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## The Harris Archive

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In this age of the digital download, with journal articles available 24/7 and virtual libraries, the physical or analog archive holds a unique place as one of the most important resources for studying important source material which has not yet been digitized or scanned, giving the researcher a true “feel” for the works. The John F. Kennedy Library of California State University, Los Angeles houses many such collections of materials relating to local and state government, education, science and the Arts. Within this latter group of collections is the *Roy Harris Collection of Musical Scores and Personal Papers*, aka the “Harris Archive.” American composer Roy Harris (Leroy Ellsworth Harris, 1898-1979) was born in Oklahoma and at a young age moved to the Southern California region bordering on the campus of CSULA known as the San Gabriel Valley. After a long and distinguished career as composer and university professor, Roy Harris accepted a position in the music department of CSULA. In 1973 he donated his papers to the university, which “consist of approximately 3,000 leaves of original manuscripts and sketches, copies of published and unpublished works, 15,000 letters and other memorabilia, commercial and noncommercial recordings of the major portions of Roy Harris’s works, and the complete holdings on microfilm of Harris papers owned by the Library of Congress.” The same source states, “In 1987, Mrs. Johana Harris added approximately 70 linear feet of documents bringing the total to approximately 180 linear feet.”<sup>1</sup>

Among these documents are many scores annotated in the composer’s hand. Harris was known to revise many works extensively and even borrow from earlier works. These annotated documents tell the history of a composer known for not composing any piece without a commission, and often needing to call on previous muses to meet his deadlines. In the archive is a bound copy of a choral setting of Whitman with re-harmonizations and re-orchestrations notated throughout the score. Through these annotations, one can see the evolution of his harmonic language and perhaps even the borrowing over time of pre-existing compositions. In these pages, Harris’s process is clear, though some aspects need deciphering, and the development of his language can be traced in a single stave. In addition to these bound score copies, which include all the symphonies of Harris, are boxes of loose manuscript paper. This is the most fascinating part of the collection, which ranges from sketches of a few bars of keyboard harmony to entire sections of large chamber and symphonic works.



Roy Harris

*Photo courtesy of Cal State LA University Library*

Shortly after his death in 1979, the Roy Harris Society was established to raise awareness of Harris’s music and to create interest in financial support of the archive. Though the organization was short lived, the work of these individuals was significant and helped produce important articles on Harris’s music. A key figure in the

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early days of the archive and the society was Dan Stehman, Professor of Music at Los Angeles Valley College and Roy Harris scholar. Among Dr. Stehman's most significant works were two books, *Roy Harris: An American Musical Pioneer* (1991) and *Roy Harris: A Bio-Bibliography* (1991), and his article for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980). Well into the 1990s, Dr. Stehman continued his work and defense of Harris with his Letter to the Editor in *Musical Quarterly*<sup>2</sup> responding to Louise Spizizen's *Johana and Roy Harris: Marrying a Real Composer*.

Southern California is known for many things, not the least of which are historic seismic events. In 1987, around the time Johana Harris donated the remaining papers to CSULA, the campus was devastated by the Whittier Narrows Earthquake.<sup>3</sup> The JFK library suffered the brunt of the damage and though no items from the archive were lost, the entire collection was thrown from the shelves during the main quake and series of aftershocks. The bound scores, filed materials and recordings were easily placed back on the shelves, but what remained were sketches, untitled manuscripts and letters strewn on the floor of the archive. These materials were carefully placed in boxes and stored. When originally donated to the library, the loose manuscript paper was not well organized, and at the time, were in need of archival work to catalog and verify the relation between certain boxes of sketches and periods of Mr. Harris's career. After the 1987 earthquake, these marginally organized boxes became problematic as many of the original boxes with labels were either discarded or packed with manuscripts with little or no regard to the relation between the material and the dates on the box. Since then, volunteers, librarians and other researchers have done a remarkable job at organizing these materials, but much work remains. In 2010 acid free archival storage boxes were purchased for the safe storage of these materials.

Through all of this the archive has maintained an active role in the research goals of scholars and performers. In the mid 1990s, the New York Philharmonic was in the midst of a series of performances of Harris's symphonies, and the archive filled several requests in support of those performances. A decade after the earthquake the archive assisted British schol-

ar Malcolm D. Robertson as he prepared a two-part essay on the symphonies of Roy Harris for *Tempo* magazine commemorating the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth.<sup>4</sup> American pianist Geoffrey Burleson visited the archive in 2008 to research Harris's piano music. What he found while searching through the archive were unpublished works and small orchestration. These works found their way onto his 2010 Naxos recording, *The Complete Piano Works of Roy Harris*.<sup>5</sup>

In the austere times California public higher education has faced through much of the past twenty years, university special collections have suffered. The current CSULA University Librarian has been at the forefront of promoting all special collections in the JFK Library and assisting development officers in securing grants to preserve and maintain the Harris archive. In 2010 the archive received a grant from the GRAMMY Foundation for creating a plan to preserve the 300-350 sound recordings in the archive. The Foundation stated in a press release at the time, "These personal recordings are of high historical value, showing the process of composition, and may include previously unpublished works." With this support, an audio archivist was hired to begin the necessary work on these valuable private recordings of Mr. Harris.

In an effort to raise awareness of the archive and the music of Roy Harris, the Pacific Contemporary Music Center of CSULA joined forces with the University Library, establishing the annual *Roy Harris Lecture on American Music*. The focus of this lecture series is primarily the work of Harris, but also draws from topics relating to his students, and American art music of the mid-twentieth century. The inaugural presentation in 2012 was a lecture-recital on the piano music of Harris, presented by Burleson, Professor of Piano at Hunter College, CUNY. In 2013, Dr. Susan Kane, Director of Opera at CSULA, presented a lecture and demonstration of two radio operas, one by Menotti, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, the other by Barber, *A Hand of Bridge*. The forthcoming lecture in 2014 will return focus to Harris with a lecture by Dr. Beth Levy, Associate Professor of Music at the University of California, Davis and author of *Frontier Figures — American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (University of California, 2013).

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The Roy Harris Collection of Music Scores and Papers welcomes inquiries from scholars and musicians the world over. Inquires about the Roy Harris Lecture on American Music should be sent to Dr. John M. Kennedy, chair, Department of Music, Theatre and Dance, CSULA: [john.kennedy@calstatela.edu](mailto:john.kennedy@calstatela.edu). To receive more information on the archive or to schedule an appointment contact Christine Gladish at (323) 343-2015 or via email [cgladis@calstatela.edu](mailto:cgladis@calstatela.edu). General information on the policies for the archive can be found at <http://calstatela.libguides.com/content.php?pid=187706&sid=1575674>.

The Pacific Contemporary Music Center and the CSULA University Library is interested in working with independent scholars and institutions on collaborations, research initiatives and grant applications that will promote research and scholarship on the music of Roy Harris. All inquiries should be sent to Dr. John M. Kennedy at the address above.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>“The Roy Harris Collection of Musical Scores and Personal Papers,” California State University, Los Angeles. <http://calstatela.libguides.com/content.php?pid=187706&sid=1576267> (accessed May 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Stehman, Dan. “Letter to the Editor,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 637-639.

<sup>3</sup>“Historic Earthquakes: Whittier Narrows, California,” United States Geological Survey. [http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/events/1987\\_10\\_01.php](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/events/1987_10_01.php) (accessed April 2013).

<sup>4</sup>Robertson, Malcolm D. “Roy Harris’s Symphonies: An Introduction,” *Tempo* 207 (1998): 9-14.

<sup>5</sup>Burleson, Geoffrey. *Roy Harris: Complete Piano Music*. Naxos 8.559664, 2010.