with De Gogorza and Elizabeth Schumann, was the only opera student who remained at Curtis. In 1939 the Austrian immigrant Hans Wohlmut (renamed John Wolmut after the War) started teaching a class in opera, but there was no separate opera department again until 1945.

**Anton Torello teaching in the double bass room***

The Catalan double bassist Anton Torello (1884–1960), who had immigrated to the United States in 1909, was principal bass of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1914 to 1948, and became Curtis’s double bass instructor from 1926 until 1947. Known as one of the foremost virtuosos on the instrument, Torello was credited with introducing the overhand style of bowing to the United States.

In the 1937–38 school year Torello had ten students. This photo, apparently taken in the double bass room on the second floor of Knapp Hall at 1720 Locust Street, is thought to show (from left to right) Ferdinand Maresh (’40), Irven Whitenack (’39), Henry Portnoi (’40), and (hidden from view) Jane Tyre (’40). The identity of the student seen from the back is not known.
Violin practice with Efrem Zimbalist and Vladimir Sokoloff

In this photograph Frederick Vogelgesang (Violin ‘39) and his teacher, Efrem Zimbalist, are accompanied by Vladimir (“Billy”) Sokoloff (Accompanying ‘36). The Russian-born Zimbalist (1890-1985), a student of Leopold Auer, was one of the most famous violinists in the United States at the time of his appointment to the Curtis violin faculty in 1928. Zimbalist became director of the Curtis Institute from 1941 to 1968. More information about him can be found in the Zimbalist Room, which was his office while he directed the school. In this room on the second floor of the main building his photographs and memorabilia are on display. This image was taken next door, in what is now called the Horszowski Room.

In 1937–38 Vladimir Sokoloff (1913-1997), husband of Eleanor Blum Sokoloff (Piano ’38), accompanied Zimbalist, Hilsberg, and De Gogorza during their classes. From September 1938 until his retirement in 1994 Vladimir Sokoloff would teach supplementary piano and accompanying at Curtis. He accompanied several members of the Curtis faculty in their solo careers and performed as a duo with his wife Eleanor Sokoloff.

Felix Salmond teaches Leonard Rose

The London-born Felix Salmond (1888–1952), a graduate of the Royal College of Music and one of the most distinguished cellists of his time, taught at Curtis from 1925 until 1943. A highly esteemed teacher, Salmond developed a new technique to achieve a singing, less nasal tone.

One of Salmond’s early students was Orlando Cole (’34), who became a founding member of the Curtis String Quartet. In 1937–38 Salmond had eight students, of whom Leonard Rose (’38) became the most famous.

Lea Luboschutz with her student Rafael Druian
Lea Luboschutz, the colorful, world-famous Russian violinist who was known to everybody as “Lubo,” taught at Curtis from 1927 to 1947. Standing next to her in the doorway of 1720 Locust Street is sixteen-year-old Rafael Druian (‘42), who was one of her seven students.

Russian-born but raised in Cuba, Druian (1922–2002) already had a solo career by this time. After a career as concertmaster of several leading American orchestras, he focused on solo performances and teaching during the later part of his life. He joined the Curtis faculty in 1990 and remained until 2001.

**Feeding pigeons on Rittenhouse Square**

The little boy seen here feeding pigeons in the park on Rittenhouse Square is Charles Libove (Violin ‘40). He was one of the two eleven-year-old violin students who came to Curtis in October 1937 to study with Lea Luboschutz. Young students who did not have their own relatives in Philadelphia usually boarded with a family who could provide a room in which they could practice their instrument.

In 1940 Charlie Libove went back home to Brooklyn to go to high school. After attending the Juilliard School he played in several string quartets and trios. He also taught and toured with his wife, pianist Nina Lugovoy (Piano ‘46).

**Harp class with Carlos Salzedo**

Carlos Salzedo (1885–1961), who taught at Curtis from 1924 until his death, was the most famous harpist of his time and had his own harp ensemble. He was also known as a conductor and a composer, particularly of harp music. In 1931 he founded the Salzedo Harp Colony in Camden, Maine. At Curtis in the 1937–38 school year, he had eight harp students.

This photograph shows Salzedo during a harp class on the first floor of Knapp Hall (now the reference room of the John de Lancie Library in the Milton L. Rock Resource Center). The girl with the studded waistband to the right of Salzedo is Reba Robinson (‘42) and the girl holding music to the immediate left of Salzedo is Lynne Wainwright (‘40). Salzedo later had a studio on the third floor of the
main building, now known as the Salzedo Room. After his death he left his papers and memorabilia to Curtis, including a cast of his hands that is now on display on the first floor of the Rock Resource Center.

David Saperton teaches Jeanette Savran

David Saperton had fifteen students in 1938, including Eleanor Blum Sokoloff (’38), who already had started teaching at Curtis in 1936. Jeanette Savran (’36) was one of the students at Curtis who had already graduated but continued to take lessons at Curtis, as did fellow pianists Ezra Rachlin (’36) and Jorge Bolet (’34).

Gary Graffman with his teacher Isabelle Vengerova

Pianist Gary Graffman (’46), director of Curtis from 1986 to 2006, was only seven years old when he auditioned at Curtis in 1935; extensions were fitted to the pedals so his feet could reach them in order to play. Since he lived in New York, only a few blocks away from the New York studio of his Curtis teacher, Isabelle Vengerova, he was allowed to have his lessons with her there. A few times a year Graffman came down to Philadelphia by train, as on this occasion. The lesson took place in what is now called the Vengerova Room on the second floor of the main building. Graffman reminisces about his teacher in his autobiography, I Really Should Be Practicing (1982).

A similar photograph took up a full page of the LIFE feature published on December 12, 1938.

Organist at work

The instrument in this photograph is probably the Aeolian-Skinner concert organ that Cyrus Curtis, an accomplished amateur organist, donated to the Curtis Institute for its new recital hall in 1927. In the summer of 1937 the organ was renovated, receiving an echo division and a new five-manual console. The organist in the photo may be Alexander McCurdy (’34) (1905–1983), who was the organist of the Second (later First) Presbyterian Church and had been
appointed organ instructor at Curtis in 1935. McCurdy demonstrated the enlarged and improved organ to the Curtis community during a faculty recital on November 16, 1937.

**Conducting a choir from the organ**

In 1937 Alexander McCurdy, organ instructor at Curtis, had become director of a new music department at the Episcopal Academy, a private boys’ school, where a new choir school of twenty boys was established at the same time. The venture was a collaboration among the Episcopal Academy, the Curtis Institute, and St. James Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, where the boys would serve as the church choir.

This photograph was presumably taken at St. James Church, which was located at the corner of 22nd and Walnut Streets and torn down in 1945. Behind the organ is Richard Purvis (’40), whom McCurdy had appointed as his assistant and as organ instructor at the new music department at the Episcopal Academy. Other Curtis students joined its faculty, too. According to a brochure Donald Sandifur (Composition ’38) taught band and orchestras, and Joseph Levine (’38), Frederick Vogelgesang (’39), and Leonard Rose (’39) taught piano, violin, and cello respectively.

**Music Criticism with Samuel Chotzinoff**

Music criticism was another novelty in the Curtis curriculum in September 1937. Teaching the subject was the renowned writer Samuel Chotzinoff (1889–1964), then a music critic at the *New York Post*. In 1937–38 his class included five students, of whom three had chosen Music Criticism as their major. From October 1938 Chotzinoff’s students were commentators on the weekly CBS Radio broadcasts from Curtis.

Chotzinoff, seen here from the back, taught at Curtis until 1940. In this photo are (with bowtie) Edward O’Gorman (Conducting and Composition ’38); and possibly Marvin Duchow (Composition ’39) on the right, along with unidentified students.
Renee-Longy Miquelle teaching Solfège

Renee-Longy Miquelle taught Solfège from 1926 to 1941. The subject included ear training, chord formation, rhythm, sight-reading, transposition, and score reading. Ms. Miquelle was known as a good teacher, though a very strict one. The boy on the front row in the middle is Ezra Rachlin (Piano and Conducting ’37), who had already graduated but continued to take classes at Curtis.

German with Dr. Mary Shumway

From the beginning, Curtis aimed to produce musicians who were educated in the humanities as well as in music. Academic studies, including foreign languages, were deemed important. At Curtis students could take classes in German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Latin.

In addition to teaching German, Dr. Mary Shumway was one of two academic tutors at Curtis. The boy in this photo is Nathan Goldstein (Violin ’47), who entered Curtis in 1937 at age eleven as a student of Lea Luboshutz.

Dr. Jean Beck

The musicologist Dr. Jean Beck (1881-1943) taught French and music history at Curtis from its founding in 1924 until 1938. (During his last years at Curtis he taught only music history.) Beck did not teach musicology, but the fact that Curtis hired a musicologist signaled the school’s interest in this new field.

In the 1930s musicology was still a relatively new academic subject in the United States and its importance to musicians was a subject of debate. Beck was a specialist in medieval music and focused on the repertoire of the troubadours and trouvères. In 1937 he published a reconstruction of the 13th-century musical play *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion* by the trouvère Adam de la Halle, which was performed as “Robin and Marion” during a Curtis recital on May 2, 1940. Beck is better known for his facsimile edition of “Le manuscrit du Roi,” an important source for French songs and motets from the late 13th century. Beck published the second volume of this edition in 1938.
Listening to the weekly Curtis broadcast

From 1933 to 1941 the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), one of the two primary radio networks at the time, broadcast The Curtis Institute Musicale each week. At first Curtis’s weekly broadcasts took place in the studio of WCAU nearby. From 1937, however, the programs were broadcast directly from Casimir Hall (now Field Hall). This enabled the weekly broadcasts to be recorded in the newly established Recording Department in Knapp Hall through a cable connected to Casimir Hall.

In this photograph students are listening to the radio broadcast through the loudspeakers in the Common Room, while the recording is taking place behind the doors of Casimir Hall.

Trio Classique plays for the weekly radio program

Eudice Shapiro (Violin ’35), Ardelle Hookins (Bowers) (Flute, ’34), and Virginia Majewski (Viola ’36), started working together after they heard Beethoven’s serenade for flute, violin, and viola during viola teacher Louis Bailly’s classes. By 1938 they had started to perform as Trio Classique. As the repertoire for flute, violin, and viola was not large, they filled out their programs with transcriptions and arrangements.

On Wednesday January 26, 1938 they played arrangements of music by Beethoven, Jungmann, Cornelissen, and Couperin. The “adagio and fugato” that opened their broadcast was thought to be by Beethoven at the time, but is now considered an anonymous work.

The Recording Department in Knapp Hall

In the 1936–37 school year a new Recording Department was established in Knapp Hall at 1720 Locust Street. The set-up consisted of a cutting device, turntables for recording and playing records, a radio, amplification units,
loudspeakers, and a microphone. Any number of pressings could be made from
the master disc of a recording, each of which could be played up to fifty times
without appreciable loss of quality. The turntables were also used to play
records in the library. According to Mary Louise Curtis Bok’s annual report for
1936–37, the Recording Department was visited 2,610 times and 700 individual
recordings were made.

Voice teacher Estelle Liebling (seen in the recording booth) taught at Curtis for
one year. In addition to working with singers, she taught Radio Class, which
covered microphone technique, diction, line, style, phrasing, and repertoire. It is
not known if this photo was taken during one of her classes or during an actual
recording. At the microphone are John Briggs (Music Criticism, ’39, left) and
Donald Coker (Voice ’41, right).

The Common Room

The Common Room has not changed much since Fritz Henle took this picture.
At the time it served the same purpose as it does today: a place for students,
faculty, and staff to meet and socialize before and after recitals, during parties
and special events, and for the weekly Tea. Mary Louise Curtis Bok started this
famous tradition in 1925, pouring the tea herself until the 1960s.

The Common Room is quite recognizable in this photograph, although today the
stairwell is enclosed by a reinforced glass wall built around 1970 to comply with
fire-safety regulations.

The library in the Bok Room

Until 1974 the library of the Curtis Institute was located in the basement of the
main building, with its reading room in what is now called the Bok Room. A
spiral staircase led from this room to the basement, where the library occupied
eight more rooms. According to Mary Louise Curtis Bok’s annual report for the
1937–38 school year, the library contained more than 28,000 volumes and the
reading room had nearly 6,000 visitors.

Seen here through the railing of the staircase is Lela Maki (’40).
Healthy meals for students: the cafeteria

Another innovation established during the 1937–38 school year was the new cafeteria, located on the fourth floor of Knapp Hall (now part of the Rock Resource Center). Providing cheap but healthy meals at Curtis was a way to make sure that all students were adequately fed during the Depression. “A cafeteria where wholesome food is served ‘at cost’ to students, teachers and members of the staff forms a part of the Institute’s equipment,” read the proud announcement in the Catalogue for 1937–38. In charge of the new facility was House Manager Florence Lockhart, who had a small apartment on the same floor and unofficially functioned as a “house mother” to foreign students.

The young man with the tray is Richard Purvis (Organ ’40). Seated at the right table are (from left) Eleanor Blum Sokoloff (’38) and Eudice Shapiro (’35).

Tea with the Curtis String Quartet

The Curtis String Quartet was founded in 1927 as the “Swastika Quartet,” named for the residence of Mary Louise Curtis Bok and her first husband, Edward Bok. With the rise of German Nazism, which used the ancient swastika symbol as its emblem, the Quartet changed its name in 1932. Everyone at Curtis took great pride in the youthful ensemble, which was already very successful by the early 1930s. In 1934 it performed in the White House and in 1935 it was the first American-trained chamber group to tour Europe.

In this picture Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who financially supported the quartet as well as other groups, is having tea with its members. From left to right: violist Max Aronoff (’34), second violinist Charles Jaffe (’35), cellist Orlando Cole (’34), and first violinist Jascha Brodsky (’34).

William Strasser, music consultant

William Strasser was a Hungarian by birth who studied music at the conservatories of Vienna and Prague. He conducted operas in various European
cities before he started to lose his hearing and settled in the United States. In
1928 he was appointed as consultant in the library, transcribing music and
repairing and binding scores. His handwritten transcriptions and compositions
are kept among the Curtis Special Collections.

In his private life Strasser was an artist, specializing in paintings and pen and ink
drawings. He painted the still life visible in this photo, depicting a Beethoven
score with a candle and inkwell, in 1930.

The annual Christmas party

The President's Christmas party was very much like our own annual holiday
party, celebrating the end of the semester and the holidays with music, skits,
and dancing. It was the one occasion in the year, according to Overtones, that
“The Curtis Institute as a body lays aside its earnest demeanor, forgets its
dignity and frolics like a spring lamb.”

In this photo members of the Curtis Orchestra are performing with the men and
boys’ choir of St. James Church. The conductor is probably Curtis organ
instructor Alexander McCurdy.

“A Christmas Eve Choral,” read by Eva LeGallienne

Among the guests invited for the evening in 1938 were soprano Rose Bampton
(’34) and two Broadway actors: Walter Hampden (1879–1955) and Eva
Bergerac, his most famous Broadway role.

In this photo Eva LeGallienne, standing in front of the St. James Church choir, is
reading Bliss Carman’s poem “A Christmas Eve Choral.” She must have spoken
the words of the ballad while the choir was singing. The musical arrangement of
the poem is unknown.

Skits at the Christmas party
Skits have been part of Curtis’s annual holiday parties since the very beginning. In the first photograph is registrar Jane Hill with an unknown man. At right, sitting at a desk, is Ethel Nice, secretary to Dorothy Bowman, the assistant director and student counselor.

In the second photograph an unknown student plays a baby violin for Ethel Nice.

**Mary Louise Curtis Bok accompanies Samuel Barber**

The 1938 entertainment ended with a performance by Samuel Barber, a baritone, who sang songs by Schubert. To everybody’s surprise, he was accompanied by Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who apparently did not often play in public. “The whole, and particularly this crowning touch at the end, was a truly Presidential Christmas Gift,” according to *Overtones*.

**Dancing to close the Christmas party**

The annual Christmas parties ended with dancing. Identified on the balcony are faculty members Euphemia Giannini Gregory, who taught voice and Italian diction from 1927 to 1973; Rosario Scalero; and Mary Shumway. On the dance floor Mary Louise Curtis Bok dances with an unknown student. Also identified are her son Curtis Bok, vice-president of the board of directors, as well as Samuel Barber (‘34), John Briggs (‘39), and Sol Kaplan (‘38).

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