

MLA NCC Newsletter

Music Library Association

Northern California
Chapter

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MLA/NCC Spring Meeting

The next meeting of the MLA/NCC will be held at the Oakland Public Library's Woods Auditorium on Friday, May 1 from 1-5 p.m. The highlight of the meeting will be Richard Colvig's presentation on the Oakland Public Library's scores and sheet music collection, which he developed during his thirty-year tenure as music librarian there. After the meeting, we will be toasting Richard and other recent retirees Mary Ashe (SF Public Library) and Serena De Bellis (SF State University) at a dinner in their honor (please see the attached registration details). We hope to see you all there!

Tributes to Retiring Members

Beginning with the following article on Richard Colvig, the MLA-NCC Newsletter will pay tribute to the careers and musical activities of our recently retired members. Anyone interested in submitting anecdotes, stories, or personal testimonials are encouraged to contact the editor (see last page for address). The Fall 1992 issue will acknowledge the contributions of Serena De Bellis and Mary Ashe, with the editor's apologies for her lack of timeliness!

A Tribute to Richard Colvig

by Lee White

(Reprinted from the Friends of the Oakland Public Library Newsletter, September 1991)

Thirty years ago, Richard Colvig started to work at the [Oakland Public] Library, beginning his dedication to strengthening and enriching the Library's outstanding music collection. Today, this collection is a major city treasure and a special resource throughout the state.

Richard Colvig graduated with honors (Phi Beta Kappa) from the University of California at Berkeley and continued on to earn a Master's Degree in Music History. After further studying, working and performance experience, he decided to return to academic studies and earned another graduate degree at UCB, a Master of Library Science. In 1961, he accepted a position at the Oakland Public Library, beginning his local library career as reference librarian and music cataloger, while continuing to be an author and musician in his spare time.

For over thirty years, he maintained the quality and diversity of the Oakland Public Library's music collections, making them one of the most complete and extensive public library music resources of northern California. Building on the existing

substantial collections of books and scores, he strengthened the ethnic, folk, jazz and current popular musical forms as well as developing a wide base of classical and historical offerings. Under Colvig's expert direction, the collection has become especially strong in several areas: popular sheet music of the last 100 years, music scores for a wide variety of solo instruments and ensemble groups, and a large collection of music for choral groups. He began and developed the collections of audio cassettes and CDs. A special collection project of his was the Oakland Library's well-known group of opera resources, including scores, miniature scores, records, librettos, audio cassettes, and an extensive number of video tapes that are always in demand. Colvig also meticulously cataloged all of these items to make them easily available to the public.

Richard Colvig is widely known for the outstanding quality of his reference work and his extensive knowledge of all aspects of the musical world. He is famous for his ability to identify, almost immediately, a few lines or bars of music hummed to him, in person or over the phone. During his tenure at the Oakland Library, both as Librarian and Senior Librarian of the Library's Art, Music and Recreation Section, he trained and supervised many librarians and staff. At the same time, Colvig was active in the Music Library Association both in California and nationally.

In addition, during his years at the Oakland Public Library, Richard Colvig published several well-known music reference books, including a standard work on musical terms, a widely distributed pioneer work on

black music, and he coauthored a work on medieval and Renaissance music recordings. He continued his musical avocation as an organist and choir director at various Bay Area churches; presently, he is Assistant Organist and Director of the Schola Cantorum at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Berkeley.

Conference Report: MLA Joint 50th Anniversary Celebration - Pasadena Public Library, October 18-19, 1991

In October, members of the northern and southern chapters were joined by distinguished guests at the recently and beautifully renovated Pasadena Public Library for the golden anniversary of the Golden State's Music Library Association. The two days were filled to bursting with presentations by scholars, composers, performers, and other experts on the California music scene, past, present, and future. Three concerts, a banquet, and a birthday dinner for the association, at the home of composer William Kraft, contributed to the festivities.

The Pasadena Public Library has been renovated "to look old," as we were told in welcoming remarks. The project, which cost over \$9 million, with \$3 million contributed by the citizens of Pasadena, has unobtrusively incorporated state of the art automation into the beautiful Spanish style architecture of the building. This blending of the best of both past and future was also a theme of national MLA president Don Roberts' opening remarks. He compared the California MLA with a "port of the vintage," which differs from "vintage port" in that wine from each successive vintage is added

to the original as evaporation occurs. This graceful metaphor was given material substance when Don presented two bottles of fifty-year-old port of the vintage, which were sampled by all at the birthday dinner later that evening.

Many and diverse aspects of music in California were addressed by presenters during the conference. Friday's opening session covered computers and music in the state, beginning with Garrett Bowles on the Computer Audio Research Laboratory at UC San Diego. One of the few such centers in the world, CARL has always had an interdisciplinary and international focus. New instruments have been developed here, new musical structures explored, and psychoacoustic experiments conducted. The UCSD music library has an archive of CARL material; work from CARL is also published frequently in the standard scholarly literature. After minor but irritating (and perhaps obligatory?) technical difficulties, Garrett was able to play three compositions representative of work that has been done at CARL.

Next, Jeff Earnest told us about an exciting and ambitious project to preserve electroacoustic music in the International Digital ElectroAcoustic Music Archive (IdeAma). The need for such a repository is great, especially since most of this music exists only on tape. As we know, tape is the most volatile of recording media, and reproduction deteriorates with each dub. Much of this music is in studios and radio stations instead of libraries or archives where students, scholars, and composers can gain access to it.

IdeAma is to be a purely digital archive, with all data, recordings and scores stored on compact disc. There are plans to transfer the data to new storage media as technology advances, so that it will always be available in state-of-the-art format. Historical significance will be the primary criterion for inclusion of material in IdeAma; musical significance will also be important. Each partner branch will have a selection committee for its target collection. A catalog database is planned, with two kinds of records, including MARC records for identifying and locating items. Both partner and affiliate branches will have this data, and it may be available through utilities. More detailed records will be available in catalogs at the partner branches. These catalogs will be relational databases, accessed from workstations in the branches that will allow researchers to listen to a given composition while viewing the score. Stanford's Center for Computer Research In Music and Acoustics (CCRMA), part of the Archive of Recorded Sound, and the Center for Arts and Media Technology (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, are the founding partner branches. CCRMA's target collection will cover North and South America and Asia.

IdeAma will open officially in Karlsruhe in 1994. The Stanford part of the project is being funded initially by the Mellon Foundation. For the next two years, emphasis will be on establishing and cataloging the target collection. There are no plans for commercial release of any of this material, and interlibrary loan questions have yet to be addressed.

The composer Beverly Grigsby presented the closing session of the morning. In addition to giving a very helpful capsule history of the development of electroacoustic music and its technology, she raised interesting points about requirements and difficulties of performance in this medium. The first electroacoustic instrument, a 200-ton "teleharmonium," appeared in 1906, much earlier than most people realize. Early versions of synthesizers were developed in the 1920s and 30s, and they generated international interest among composers such as Hindemith, Strauss, Milhaud, and Boulez. Things really took off after World War II, with ever more wonderful technological innovations giving composers more freedom with this medium. By the 1970s, however, problems with electroacoustic performance were evident. Audiences tend to feel alienated from such performances, dominated as they are by snaking cables and black boxes of various sizes. Working with prerecorded material is difficult for live performers, too; there is an irretrievable loss of spontaneity. Busoni's modernist notation that perfect control of all elements of a performance would equal a perfect performance has turned out to be incorrect. Grigsby did say that from the composer's point of view, the technological advances continue to stimulate. An adequate studio is within the reach of most individuals now. She sees a trend toward composer-performers and expressed her opinion that the proliferation of electronic instruments, such as synthesizers that can be programmed to sound like orchestras, will not lead to less work for live musicians.

[Ed. note -- Contrast this view with Barry Vercoe's opinion (p. 7-8)].

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The afternoon session began with a concert of duo-piano music by California composers (broadly interpreted -- it included Rachmaninoff) performed by Ayke Agus and Deon Nielsen Price. Most works were from the first half of the twentieth century, with Price's own "Interruptions" from 1989 adding a contemporary statement.

Next, historians Catherine P. Smith and Dorothy L. Crawford spoke about two contrasting figures in the cultural history of Los Angeles. The impresario L. E. Behymer was literally a self-made man. Catherine Smith showed how he later exaggerated his importance in bringing major performers to the area around the turn of the century, creating himself as a kind of myth. Behymer was a non-musician who concentrated on sponsoring crowd pleasing and therefore lucrative "attractions." Virtuosi performing the safe standard repertoire were his contribution to culture in Los Angeles. Smith viewed him as a phenomenon connected with the emergence of mass culture in late 19th and early 20th century America -- a business man, colorful and vulgar, dealing in high art as a commodity.

Dorothy Crawford's subject, Lawrence Morton, was a perfect contrast to Behymer. He had a musical background, was idealistic about the role of art in society, never made money with any of this artistic endeavors, wrote witty and insightful reviews of contemporary music, and was even active in the MLA in the 1940s and 50s. His broadcasts of the "Evening on the Roof" concerts, later

to be known as "Monday Evening Concerts" introduced unknown older music as well as contemporary works to Los Angeles listeners. West coast, United States, and even world premieres of American, Californian, and European music were featured. Morton was also involved with the Ojai Festival and the Bing Concerts, doing much to broaden the cultural referents of Southern Californians.

After dinner at the Kraft home, featuring 50th birthday cake and the above-mentioned part of the vintage, conference participants and their guests reconvened at the library for the first of the musical Festschrift concerts. Garrett Bowles' original idea was realized much more successfully than anyone could have expected, and we were privileged to hear perhaps a dozen short works by contemporary California composers. Personnel from the North Wind Quintet, Ayke Agus, and Deon Nielsen price performed in various combinations and with panache.

Saturday's program began with two presentations on film music, an uniquely Californian form. Tony Thomas considered the role of music in film, noting that the association has existed from the beginning of cinema: "there has never been a silent film." He pointed out that there are no real rules for film composition and that exactly what music does for a film is difficult to articulate. This causes problems for composers, who must work with musically ignorant producers and directors. Thomas said that film without music is cold; music adds warmth. It is an ally of illusion, communicating on a subconscious level. He also gave us distressing information about the state of preservation of much film

music. Scores have simply been discarded in too many cases; there are only a few archives for this material. The Warner archives a USC and the MGM holdings at Cal State Long Beach are two that were mentioned. In closing, he spoke of the decimating effect that synthesizers and other electronic technology are having on the creation of film music in our day.

After Thomas' general remarks, Steven Smith spoke on film composer Bernard Hermann, whom he called "America's greatest musical dramatist," offering insights into both Hermann's career and his philosophical position regarding music in film. In closing, Smith observed that 90% of the films now being made are targeted to an under 30 audience, which actually has a new culture. Mostly now, he said, film music is background, not part of the dramatic structure of the film, and is no longer used to "tell you what people are thinking and feeling."

The general to specific structure was repeated in the next session, with Charles Shere speaking from an abstract perspective about composition and composers in California; and Ed Bland speaking from his personal experience as one such composer. Shere tried to describe an archetype for California music, finding that West Coast composers are more comfortable than their East Coast counterparts with embracing non-European traditions. He also saw that social and political dimensions are different for the two coasts. He closed with a summary of the history of music in California since 1950. Ed Bland spoke about his personal evolution as a composer and about the Californians

and others who have influenced him. He began, at the University of Chicago, to work in a Schoenbergian manner but found it uncongenial. His cultural heritage had given him great familiarity with jazz, and he noted a consistent characteristic of Western music for a higher level of tension than jazz. Charles Seeger's statement in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* that, as opposed to other modes of discourse, "music has no law of contradiction" was inspiring to Ed. This freed him from the Schoenbergian puzzle.

Next, Ed Colby, Danette Adamson, and Mimi Tashiro spoke on historical topics in California music librarianship. Ed recounted the growth of the Stanford Music Library and the Archive of Recorded Sound; Danette told of six early chapter leaders; and Mimi gave us an informal portrait of Vincent Duckles. She and Danette produced the history of the California MLA, which was distributed at the conference, and they commented on that project. We were all urged to keep better archival records for future chapter historians.

The final session was a panel discussion by four California composers on the challenges they face in their chosen work. They observed that northern California composers tend to survive by being in academia, while southern California composers work in the commercial music world. Marshall Biolosky said that composers these days have no social function. Jules Tanager asserted that this is the case for the arts in the United States generally. Specific problems noted included lack of visibility and difficulty in getting commissions and performances. Some of the panelists lamented the

lack of public or private patronage; other seemed to feel that it has been ever thus. There has probably never been adequate support, material or other, for all of the deserving artists. We applaud those who struggle on in the face of this.

Brief business meetings followed for each chapter. The banquet was next. Highlights included the impromptu singing of a round, specially composed for the occasion by Stephen Fry, and a very entertaining after dinner speech by composer David Raskin. After these diversions, we returned for the second musical Festschrift. Once again, the North Wind Quintet and several friends treated us to a varied sampler of recent work by California composers.

Intellectually and aesthetically stimulating, both charming and informative, the 50th anniversary conference was a very special and memorable event. Great thanks are due to the many people who contributed their time and effort to making it so.

Martha Weil, Humboldt State University
Vice-Chair/Chair Elect