Madam Chancellor, I present to you Maureen Forrester, artist and master teacher, whose accomplishments surely exemplify the thought: "Without music, life would be a mistake". Forrester’s sonorous contralto has won her international acclaim since the early 1950s when she began her professional career. But beyond her personal artistic mastery, her commitment to Canadian culture has given voice to countless Canadian works, both through her own performances and through her promotion of this country’s composers.

From her Montreal birthplace in 1930, Maureen Forrester embraced music for the first time as a child studying piano, later joining church choirs before beginning formal voice studies at age sixteen. Over the years of international appearances following her professional debut in 1951, audiences have always sought the emotional contact of Maureen Forrester’s singing. Whether interpreting the lyrical pace of a French Canadian folk song or the drama and intensity of the classics, she never disappoints, carrying her audiences to the frontiers of aesthetic experience.

Her distinguished singing career offered impeccable credentials for an equally distinguished five year term as Chairman of the Canada Council, beginning in 1983. Under her able stewardship, Canadian music received the visibility that only a true ambassador of Canadian culture could provide.

In tribute to her remarkable gifts, Madam Forrester has received many honours, among them Companion of the Order of Canada, the Molson Prize for outstanding cultural achievement and the Toronto Arts Award. But accolades and superlatives fail to capture her magnificent artistry and we are reminded that "When words leave off, music begins." Madam Chancellor, on behalf of the Senate of this University, it is a special privilege for me to present Maureen Forrester for the degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.