

# Sylvester Scores High Note

Recently, Susan Nelson Sylvester's work was recognized by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the world's leading performing-rights organization, rep

[Print \(javascript:window.print\(\)\)](#)[Share](#)[E-Mail \(/printmail/4326\)](#)

## Friday, December 3, 2010

Recently, Susan Nelson Sylvester's work was recognized by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the world's leading performing-rights organization, representing more than 360,000 songwriters, composers and music publishers. This is the second time that Sylvester, a staff member at Westminster Choir College of Rider University, has received an ASCAPPLUS award in the Concert Music Division.

The awards program, established in 1960, rewards and compensates writer members based on the value of their original compositions and recent performances. The Concert Division includes symphonic, chamber, operatic, choral, electronic, liturgical, educational, solo vocal and instrumental compositions and performances. Sylvester submitted a list of her original compositions, performances, commissions, recordings and published pieces from the past year.

"I was very happy when I learned that I had received the award for the second time in a row," said Sylvester, who has worked at Westminster since 1996.

As a library technical assistant of Cataloging and Processing at Talbott Library, she catalogs Westminster Composers material. Sylvester said she thrives in the musical environment.

"Sometimes, I'm writing a piece in my head. Something can pop across my desk, and I can draw inspiration," said Sylvester who has been writing compositions since she was a teenager. "When you get an idea, sometimes it just needs to be written down. I enjoy the puzzle of working it into a finished piece. It's a fun process."

While Sylvester tends to write church music and standard anthems, she has written compositions in a variety of styles, including jazz, new age, baroque, medieval, Indonesian gamelan, Hispanic, Caribbean, Klezmer, spirituals, Appalachian, Celtic and even big-band style. She primarily writes for handbells, but she has also composed pieces for chorus, brass quartet, string orchestra, recorder consort, guitar and bells.

Currently, Sylvester has 161 pieces in print with 21 different major publishers. Her compositions have been played by community, professional and church handbell ensembles for performances in the United States, as well as internationally in Argentina, Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Japan, Korea, Scotland and Singapore.

"It's thrilling. It's nice to hear their interpretation and to hear it live," she said.

"Sometimes, I'm a little nervous not for the performers – I trust the performers – but how the audience's reaction is going to be."

Sylvester’s musical career developed from her fascination of church music as a child.

“I remember hearing the organ, and I knew I wanted to be an organist,” she said. “I liked the choral anthems. That was during the pipe organ heyday.”

A church musician at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Hamilton since 1974, Sylvester has served as the church’s director of Music since 1999, where she plays the organ and directs the vocal and handbell choirs. In addition, she also plays the piano, guitar, recorders and woodwind instruments.

“I like to push the envelope in handbell composition and enjoy doing new, innovative things,” she said.

For example, Sylvester was the first composer to write pieces solely for handbells crafted by Netherlands-based bellfoundry, Petit & Fritsen. She is also one of the first composers to include optional instruments with handbell compositions, write extended works for handbells and invent new handbell articulations.

“One of the nice things about working at a music school, from my perspective, is it’s really restful to work in a place where everyone understands you. For instance, if you walk around here thinking of a tune and you’re caught conducting, no one thinks that’s weird,” she said. “My colleagues in the library are also musicians. It’s a great fit for me.”

[Back to Arts & Culture \(/news/arts-and-culture/\)](/news/arts-and-culture/)

[Back to People \(/news/people/\)](/news/people/)



### Sites of Interest

[Event Calendars](#)

[Emergency Information](#)

[Athletics - qobroncs.com](#)

[Alumni Portal - alumni.rider.edu](#)

[The Bronc Radio Station](#)

**Lawrenceville Campus**  
2083 Lawrenceville Road  
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

**609-896-5000** (Main)  
**800-257-9026** (Admissions)  
[www.rider.edu](http://www.rider.edu)

**Princeton Campus**  
101 Walnut Lane  
Princeton, NJ 08540

Home of

**609-921-7100** (Main)  
**800-962-4647** (Admissions)  
[www.rider.edu/wcc](http://www.rider.edu/wcc)

### About University Communications

[What We Do](#)

[Our Team](#)

[Policies, Guidelines, and Manuals](#)

[Publications and Creative Services](#)

[University Experts](#)

#### Contact Us

E-mail us at [univcomm@rider.edu](mailto:univcomm@rider.edu),  
call 608-896-5192

#### Have a story idea?

[Submit your ideas to University Communications.](#)

### Contact Our Team



**Dan Higgins**  
Executive Director of  
University Communications  
[dhiggins@rider.edu](mailto:dhiggins@rider.edu)  
609-896-5192



**Sean Ramsden**  
Director of Editorial Services  
[sramsden@rider.edu](mailto:sramsden@rider.edu)  
609-896-5000 ext. 7290



**Cathy Carter-Romero**  
Director of Publications and  
Creative Services  
[cromero@rider.edu](mailto:cromero@rider.edu)  
609-896-5000 ext. 7278