

Robert Erickson explains idea behind the Contemporary Music Archive in special collections of Central University Library

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When Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died in 1791 at the age of 35, many performing editions of his works, in particular his earlier pieces disappeared forever.

"What if they had all disappeared?" muses composer-professor Robert Erickson of the University of California, San Diego Department of Music, explaining the idea behind the fledgling Contemporary Music Archive established in the special collections of the UC San Diego Central University Library.

"Mozart was not worth a damn to his public until a few months after his death," says Erickson bluntly. "I've been working on a new edition of his piano concertos which were, in fact, protected and preserved and have recently passed out of the hands of their long-time collectors. That brings home to me the actual crucial value from an archive.

"I'm not even suggesting we'll have only artists of the caliber of Mozart in our collection," adds Erickson, "but it's just as valuable to cherish the works of lesser composers or the lesser works of great ones, little clues, notions from sketches. You don't solve all the mysteries in an artist's life or career. But such people and their talents, large or small, occur only once and even a hint of a musician's experiences or works is better than no legacy at all."

The essence of the archive effort, according to Dr. John L. Stewart, professor of literature and provost of John Muir College and a motivating force in the establishment of the archive, is not an attempt at accumulating materials of an undifferentiated contemporaneity, but rather a concentration on acquiring texts and scores reflecting 20th century American music, particularly of the West Coast.

"We are interested in the marriage of technology to modern music," explains Stewart, "especially the impact of electronics, which is appropriate to our campus because of its Center for Music Experiment.

"We are slightly less interested in acquiring materials relating to modern composers who have lived most of their lives and done most of their work in Europe or someplace else. Our major concern is contemporary music of the United States, particularly California."

The purpose of the archive, according to Stewart, is to aid in the development of a strong research program in the arts to match those in other areas at the university.

"The arts here," says Stewart, "shine in the areas of creativity and performance. But now we want to balance that by providing through the library a means for research. It's important to recognize contemporary music since our own department is so strongly oriented toward composing."

The archive, currently valued at about \$100,000, was established in January 1978 on the occasion of a program honoring composer Ernst Krenek whose papers and works (1938-present) form the major part of the collection and who, in Stewart's words, has been "the intellectual and artistic forebear of what has become an unusually exciting and adventuresome department of music" at UC San Diego. Several members of the

department, Erickson among them, are former students of Krenek's. Erickson has called his artistic mentor "the Picasso of music."

Krenek's link to the San Diego campus dates back to 1966 when the composer lectured here on the sketchbooks of Anton Webern and his own "Quintina" was performed. When John Muir College was inaugurated in 1967, Krenek was honored as one of five founding fellows of the college.

To help celebrate that event, a friend of Muir College commissioned an orchestral piece by Krenek, "Exercises of a Late Hour," which received its premiere performance before an audience of fellows and invited guests. Two years later, when the permanent Muir campus was dedicated, a larger audience of students, faculty and friends heard the first West Coast performance of "Instant Remembered," anticipating the Los Angeles premiere of the Krenek piece which occurred nine days later.

The 1970 Muir dedication was also the occasion of a series of four regents' lectures delivered by Krenek. The four essays, which Krenek entitled "Circling My Horizons" after his composition "Horizon Circled," were requested by UC San Diego not only to fete its new college but to hail Krenek's 70th year.

Stewart notes that Krenek has lived longer in California than any other place during his career and has accomplished the major portion of his creative work here, although greater acclaim and performances of his pieces have come from Europe and the East Coast of the United States. The composer, who has lived over half his life in the United States, now resides in Palm Springs.

Stewart himself will draw upon the archive repository to write an "intellectual biography" of Krenek, due to be published by the University of California Press in the early 1980s. It will stress the composer's work, his artistic history, rather than the details of his personal life.

A casual perusal of the Krenek papers, even by an amateur and non-musician, yields up vignettes in the chronicles of the composer and his contemporaries which might never be shared without the existence of an archive. There are, for instance, a series of letters spanning only a few years during which conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos (then with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra) was transformed from a cool and acerbic critic in 1941 to a "dear friend" who "prayed to God" to grant him the "high privilege" in 1943 of presenting Krenek's Second Symphony, exulting that "in this chaotic world of morality and art, a genius like yours is my only hope and faith left."

Only two years before, Mitropoulos, still on formal terms, had remonstrated with Krenek for removing his "talent and genius" from the reach of what the conductor called a "conservative public." Mitropoulos offered to introduce any Krenek score "with more human appeal, like those you were writing some years ago," a score more accessible than the "more and more abstract" musical vocabulary Krenek had been exploring. Again, in 1942, cautioning Krenek, about to submit another score to him, Mitropoulos wrote, "Don't be too harsh or too cruel -- don't think of my ears, better think of those of the poor unsophisticated public."

By July 1945 it was "Dear Ernst" and "very affectionately yours, Dimitri." And by 1948, Mitropoulos was bemoaning the fact that some other conductors were going "so far as to bring out that my style in classical music is no more any good because of my devotion to modern types of music."

Also among the Krenek papers is a 1948 letter from experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger, thanking the composer for his suggestion that more frequent sequences of silence might add to the suspense in Anger's "Escape Episode."

The other major component of the UC San Diego archive consists of the papers and tapes of the late musicologist, author and critic Peter Yates. There is a wide range of textual materials, including letters, manuscripts, stage play scripts, lecture notes, publication offprints, books and ephemera.

The tapes were made by Yates at live concerts, music festivals and lectures throughout the world. They provide rare and often unduplicated records of talks and performances by composers such as Edgard Varese, Arnold Schoenberg, Luciano Berio, Lou Harrison, John Cage and UC San Diego's Roger Reynolds.

"Yates," says Erickson, "was probably the most important critic of California music and of American vocal music. He was in Los Angeles at the same time as Stravinsky and Schoenberg and did a great deal to bring their works to public attention on the West Coast. He was also the first critic to pay attention to the music of Harry Partch and Lou Harrison."

Erickson has an encouraging word for potential donors who might be squeamish about giving their works up to an archive.

"There is an autumnal, if not winter-like aspect to entrusting your papers to a library," admits the composer, "particularly if you feel yourself in the prime of life. But think of it this way. After you become part of an archive, you never have to do another thing and, at some future date, you will have ensured that some part of you will live on.

"We must take heed for our future," emphasizes Erickson. "This archive will permit a proper and better, more detailed, more factual and richer history and criticism of California music. The twentieth century doesn't necessarily come into this, except that there was no West Coast to speak of until the mid-nineteenth century. Actually, we would accept music from further back, if we could get it."

The membership of the committee to establish and oversee the growth of the contemporary music archive spans continents. Krenek is listed as founder and honorary chairman. Second honorary chairman is Dr. Ernst Hilmar, curator of the music collection of the Vienna Stadtbibliothek, repository for Krenek's papers through 1938 when he fled Austria in the wake of the Nazi onslaught. Hilmar is considered an authority on the lives and music of the "Second Vienna School" to which Krenek, Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern belonged.

Executive secretary of the committee is Georgina C. Peyton, director of special collections for the UC San Diego libraries. Other committee members are: Tito Capobianco, artistic director, San Diego Opera; Mario de Bonaventura, a guiding force at G. Schirmer, Inc., music publishers, New York; Paul Fromm, Chicago, whose foundation financed the establishment of Perspectives of New Music magazine in Princeton, N.J., and the publication of a number of Krenek's most important works; Johannes Riedel, professor of music and music education, University of Minnesota (Minneapolis).

Robert Erickson, composer and professor, UC San Diego music department; Dr. Beverly Grigsby, composer and faculty member, music department, CSU-Northridge; Karl Kohn, composer and professor of music, Pomona College; Will Ogdon, composer and professor of music, UC San Diego, and a former Krenek student; Bernard Rands, composer and chairman of the UC San Diego music department; Roger Reynolds, composer and professor of music, UC San Diego; Roger Sessions, composer and professor emeritus of music, Princeton University; David Ward-Steinman, composer and professor of music at San Diego State University.

Also, Mrs. Mimi Rudolph, Palm Springs; Nicolas Slonimsky, Los Angeles; Mrs. Clara Steuermann, Los Angeles, widow of pianist and musicologist Eduard and herself chief archivist of the Schoenberg Institute, and Dr. John L. Stewart, provost of Muir College.

For information contact: Barbara Ann Firger, 452-3120 OR Department of Special Collections, 452-2533

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