2002 Annual Meeting at the Crane School of Music

The annual fall meeting of the New York State/Ontario Chapter was held on Friday and Saturday, October 18-19, 2002 at the Crane Music Library on the campus of SUNY Potsdam. Jane Subramanian and Ed Komara did a splendid job putting together a wonderful program that I am sure everyone enjoyed. Because of the long and interesting history the Crane School enjoys, attendees of the conference were treated not only to a wealth of information from the past, but also the opportunity to experience the present state of this musically rich environment. Many thanks go out to the several excellent presentations that were given. Please see the pages inside this issue for summaries of those presentations.  

(More on the meeting inside)

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Message from the Chair

I am pleased to take up the NYSO chair duties from the outgoing chair, and my SUNY Potsdam colleague, Jane Subramanian. I had to carry out a few light duties at the annual MLA national meeting at Austin three months ago. Now I turn my efforts towards our annual fall chapter meeting, and to announce and encourage professional opportunities within our organization.

Jane and I were delighted that so many of you came to the fall 2002 meeting at SUNY Potsdam. It looked like everyone enjoyed the meeting, which was held during one of the last peak fall foliage weekends in the NY state "North Country." We are indebted to our SUNY Potsdam colleagues who assisted us, especially Rebecca Thompson, Director of College Libraries; Dr. Alan Solomon, Dean of the Crane School of Music; the Northern New York Library Network;

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Nancy Hess, Continuing Education; Lorelei Murdie, the Crane School; and Gary Galo, audio engineer of the Crane School and one of the speakers. All of our speakers' talks are described in this newsletter, so take a look, refresh your memory if you were there, and recognize their efforts.

It was also good to see that so many of us trekked southwest to Austin, TX for the national meeting last February. It says a lot about MLA and about what we bring to the meetings, that we NYSO members were willing to travel that far west, especially in a year of decreased funding for travel from our institutions, and of increased security fuss at the airports. For the first time, I attended the annual chapter chairs breakfast. Previously I have always wondered what went on at a meeting held at such a frightfully early time of 7:30 am. I can say now there is a lot of encouragement to the chairs for continued regional activities like meetings and chapter grants, and there is a lot of bragging from the chairs in turn. Also, that Friday evening our chapter met, and the main topic was about where to hold our next fall meeting.

Where we will meet is still an open matter. I have not received an invitation from any of our members, nor from any institution within our region. In view that the 2004 NYSO meeting will be hosted by our colleagues at the Sibley Music Library of the Eastman School, it will be good to meet this fall (2003) in a region away from Rochester, perhaps in the eastern part of the state. We have talked with the New England chapter for a joint meeting, but this fall is not possible, although our two chapters are open to meet in 2005 or after. We are not limited to meeting at a member's institution, but nonetheless it would be good to do so at a setting where there is a library with a notable music component. I have received good suggestions for such places as Binghamton and Albany. Other ones included Ithaca College and Vassar College, but I recognize that the chapter has met at Cornell recently and at Vassar several years ago. The chapter officers and I will explore our ideas, select a site, and announce the meeting site and the program in the next newsletter.

My last remarks in this message are to encourage those of you engaged in research to be aware of the MLA award and grant opportunities. There are a number of awards and grants for which applications may be made, including the Walter Gerboth Award and Kevin Freeman Travel Fund for librarians at the beginning of their careers, and the Dena Epstein Award for Archival Research in American Music. There is a new award, the Carol June Bradley Award for Historical Research in Music Librarianship, endowed by Dr. Bradley, whom many of us will remember as teacher and colleague for many years at SUNY Buffalo and at Vassar College. Information for all of these awards may be found on the Music Library Association website at http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org. Please feel welcome to ask any past Gerboth Award winners in our chapter (including Dale Vargason, John Bewley, Kristina Shanton, and myself--have I forgotten anyone?), or to check with Dale Vargason or me about the new Bradley Award.

If you have something to present at our next chapter meeting, tell me—you need not wait for a call for papers. Speaking of chapter presentations, let me mention that Jane Subramanian is now chairing the Best Of Chapters committee, reading and recognizing the best presentations submitted by individual chapters; this is more of a closed recognition process than the grants and awards mentioned earlier, but I am sure Jane can answer any questions you may have. There are also chapter grants, too, which may not be limited to just travel, as several chapters use them; I heard some creative ideas at the chapter chairs' breakfast in Austin. If you have an idea for assessing current music libraries in our region, reaching out to potential members, or any other activity that would benefit or have an impact on NYSO, let me know, and we may shape it as a chapter grant proposal.

Have a good summer, especially after that cold winter we all just had. And, do take some time to enjoy your library collections.

All best,
Ed Komara
SUNY Potsdam
Milestones in the History of the Crane School of Music: Julia Crane, Helen Hosmer, and Beyond
(Jane Subramanian, SUNY Potsdam)

Jane Subramanian's presentation focused most heavily on earlier Crane history. The village of Potsdam had developed musical traditions early on, thus it seemed natural that the area would eventually develop a strong presence in music related to higher education. Julia Crane was a leader in recognizing that specially trained music teachers for the public schools were in great need—previously, music in the public schools had been taught by either studio teachers or musicians trained at conservatories, none of whom had any teacher training. With her founding of the Crane Normal Institute and her new course for training music teachers, the first specially trained music teachers ever to graduate from any Normal School in the country graduated in 1888 from her institute. Miss Crane also shared her knowledge of training music teachers with others in the country, through her published manuals, presentations, summer school teaching at various locations, and other articles.

Following Miss Crane, others provided many contributions as well, but the next major figure at Crane was Helen Hosmer, who became the head of Crane on an interim status in 1929/1930, with her being named as the permanent head the following year. Miss Hosmer made many contributions, including the formation of Crane Chorus, which included every student at the music school for many years, until the size of the student body made that requirement unwieldy. Crane Chorus reflected the earlier tradition in Potsdam of the choral festival, and provided a significant choral experience for all music students, as well as a means of unifying a growing department. Miss Hosmer's initiation of European study tours, connections with Nadia Boulanger and Robert Shaw drawing them to serve as guest conductors of Crane Chorus, and her arrangements for Crane Chorus to sing in New York City at such locations as Carnegie Hall, all provided important relationships for Crane, in addition to her outstanding leadership of Crane in terms of her teaching philosophy, curriculum changes, physical space, etc.

Beyond Miss Hosmer's contributions, later years saw many strong contributions of others as well. These included some off-campus programs and activities, such as the Saratoga-Potsdam Choral Institute run by Brock McElheran from 1969-1984. The Saratoga-Potsdam Chorus was prepared by McElheran for performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy at their summer home at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and coursework was provided as well. Crane was also significantly involved with both the 1980 Winter Olympics and the inaugural Winter Goodwill Games of February 2000, both held in Lake Placid. Composers, student performing groups, and conductors from Crane all lent their expertise to these events. The programs at Crane have since expanded to include many other majors, but the largest program still remains with the music education major. Both Jane and her older sister graduated with degrees from the Crane School of Music, thus personal reactions and experiences were also included in the presentation.

From the Crane Archives: Historic Performances of Crane Chorus and Crane Symphony Orchestra
(Gary Galo, Audio Engineer, SUNY Potsdam)

Since 1931, the Crane Chorus has been one of the main performing groups of the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam, and it has participated in some of the most notable concerts in the School's history. The first recording of the Chorus, indeed the earliest of any Crane performing group, dates from April 1941 from a Carnegie Hall concert, with guest conductor Nadia Boulanger directing music by Schutz, Szymanowski, and Fauré. Other distinguished guests have conducted the Chorus, including Leopold Stokowski at the United Nations in 1958, and Robert Shaw during many visits to Potsdam from the 1940s through the 1980s. There are many recordings of the Chorus being led by its founder, Helen Hosmer, including the remarkable 1952 New York premiere of Norman Dello Joio's "Psalm of David" at Carnegie Hall.
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Some of the Chorus's most thrilling moments from the 1950s through the 1980s were led by longtime Crane faculty conductor Brock McElheran, including the 1969 performance of Krzysztof Penderecki's Dies Irae (Auschwitz Oratorio), and the 1975 Berlioz Requiem. For this talk, Mr. Galo prepared new sound clips from the Crane School's audio archive with the latest digital audio technology.

Music and Culture of West Africa (Robert Washburn, Dean Emeritus, Professor Emeritus, Senior Fellow, Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam)

Professor Washburn, who completed both his BS (1949) and MS (1955) at the Crane School of Music, became part of the faculty there in 1954. He has become a vital part of the school's history. In 1963, he received his Ph.D in composition from the Eastman School of Music where he worked with Howard Hanson, Bernard Rogers and Alan Hovhaness. He also studied with Darius Milhaud and Nadia Boulanger. Besides composing and teaching, Washburn is a specialist in the music of Africa and Asia. As an ethnomusicologist, he has taken a number of trips to various parts of Africa and the Middle East, where he completed field studies of local music traditions. His talk on the music and culture of West Africa was particularly interesting, and well illustrated. Besides talking and showing numerous slides of his travels, Professor Washburn also exhibited and played many original musical instruments he brought back with him from West Africa.

The North Country Opera Star, Circa 1900: The Heuvelton Opera House and Bessie Abott
(Sandra Chambers, Crane Library Assistant, SUNY Potsdam)

Mrs. Chambers currently resides near Heuvelton, NY, about 20 miles southwest of Potsdam. On a recent field trip to the Heuvelton Opera House, she noticed several remnants of the House's performance past, including a photograph of Bessie Abott. The occasion sparked her research on Miss Abott's career, for which Mrs. Chambers consulted several regional historical societies, and towards which she collected recordings, newspaper clippings, programs, and photographs. Throughout her short life (1878-1919), Abott gave her birthplace as Riverside, NY, but Mrs. Chambers shows that she was born Bessie Pickens on Riverside Ave. in Heuvelton NY, with a twin sister, Jessie. The Pickens family maintained several lucrative properties in St. Lawrence County, including Pickens Hall (also known as the Heuvelton Opera House). By the mid 1890s, the family fortunes were dissipated, so to support themselves, the teenaged twins began singing in theaters and vaudeville in New York and other American cities. By 1898, Bessie Pickens was singing operetta, and on the advice of famed tenor Jean de Reske she began studying towards an opera career. She made her operatic debut at the Paris Opera in 1901, re-christened as Bessie Abott. With her dark, striking features enhancing an expressively if limited soprano voice, Miss Abott enjoyed tenures at the Paris Opera (1901-1906), the Metropolitan Opera in New York (1906-1909), and with numerous guest appearances. She also made several recordings for Edison and Victor, the most famous of which was the Act IV Quartet from Verdi's Rigoletto with tenor Enrico Caruso. Upon her 1911 marriage she retired, and in 1919 she died in New York.

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Fit for a Queen: Music from the Coronation of Elizabeth II
(Gerry Szymanski, Sibley Music Library)

Using photographs, musical examples, and audio and video clips from the actual coronation service, Gerry gave a power point presentation that outlined the great contributions made by then living composers to this pivotal event in 20th century British history. The Coronation service drew from elements both ancient and modern, and the music varied from the massive Te Deum of William Walton, (scored for two SATB choirs, a semi-chorus, boy’s chorus, organ, and large orchestra), to the gentle, solo-treble voiced O Taste and See of Ralph Vaughan Williams. Gerry also highlighted many other commissioned works such as Britten’s Gloriana, Coulthard’s Prayer for Elizabeth, and the ten madrigals by ten contemporary poets and composers titled A Garland for the Queen. The year 2002 was the Queen’s jubilee, celebrating fifty years of accession to the throne of the United Kingdom.

Call for Proposals for 2003 Conference Presentations

A place and date have not yet been set for the next New York/Ontario Chapter meeting this fall. However, presentations are now being accepted. If you would like to submit a proposal for a presentation, please make a copy of the form below and return it by July 1st. We would hope to include everyone who is interested, but if the number of proposals exceeds the time period of the conference, the strength of the information given, as well as expected range of the topic relevancy for those attending, may be important considerations.

Name ____________________________________________

Institution _______________________________________

Phone __________________ email _______________________

Title of presentation _______________________________

_________________________________________________

Abstract of content __________________________________

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_________________________________________________

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_________________________________________________

Please return this form to:
Edward Komara
Crane Music Library
SUNY Potsdam
Potsdam, NY 13676

or submit electronically to:
komaraem@potsdam.edu

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FINANCIAL REPORT

Date of this statement: May 20, 2003

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

September 1, 2002 through May 20, 2003

Balance in HSBC bank account on September 1, 2002 $1,888.11

INCOME

Membership dues $105.00
Total income $105.00

$ 1,993.11

EXPENSES

Check printing charge (9/01/02) $ 14.03
Postal expenses: fall 2002 newsletter (9/11/02) $ 23.08
Travel grant: Robert J. Alessi (9/23/02) $ 150.00
Travel grant: Jaroslav P. Szurek (9/23/02) $ 150.00
Travel grant: Adam Kubik (9/23/02) $ 150.00
Travel grant: Steven K. Gerber (9/23/02) $ 150.00
Total expenses $ 637.11

Resulting balance in HSBC bank account on May 20, 2003 $ 1,356.00

Please note that the balance of the Canadian bank account is unreported while Suzanne Meyers-Sawa is on leave.

Largely owing to the lack of any substantive discussion in the Business Meeting held on October 19, 2002, at SUNY Potsdam, no business report was submitted.
News from Around the Chapter
Submitted to the Editor by Chapter Members

Sibley Music Library of the Eastman School of Music.

Jim Farrington was appointed president of ARSC (Association of Recorded Sounds Collections), at their annual meeting earlier this year. G. Dale Vargason was appointed chair of the newly created Carol June Bradley Award, to be given annually by the MLA to support historical research in music librarianship.

Syracuse University Library.

Harriet Sonne de Torrens has been appointed head of the Fine Arts Department (which includes fine arts, music, and architecture) at Syracuse University Library. Harriet is both a librarian and a specialist in medieval Scandinavian art. She brings a wealth of knowledge in the arts as well as management experience and familiarity with many languages. She and her husband (responsible for the Iberian and Latin American collection at the University of Toronto) have created an electronic database of Scandinavian baptismal fonts from the 12th and 13th centuries which is being distributed by her: Gateway to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Harriet will receive her PhD in art history from the University of Denmark in the near future.

University at Buffalo.

At the 2003 annual meeting of the MLA held in Austin, TX, Nancy Nuzzo assumed the position of Treasurer/Executive Secretary. As chair of the local arrangements committee for the 2004 MLA meeting in Washington D.C., Rick McRae has been very busy planning numerous activities.

If you have news to report for the Fall newsletter please send it to the editor.

A Note from the Newsletter Editor

After three years as newsletter editor for the chapter, I will be stepping down from the post at the fall meeting this year. It has been both a great pleasure and honor to serve the chapter during this time, allowing me to get to know many wonderful people, and to gather information for the newsletters. I am sure a worthy candidate will soon fill the position, which will be announced at the fall meeting. If you have a candidate in mind that you would like to nominate (self nominations accepted), please pass this information along to Ed Komara (address given above).

Cordially,
G. Dale Vargason, Newsletter Editor
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