

**MERLE
CAMPBELL
MONTGOMERY**
1904-1986



**EDUCATOR,
COMPOSER, &
CONCERT
PIANIST**

Americans listen to music in great concert halls and muddy cow pastures, libraries and nightclubs, churches and homes, offices and automobiles, elevators and airplanes. They listen to love songs, tragic songs, work songs, war songs, religious songs, folk songs, and nonsense songs. They pay millions of dollars a year to hear their favorite music.

In the 1976 Bicentennial, music portrayed the enormous diversity of America – its multiplicity of tastes, ethnic origins, religious and political beliefs. During America’s Bicentennial Celebration, Dr. Merle Montgomery was director of the Bicentennial Parade of American Works music series at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington DC, which included 50 state concerts, placing of 200 plaques honoring musicians of the past 200 years, and fifteen 13-week series of radio programs celebrating composers in every state.

Merle Campbell was born in May 1904 in Davidson, Oklahoma. A pump organ in the living room of their Oklahoma farmhouse – and later piano lessons – stirred her musical interests. While in college she saw that “many people play the piano well, but they don’t seem to understand what they are doing.” The awareness of this prompted her to begin writing and publishing theory books.

In 1924, she graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a bachelor degree in fine arts and married Pleasant Montgomery, who died in 1929. For the next four years, she studied in France privately and at the American Conservatory of Music in Fontainebleau, receiving a diploma in 1934. After teaching piano and theory for a few years in Oklahoma City, Montgomery went to Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, completing work on her masters of music in music theory in 1943. She taught piano and theory there for the next decade while completing her doctorate in 1953.

From 1953 to 1956, Dr. Montgomery wrote, produced and hosted “Let’s Go to Musicland!”, a series of thirteen 15-minute films for the Oklahoma Educational Service Division. The series introduced children to the fundamentals of music. In 1956, Montgomery was selected Oklahoma Woman of the Year.

She married author-composer A. Walter Kramer in 1957. He had a distinctive career in his own right, composing for piano, violin, and orchestra and serving as editor for Musical America for a decade. At age 18 one of his selections had been played by the New York Philharmonic. In 1976, Dr. Montgomery was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame for her accomplishments as a pianist, composer, and music educator. The next year, she was given the Distinguished Service Citation by the University of Oklahoma, the school’s highest honor.

Montgomery, a teacher and composer who played prominent roles in the National Federation of Music Clubs and National Music Council, died in August 1986 at age 82 in Chantilly, Virginia. She is buried in Norman. Pianist icon Van Cliburn said it best, “Merle Montgomery... a woman whose life has touched the world and made it sing.”