

# GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN!

In Grades Five and Six, one teacher, Mrs. Atkinson, took an interest in me musically. I found music class difficult at times (learning a new instrument was especially frustrating), but it also felt like a refreshing change of format and tone from the study and writing work you had to do in most other subjects.

When it came time for Grade 6 to prepare for its Christmas concert, Mrs Atkinson was our music teacher and choir leader, and she identified my ability to sing. I'm sure I'd told her that with Miss Pearcy's choir I'd once sung a solo on the stage of the MacPherson Theatre. I didn't brag, but I was proud and wanted Mrs. Atkinson to know that I had some experience.

It had only been the previous year when I'd sang under Miss Pearcy's tutelage, and even though I knew I could still sing, it felt a little embarrassing to be showing an ability from Victoria, not knowing how I'd be received in front of a group of Vancouver kids, with their different tastes in music.

Back in the gymnasium in St. Paul's private school outside of Victoria, I'd learn a new piece of music by standing next to Miss Pearcy's piano. I'd watch her hands on the keyboard, listen to the notes, and try to read the words on her sheet as she played and sang. I always tried to match her notes and anticipate the next word. After a couple of run-throughs like that, I'd go back to stand with the other kids in the choir and we'd go through it all together.

Standing next to Miss Pearcy was a special moment: one-to-one time with the teacher. Six or seven months is a long time between choir practices, but standing next to Mrs. Atkinson's piano in the music room of MacCorkindale Elementary, practising "Go Tell it on the Mountain" (a song that I'd sang many times before) I found that same special feeling once again. Mrs. Atkinson's quiet manner and guidance encouraged me to let my voice ring out and I hit my notes without feeling shy or self-conscious. The first time I hit my solo line "go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere", some kids tittered and giggled at how my voice

sounded, but I just sang past those little moments. I softened my R sounds in the English style, the way Miss Pearcy had taught me, and I focused on the hard and soft sounds of each syllable. My elocution was still clear, and it sounded pure and right on-key. It was something special that I could still do.



*"John Love, Xmas, 1976."*

When the night of the Christmas concert came, our choir sang its song, and I sang my solo just right as we'd practised. Butterflies were having a full-on acrobatic airshow in my stomach, but I got through, and I thought I sounded pretty good. It was scary and exciting.

Our school gym was packed with parents, but I saw Mum and Dad smiling out at me from about eight rows back. Seeing them there looking so proud made the moment extra golden.