



WALKS ON THE WILD SIDE: New York City native Lynn has given hundreds of tours all across the city, exploring sites well off the beaten tourist paths.

On Tour, with Robin Lynn '70

Robin Lynn '70 sits with her back to a stack of pre-folded pizza boxes in the back of Luigi's tiny pizza shop in South Slope, Brooklyn. Hot pies are coming out of the oven and regulars—loud, balding guys named Frankie and Johnny with their kids, and some neighborhood cops—stream in from the street. Gio, a big man in a white shirt throws up dough. Customers' cash is shoved into

a rickety, analog register that looks like it hasn't given out a receipt in decades.

"This is real New York," Robin says, satisfied. "This is a neighborhood, with neighborhood characters." And she

should know. She's spent the last 45 years living, breathing and loving every inch of this city.

I met Robin in the spring of 2012 at an alumni event in Gotham Hall. She made me promise that I would call her and she would take me on a walking tour. On a sunny June morning, I met her in front of a Home Depot in the Flatiron District.

This was the unlikely place to see New York's cast iron architecture in all its magnificence. We admired the gleaming, white façade, and Robin explained how the material revolutionized building in the last half of the 19th century. The wedding cake of a building was completed in 1892 for the expanding Stern's department store.

"Just look at the magnetic cast iron columns inside. It was built

Alumna to Alumna

Journalist Maya Dukmasova '12 (T5) meets up with Big Apple historian and tour guide Robin Lynn '70.



so it could have large plate glass windows letting light in. It's the pre-electric golden era!"

Instead of elegant doormen in top hats who once welcomed shoppers into Stern's, we entered past men and women in orange aprons. Weaving by the columns and through rows of lumber, Robin led me to the center of the building. An airshaft capped with a sprawling skylight pierced its six floors. Here in the heart of a Home Depot we marveled at this feat of structural engineering, basking in the indoor light and air that once made the Stern brothers rich.

For Robin, who was born and raised here, New York City is an endless onion. "I wish residents could walk down the street and have, I don't know, X-ray vision into the past, to peel back the layers," she says. Since she graduated from Rochester, Robin has held an array of jobs that allowed her to peel back layers and create context for the built environment of the city.

In the 1970s she worked for the New York State Council on

the Arts, where she distributed grants to visual arts organizations and simultaneously worked on her master's degree in art history at Columbia. Some years later she worked for a consortium of educational and cultural institutions under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to revive Brooklyn through history projects.

"When I worked [in Brooklyn] in the late 1970s people were running for their lives," she recalls. "We did exhibitions and posters and lectures and now 35 years later, all I can say is I must have done a helluva good job! Look at this borough, it's now the hippest!"

Robin had no intention of migrating to the suburbs when the first of her three children was born in 1979. She and her husband eventually settled on Roosevelt Island, a quiet residential area in the middle of the East River. As her kids grew up, Robin was organizing and giving tours of the city for the Municipal Art Society. She's worked with groups ranging from 15,000 to two and covered every inch of the city. "I know Manhattan like a college campus," she says, "I don't know anywhere in Manhattan that I don't feel at home."

We came out of the Home Depot and walked south down Avenue of the Americas. Robin told me about all the buildings we passed. The stretch of street, called the Ladies' Mile, was once home to the most glamorous department stores and boutiques in the country. We briefly stepped into the Church of the Holy Communion, an Episcopal Church complex built in the 1840s. The building has had many lives and Robin knows them all.

By the 1970s, the complex was sold, and the church became a cultural center for poetry readings and lectures on world religions. It was sold again and used for drug rehabilitation programs.

In the 1980s the church became a famously decadent night club. Between 1983 and 2007 the Limelight (and its successor, Avalon), renowned for drug busts, hosted dance parties and performers from Whitney Houston to Marilyn Manson.

Robin explained all this as we wandered through racks of expensive knitwear. The church complex is called Limelight Marketplace today.

Even though she still gives tours on occasion, in recent years Robin has transitioned more to writing. She worked with New York's "dean of walking tours" Frances Morrone on her first book, *Ten Architectural Walks in Manhattan* in 2009. Their second collaboration produced *Guide to New York City Urban Landscapes* in 2012, a book focused on parks and green spaces in the city.

Recently Robin made a gift to establish a lecture series at the University on architectural history. She hopes the series will bring a greater appreciation for the city of Rochester to the campus and create conversations between students and experts, and among departments about new ways to discover and appreciate built environments.

The most recent time I saw her, Robin invited me for a walk among the dead. We met at dusk at the ornate gate of the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn—home to a colony of South American monk parakeets, one of the many unique features of the gigantic cemetery.

As we meandered past sprawling weeping willows and pathways that erased into darkness I told Robin that I thought of her as a real New Yorker. She hesitated. She didn't seem quite comfortable with the label. "A real New Yorker is someone who if they would like to smell the grass has Green-Wood Cemetery as their option," she said after a pause. A real New Yorker is too busy living to pay close attention to this marvelous city. **R**

—MAYA DUKMASOVA '12 (T5)



At the Scene of Sound

For more than a century, the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh has served as a horticultural sanctuary for the city's residents and visitors. In the 2000s, the conservatory embarked on a renovation and expansion, the centerpiece of which is the Center for Sustainable Landscapes. A building that generates more energy than it uses, it's one of the greenest buildings in the world.

But in early 2013, when Phipps executive director Richard Piacentini walked through the completed building for the first time, his reaction wasn't quite what he'd hoped or expected.

"This is a building that's very well insulated," he says. "It struck me as very eerie, walking up the stairs in this atrium, how quiet and still it was. It was very unnerving, especially since, as a botanical garden and conservatory, we're all about showcasing beauty and stimulating people's senses."

Piacentini decided that what the building needed was "art," and fortuitously, he sought advice from his friend Sarah Reichard, director of Seattle's Washington Park Arboretum.

Reichard recommended he contact artist **Abby Aresty** '05E. Aresty is a composer of sorts—a musician who explores sound, but borrowing concepts usually associated with public art pieces such as sculptures or murals. Her work, which belongs to the relatively new genre of sound art, is site-specific, by which she means that the sounds from the surrounding environment—both natural and machine-derived—are incorporated into each piece.

Reichard met Aresty when, as a doctoral student in composition at the University of Washington, Aresty built a sound installation in the Seattle arboretum called *Paths II: The Music of Trees*.

It consisted of seven compositions that she had created based on a year's worth of recordings of sounds throughout the park.

"Sometimes I use sounds in their natural, unprocessed state," says Aresty, describing her general approach. "Other times I process them to explore different timbral and textural possibilities or properties."

Aresty says she first became interested in processing sound at the Eastman School of Music, in a class in computer music taught by Alan Schindler, professor of composition. "That's where I first learned there was a possibility of composing with recorded sounds outside of instruments—just everyday sounds," she says.

SOUND ARTIST:
Aresty's sound installations in Seattle and Pittsburgh have garnered national attention.

At the University of Washington, she worked closely with faculty in the program in digital arts and experimental media. She took a course in mechatronics, in which she learned how to use sensors to gather information about her physical surroundings and translate that information into

sound. "It's where I learned basic skills in electronics like soldering," she adds. It's also where she learned to build the solar-powered sound distribution systems that played her compositions at each of the seven sites.

After talking to Reichard, Piacentini promptly contacted Aresty. Working with Carnegie Mellon University's Frank-Ratchye Studio for Creative Inquiry, he was able to invite her to spend a year in Pittsburgh, where she would teach in the studio and create a sound installation to adorn the Center for Sustainable Landscapes. Her piece, *Of Earth and Sun*, debuted last summer.


Conceptually similar to *Paths II: The Music of Trees*, the basic elements of the piece are sounds Aresty recorded throughout the city of Pittsburgh, over the course of the year. The piece is dynamic, guided by a computer program that will alter it according to the season, the weather, and the time of day. As it plays daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., it's in constant dialogue with the environment. And there are no speakers to transmit the sound. Sound is transmitted by the building itself, through transducers, cylinder-shaped objects attached to windows, that transmit vibrations to the glass, making the windows function as speakers.

Piacentini has brightened the center with visual art. The pieces, and Aresty's sound art installation, have brought to fruition one of the original goals the conservatory had for the center: "to blur the lines between the outside and inside," he says. "It's really interesting to have a walk through the space. If it's very quiet inside, you hear everything, but if there are people talking or if the windows are open, it blends in with the ambient sounds."

Within the atrium, visitors can find information about what they're hearing, and pose questions to docents. The commentary is helpful to the many people who are new to sound art.

"I think a lot of times people think of art as things that you look at," Piacentini says. "But art can appeal to other senses as well. So sound art, I think, is really unique."

In September, Aresty began a postdoctoral fellowship at Grinnell College in Iowa. Grinnell features a different soundscape, to be sure, from Pittsburgh's. And that's part of what she'll explore this coming year, in a project she describes as a community sound mural. It's in its conceptual stage, and will develop in dialogue with the town's residents.

"Ultimately the vision is to create a piece on the theme of diversity through sonic perspective," she says. "We all listen, we all have different backgrounds that shape how we listen, and what we experience." 

—KAREN MCCALLY '02 (PHD)



POETIC BREAK: Kinnell and dog, Willie, share a moment in Kinnell's Vermont home office.

Mortal Words

Galway Kinnell '49 (MA) was a towering figure, both literally and as a poet. Part of a postwar turn away from the modernism of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, Kinnell strove to craft accessible poems from the material of everyday life. The centerpiece of his first published collection, a 14-part poem about Manhattan's Avenue C called "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ Into the New World," made his reputation, and inspired frequent comparisons to the lyrical style of Walt Whitman.

Kinnell, who died in October, wrote 10 collections of poetry. His 1982 book, *Selected Poems*, won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. In 2000, he returned to Rochester for a reading and lecture as part of the Hyam Plutzik Memorial Poetry Series. The University awarded him its highest honor for alumni, the Hutchison Medal, in 2001. In 1982, **Jeffrey Mehr** '78

interviewed Kinnell for *Rochester Review*.

Here are excerpts from that interview, "Writing Poems: The Thrill of Discovery."

The entire interview is online at http://www.rochester.edu/pr/Review/V77N3/0603_kinnell.html.

On Words

"One thing that leads one into poetry is an interest in words. Not words as written things with a referent, but words as sound that the body produces, that fill the mouth and that are therefore in some way psychically identified with the thing they're talking about. And that have a content which can't be reduced to a definition. Like 'spartled.'"

On Music

"For me, music is quite important. It seems the soul of poetry. Poetry has a body as well—the things of the world—so I find it more interesting than music. But often poetry seems to lack a soul. By listening to music, you recover the sense of what poetry must be."

On Writing Well

"When you write well, there is a kind of special mood that comes upon you, different, I suppose, for every person, but for everyone different from just the normal, day-to-day way they feel. And words seem to come on their own. You're understanding them and shaping them, and yet they come out saying things that you didn't know you could say."

On the Importance of Context

"Those people who say, 'Homer was writing about exactly the same thing as a writer today,' are, I think, completely wrong. It seems quite clear that our consciousness evolves, and that we know things differ-

ently.... For example, Homer didn't really know that it was intolerable to die. We do."

On Critical Reception

"I've had lots of nice reviews, and I've had lots of attacks on my poetry.... The only reviews that really can strike dread into your heart are those that actually see what you feel is weakest and then drive the nail right in there."

On What Makes a Good Poem

"Most good poems address themselves to things that we all know about, and the only preparation we need, as readers, is a kind of paying of respect to our inner life, to the feelings we have that are of no practical importance: the sense of strangeness and the haughtiness of existence; the fragility of our position on the globe, and the fragility of the globe itself; this very peculiar situation we're in, self-conscious creatures who know that we're lost in some kind of existence that we don't understand at all." **R**