



Blended Notes: Birdsong and Book

Pianist and vocalist
Carlie Burdett
composes for the
young at heart

By Nancy Bacchus
Photos by Rebecca L. Bennett

Carlie Burdett, composer and author, woman of faith, wife, mother, and grandmother, and lover of nature, tells readers what matters in her life in the dedication to her book, *Music for Bird Lovers*: "To the cycle of life and love in which I am privileged to live ... To children everywhere ... To the grand array of birds which fills such an important niche in our world ... And to God with praise and thanks for it all."

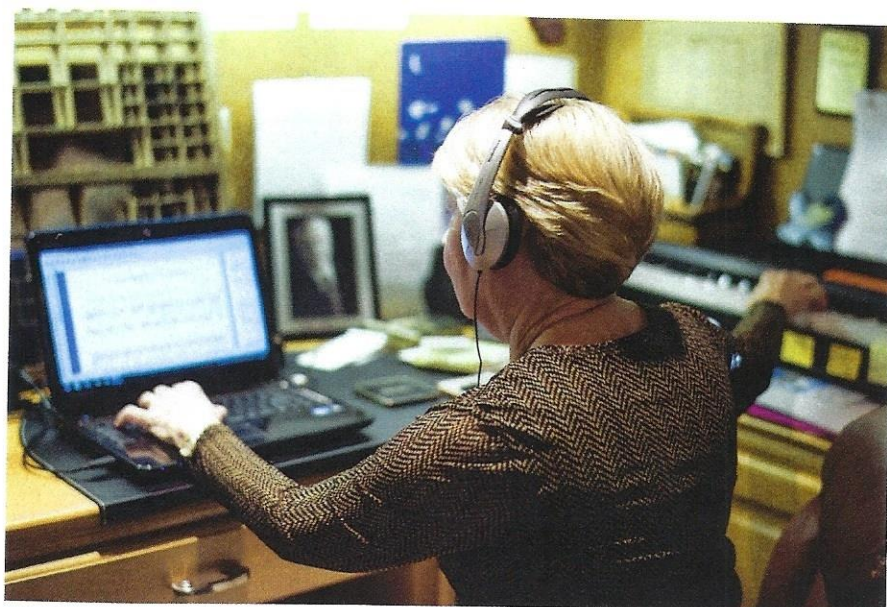
The soft-cover book grabs the reader with sharp, colorful images of nine birds in their native habitats, ending with a tenth picture of an ice-bound pond after ducks and geese have migrated to warmer climes. Each bird has its own brief story, enhanced with a world map showing where it lives and a handful of scientific factoids. *Music for Bird Lovers* is "suitable for all ages," as the cover suggests, but the CD inside is the real bonus and the backstory of how the book came to be.

Long before the storylines developed, Carlie composed evocative music, ranging from whimsical to meditative, representing the various birds: a young pelican flaps awkwardly on land before launching itself skyward in graceful flight, an ostrich's long legs propel its ponderous body at top speed, tiny sandpipers dance comically all around the beach, and baby chicks peck ineffectually at bugs. Each musical segment allows the listener to "see" the avian movements:

smooth waltzes, rhythmic marches, quickened tempos, and playful riffs.

Carlie composed her first six "birdsongs" back in the 1980s in her practice room at West Texas State University. She had returned to college to complete her music degree in theory and composition, begun years earlier at the University of Texas. The years in between brought marriage; a move to Hereford, Texas; three children; and numerous piano students. She describes her 30-mile commute between Canyon and Hereford as "so straight I could prop my book on the steering wheel as I drove and make my grocery list on the way back." The final four pieces of music weren't written until the 1990s, and then Carlie recorded the ten piano pieces as a cohesive unit. But still there was no book.

Fast forward another decade or so, and *Music for Bird Lovers* gradually developed as a family affair. Carlie often kept two little grandsons, her daughter Dorie's children. While driving with the boys in their car seats, Carlie nudged their imagination about what they thought the birds were doing in different parts of the music. Stories unfolded, she



For more information about Carlie's book and to hear audio samples, visit www.carlieburdettmusic.com/product/music-for-bird-lovers-book-cd.

wrote narratives to accompany the music, and friends tested copies on their own grandchildren. Dorie and her husband had just formed a new company, Creative Pickle, so they developed the design and graphics.

Then sixth-grade Hanna, Carlie's granddaughter, narrated the stories for the final product. Now, Carlie is busy writing *Music for Bird Lovers, Book II* for piano duets.

Carlie has been composing music as far back as grade school, when her piano teacher taught rudiments of

music theory. Her inspiration comes from poetry, from scripture, from chance remarks by friends, and, she says, "from moments that prick." Such moments occurred years ago when she was introduced to the poems of Karle Wilson Baker (1878–1960); from these, Carlie composed a collection called "Let Me Grow Lovely Growing Old." She keeps scratch pad and pencil handy and maintains careful files, but music is always with her, in her head, at her fingertips on her piano, or through the Austin Wednesday Morning Music Club. She states simply, "I always like to have something going on." Truly, music fills her days. ■



Since 2014, Carlie has published her book, won the Music in Poetry Composition Contest sponsored by Texas Federation of Music Clubs, and celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary with her husband, Tom.