

BROADCAST HER

HISTORY BROADCASTING



EVA LANGBORD

*Reflections on the women behind
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*

BY CAROLYN PATRICIA GRISOLD



CLAIRE WALLACE BARBARA FRUM MARY LOU FINLAY KATE AITKEN VICKI GABEREAU ERIKA RITTER HON. MICHAËLLE JEAN HON. ADRIENNE CLARKSON KIRSTINE STEWART

Young girls can't aspire to be the women they can't see. This is why it's so important for a national broadcaster like CBC/Radio-Canada to fully represent both men and women – on the air and behind the scenes.

When Canada's first public radio stations began broadcast in the 1920s, and its initial television stations – CBLT-Toronto and CBFT-Montreal – in the 1950s, the burgeoning industry was dominated by men. Few women held key roles, especially in management positions, but there did exist a few strong female players who helped open doors for those to come.

One of the key executives behind the launch of CBC's television broadcasting was **Eva Langbord**. Responsible for starting the station's casting and scripting departments in its inaugural year, she went on to lead the departments until her retirement in 1974. Langbord passed away in 1999, after a lengthy career in broadcasting and theatre, including establishing the National Theatre School in Canada.

Radio broadcasters like **Claire Wallace** helped pave the way for a feminine presence on the airwaves, being one of the first women to have a regular program on CBC Radio. A graduate of

Branksome Hall in Toronto, Wallace later became one of the highest paid women in broadcasting and a champion of gender equality. A member of the Women's Press Club, she earned her place amongst other influential women journalists and activists such as The Famous Five's **Nellie McClung**.

Other past players at the CBC include notable women like **Barbara Frum**, **Mary Lou Finlay**, **Kate Aitken**, **Vicki Gabereau** and **Erika Ritter**. Music industry veteran **Denise Donlon** was, from 2008-2011, CBC English Radio's General Manager, and since its inception in 1990, **Eleanor Wachtel** has hosted CBC Radio One's literary show, *Writers & Company*.

Two former CBC women have even gone on to become Governor Generals: the Right Honourable **Michaëlle Jean** and the Right Honourable **Adrienne Clarkson**.

Today, CBC continues to boast a strong female presence in its executive team: **Kirstine Stewart**, one of the Top 25 Women of Influence™ in 2011 and 2012, is the national broadcaster's Executive Vice-President, English

Services; **Maryse Bertrand** is Vice-President, Real Estate, Legal Services and General Counsel; **Suzanne Morris** is Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer; and **Roula Zaarour** is Vice-President, People and Culture. Under **Kirstine Stewart's** helm are other women of influence who play an integral role in shaping our national broadcaster, including **Jennifer McGuire**, General Manager and Editor-in-Chief, CBC News and Centres, **Julie Bristow**, Executive Director, Studio and Unscripted Programming, CBC Television, and **Sally Catto**, Executive Director, Commissioned and Scripted Programming, CBC English Television.

Every decade, women gain more ground in broadcast media: from the first to break through barriers to the women who shape the airwaves today. Although there still exists challenges, the CBC has taken a leadership role in promoting women, and through sharing their achievements in this traditionally male-dominated industry, it has built momentum for women to thrive – and opportunities for girls to aspire. ♦

Read more on **Kirstine Stewart** in *Women of Influence Magazine Winter 2011 and 2012 Top 25 Women of Influence™ special issues* at www.womenofinfluence.ca/magazine.