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Progress Report-The Robert Helps Collection

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/kang/53/
The following short report was made for a Digital and Special Collection Full Staff Meeting held on February 07, 2011.

The Robert Helps Collection was established in the Digital and Special Collections, Tampa Library of University of South Florida. It was initiated after Helps’ personal and official documents, programs and reviews, professional and personal correspondence and photographs, and score and sound recording libraries were donated in 2002.

Robert Helps (1928-2001) was an American new music pianist and composer. From 1980 until his death in 2001, he was a Professor of Piano at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. Helps previously served as a professor of piano at the New England Conservatory, the San Francisco Conservatory, Princeton University, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Manhattan School of Music. He was artist-in-residence at the University of California-Davis in 1973. His works are published by C. F. Peters, Associated Music Publishers, E. B. Marks, and the American Composers Edition. In addition to his recordings, Helps toured internationally with such performers as Bethany Beardslee, soprano; Isidore Cohen, violinist; Rudolph Kolisch, violinist; Phyllis Curtain, soprano; and Aaron Copeland, composer/pianist. Helps’ studied under Abby Whiteside, piano, and Roger Sessions, composition.

During a six-month residency at the Digital and Special Collections, the following were accomplished:

1. Scores (spanning from the late 1930s to 2001) in The Robert Helps Collection used to be organized according to LC Subjects and Size (regular and oversize): Piano Solo, Piano Duo, Chamber Music (Duo, Trio, Quartet, Quintet), Orchestra (Concerto and Symphony), Song, and etc. The Score Library was reorganized in four groups by based on their content: 1) Robert Helps’ compositions (Sketches, Manuscripts, Proof copies, and Printed/Published Scores); 2) Scores used for Helps’ performances, teachings, and studies (fingerings, pedals, remarks, and etc. included); 3) Scores Robert Helps owned with no marks; and 4) Photocopied scores for private use. Identification of authorship and proper titles were an important part in preparation for this project, and “unidentified” items were reduced to six items. All items in the score library were entered into Archon with proper dates and required information. Among the sound recordings, Robert Helps left 580 cassette tapes. The contents of each tape were identified earlier by this researcher. They were organized by type (Helps’ own performances; his work performed by others; his students’ performances; recordings for his studies, and etc.)

2. Proper “Chronological Work Order” was established. Missing works in the Collection were identified, and those works (particularly by American Composers Alliance and C. F. Peters) are currently in place now. Never been delivered complimentary copies of Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra and “Gossamer Noons” (for Voice and Orchestra) from G. Schimer are in
place in the Collection. Also, confusion of title and contents among three early works: “Adagio for Orchestra”, “Cortege: Adagio for Orchestra”, and the Second Movement of Symphony No. 1 was cleared. “Cortege: Adagio for Orchestra” is an independent composition, and the “Adagio for Orchestra” is the same work as the second movement of Symphony No. 1. Helps’ three commissioned works, “Serenade” by The Fromm Music Foundation (housed in Harvard University) were all identified: Part I: Fantasy for Violin and Piano; Part II: Nocturne for String Quartet; Part III: Postlude for Horn, Violin and Piano.

3. Unpublished works were identified:
   - Many childhood works
   - Duo for Cello and Piano
   - The Altered Landscape (for organ)
   - “Love Is a Sickness Full of Woes” Ireland-Helps
   - Chatting (for 2 cellos)
   - Pussies and Pansies
   - “Chanson Pour” Chabrier-Helps
   - “Testament” Duparc-Helps
   - Postcards

Unpublished works could be considered for future publications (both conventional and digital format).

4. By close examination of sketches, manuscripts, proof copies, and published work, there were many crucial corrections of the published works by Robert Helps hands.
   1) Helps’ copyists / type setters in New York made numerous mistakes in spite of Helps detailed directions and requests during the process of publication.
   2) In the collection, there are published scores marked “My Copy”, which showed heavy use from his own performances. In his own copy (“My Copy”), Robert Helps marked X’s with circles – wrong pitch, note value, rhythm, meter, articulation, and etc.

Current circulating Helps’ published works consists of many mistakes. Thus, the published scores are not able to reflect the composer’s own ideas and intentions. A list of corrections Helps made has been created. This will serve as a correct and true representation of Helps’ original thoughts.

5. By a reliable volunteer, the concert programs are in chronological order. Many of them were identified by performance date and place (by comparing program contents and recording lists).

Score Library items are entered in the Archon according to most recent organization. Items in the Recording Library and concert programs will be entered in the Archon, and Helps’ own performance recordings will be digitized. Also, a new Finding Aid for the Robert Helps Collection will be posted in the near future, in addition to a detailed discussion of Robert Helps’ corrections of his published works by publication of a scholarly journal and presentation at an appropriate conference.