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THE BABBITT CENTENARY
page 5

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The American Composers Alliance music catalog and archives: A collaborative effort between ACA, BMI, and the University of Maryland

By Gina Genova

In the first ACA Bulletin published in 1938, the “Aims of the Alliance” were stated as: “To encourage the inclusion of American works in concerts.”

The approach to fostering performances of these American works over time has been to leverage ACA’s ability to provide access to its scores through publishing and distribution services.

Access to scores and performance materials is fundamental. Musicians need performance materials quickly, and they need them in formats that are clean, ready to use, and economically priced.

The American Composers Alliance (ACA) was formed in 1937 by Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Marc Blitzstein, Colin McPhee, Douglas Moore, Marion Bauer, and others, and began collecting scores of its member composers in the early 1940s.

The original mission was to make the music available to orchestras and performers, and to be sure that composers were compensated fairly and credited for performances of their work

Over the years, the collection has grown to more than 12,000 pieces, the earliest from 1905, and for every year thereafter to the present.

ACA accepted music from composers under-represented in the mainstream at that time.

ACA also welcomed, and still does, unusual, and smaller or lesser-known works by well-known composers that were not considered lucrative enough for commercial publication by other publishers.

Since 2000, ACA has managed its col-

lection of scores and parts in collaboration with the University of Maryland’s Special Collections in Performing Arts (SCPA).

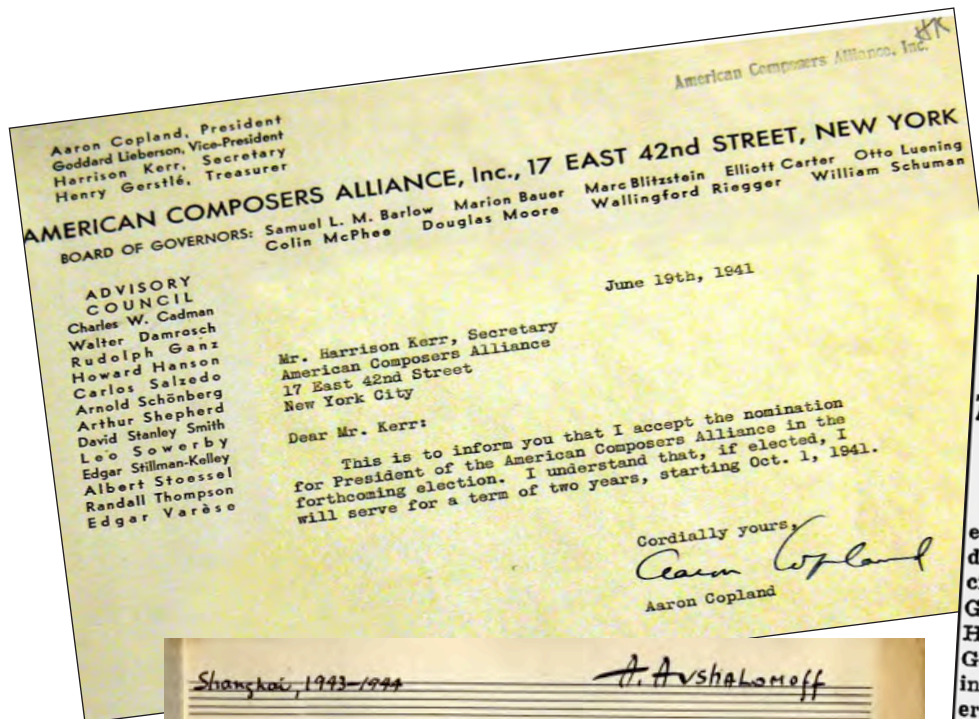
In 2010, after an inventory of all scores was completed, we turned our attention to processing the archival historical files—the official records of ACA. This ongoing project is now online at <http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/30672>

The official papers of ACA include all related materials that were produced in establishing, building, and running the organization from the 1930s through the 1990s.

The relationship between ACA and SCPA is a unique one, encompassing the normal functions of a music publisher as well as a music archive. For a number of years SCPA has acted as custodian for ACA scores and parts.

SCPA makes ACA scores available according to normal library policy, but it also makes them available to ACA for digital scanning.

At ACA, we wish to preserve the materials entrusted to us as part of our history for tomorrow’s generations. We could not have moved forward in this mission without the support of SCPA and the University of Maryland Libraries. When I first began working at ACA in the beginning of 2008, I knew about its historic publishing catalog, but I didn’t know what had happened to it. I learned that in early 2000, due to budget cuts, all of the scores had been moved from ACA’s longtime New York offices to Special Collections in Performing Arts at



COPLAND FIRST HEAD OF COMPOSERS' GROUP

The American Alliance Elects Several Other Officials

The American Composers Alliance elected Aaron Copland as its president at a recent meeting in this city. Other officers chosen were Goddard Lieberson, vice president; Harrison Kerr, secretary; Henry Gerstle, treasurer, and the following members of the Board of Governors: Samuel L. M. Barlow, Marion Bauer, Marc Blitzstein, Elliott Carter, Otto Luening, Colin McPhee, Douglas Moore, Wallingford Riegger and William Schumann.

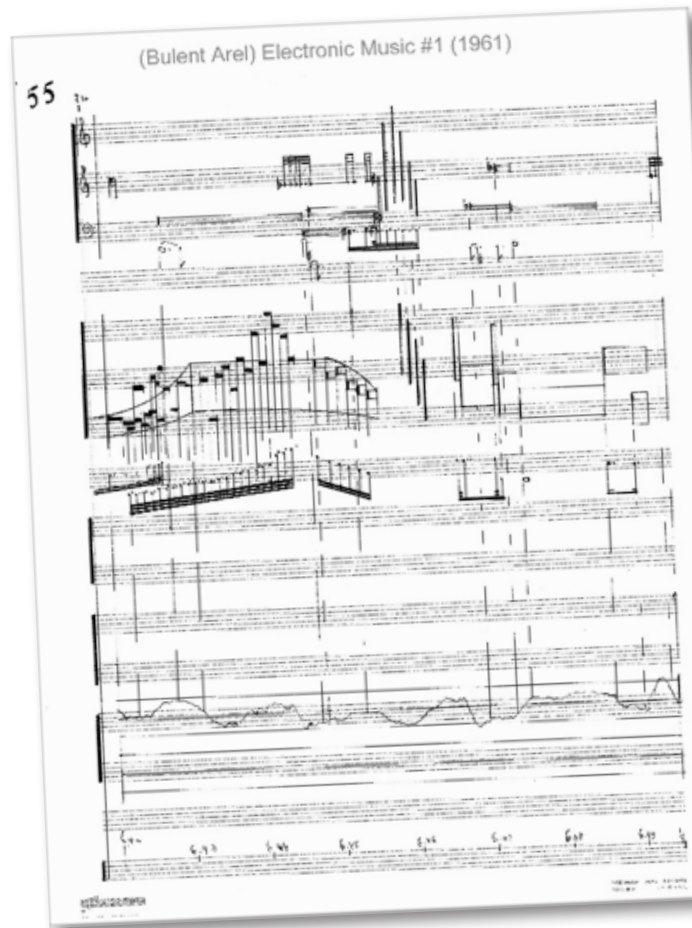
This was the first general election of officers held by the Alliance, which previously had been governed by a temporary executive committee.

The organization, which aims to encourage the performance of serious American compositions and to provide means for obtaining just compensation to the composer for performances, also held elections lately in its regional chapters at Chicago and Los Angeles, where Max Wald and Vernon Leftwich were respectively made vice-presidents.

Members of the Alliance who have agreed to serve on the Advisory

Shanghai, 1943-1944
 A. AVSHALOMOFF
 (to Dr. Amos Wang.)
THE GREAT WALL
 [for Meng Chiang Nyü]
 Chinese Music - Drumes in Facts and Scores -
 = A story of Meng-Chiang,
 the beautiful maiden who
 succeeded in outwitting even the
 great Emperor, chin shih Huang Ti,
 to prove her immortal love and
 loyalty to her husband.
 This drama is based on one of the
 oldest Chinese legends and is known
 to every Chinese.
 First produced in Shanghai, China
 in 1945 - with an all-Chinese Cast.
 Note: Meng-chiang's song, first appearing as a subsidiary theme in the prologue,
 an authentic Chinese folk song, and is the only original material in
 the rest of the music is based on the elements of which Chinese music
 constituted - mainly the folk-song.
 NUMBER 1
 12 Stereo Medium
 Label'd in U. S. A.

Modules
 FLUTE
 Eb ALTO SAX
 PIANO
 VIOLIN
 VIOLA
 CONTRABASS
 PERCUSSION
 Robert Cooley
 1968



to Daniel Pinkham.

THE PRAYER OF JONAH Charles W. Johnson (1962)

Approximately 40 Singers

60, or slower

Soprano

Alto

Tenore

Basso

Violino

Viola

Violoncello

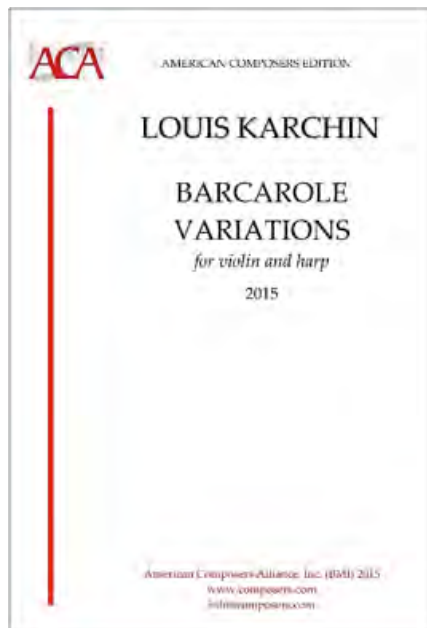
Contrabbasso

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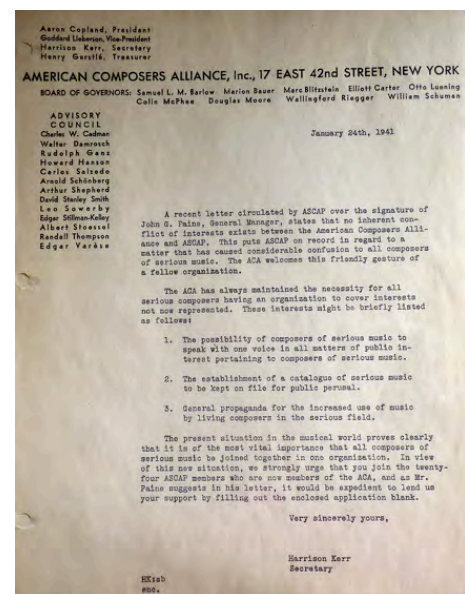
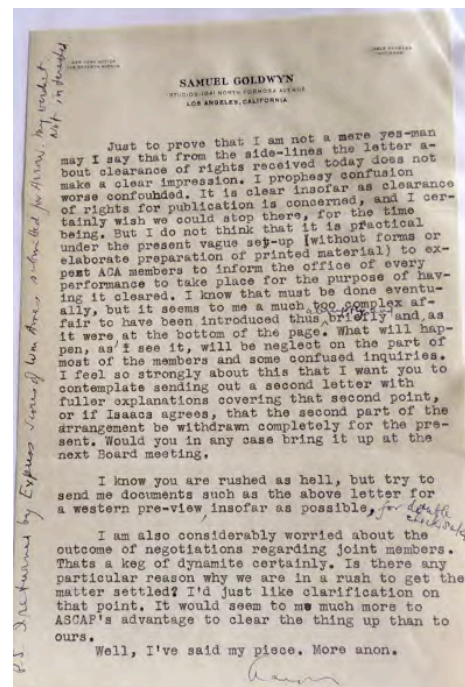
Music from the earliest days: Weigl—Five Songs from Phantassus (1905) and more current, Louis Karchin—Barcarole Variations (2015)



build greater respect for the collection.

The birth of ACA marked a turbulent period in U.S. music history. The late 1930s to the early 40s is fascinatingly well-documented in the letters of the ACA founders, the manuscripts of which are now at SCPA.

There is a great American story about business and creative enterprise waiting to be told about ACA and its history. Untapped primary sources of all kinds



lie within the official papers, correspondence, archives and scores.

the University of Maryland (SCPA).

My predecessors at ACA had made the remarkable decision to partner with a library. They transported ten thousand scores from New York to Maryland in various formats: single side printing masters – the ozalid onionskins, copies, a collection of printed and bound scores for perusal, super oversized scores, operas, reel to reel tapes and many sets of printed and bound “rental” orchestra parts.

Initially I discovered two incredible assets to build on. ACA still held publishing rights for most of the scores through its affiliation with Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI), and the physical scores and parts were still owned by ACA under an expired library deposit agreement.

Because the score collection had been sitting mostly unused in Maryland between 2000 and 2008, my first goal was to create interest that would draw more people to it – and encourage not only further study of this repertoire, but also performances and recordings.

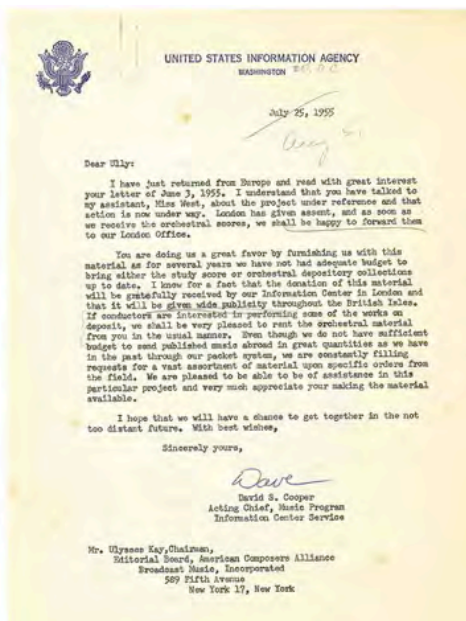
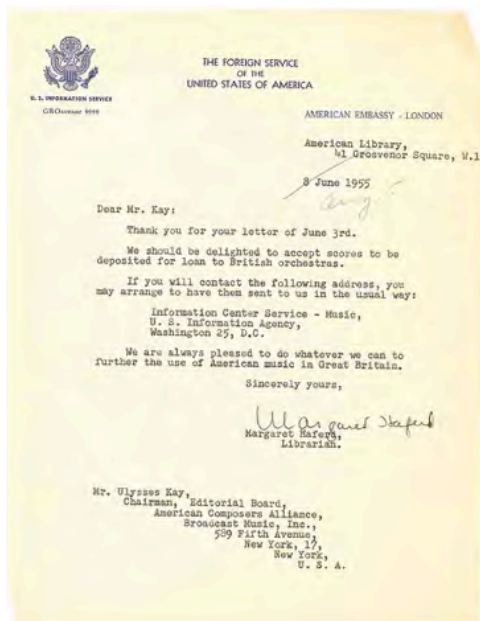
I wanted to convey to the university and SCPA the value of the collection that they had inherited, but in my role as ACA Director, I also wanted to provide more benefit – promotion and publicity – for the American composers it represented.

When I first arrived at the tiny ACA office at 648 Broadway, I found a daunting stack of unprocessed purchase orders that had been coming in— requests for scores, parts, and mechanical licenses from musicians, record companies, stores and re-sellers around the world.

I imagined that if ACA had a better way to make the scores more widely available and to properly represent the rights it still held, more people would discover and use the collection. We began by updating the website and working together with SCPA staff to create an inventory that listed everything that had been shipped to Maryland.

ACA needed access to the score and parts printing masters at SCPA, to scan and provide copies on demand for performers, and to establish a digital distribution collection of scores for the future. It also needed an expandable database where large amounts of information could be stored, edited, and retrieved by ACA and library staff.

Creating an online listing and offering newly printed and digital editions made from the score masters seemed to me the best way to make direct connections with performers and knowledgeable researchers, to encourage performances, and to



BMI initially started its classical music division. With periodic renegotiations, this relationship between American Composers Alliance and BMI remains, more or less, in force today.

From its inception, ACA seems to have



The original, lofty goal of Aaron Copland was to establish the right for all composers to receive income when their music was performed.

Initially, ACA gave its attention to American composers not otherwise protected by the older performing rights society, ASCAP. In essence, ACA began as an alternative rights society, but it would request and collect licensing fees from presenters of concert music by living composers. This had never been done before.

In 1940, ASCAP was collecting as much as four million dollars a year in revenue for its songwriters and composers, but this was from radio station broadcasting fees (New York Times, Dec. 15, 1940; T. R. Kennedy "Radio Revamping Old Favorites"). Now, presenters would have to pay for the right to perform music in a symphony hall if the music was not in the public domain. This was a hard sell in some circles (and still is).

After much litigation and a stormy period of time, the radio broadcasters organized themselves and set up BMI to license radio rights to their own catalog. The problem was, they didn't have one. They had to build it from scratch. They began by buying broadcasting rights to music that was not registered to ASCAP, which soon brought BMI together with ACA composers for like-minded reasons.

Since the early 1940's ACA composers had been trying to join ASCAP, without success.

At the time these letters (pictured on previous page) were written, ACA Director Harrison Kerr was still hopeful that ACA composers might be accepted under the ASCAP umbrella. Up to this time, ASCAP had offered its membership only to a select few ACA composers, including Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, and Marc Blitzstein.

ASCAP had said "maybe" to the idea of taking all ACA composers and kept ACA leaders on the hook for several years. When the deal fell through decisively and there was no chance for all ACA members to join into ASCAP as a group, Copland was justifiably concerned, and letters in the ACA collection at SCPA contain much information on the complexity of the issue of dual memberships in ACA and ASCAP.

It was not until 1944 that Harrison Kerr established the agreement between ACA and BMI in which the broadcasters would collect performance royalties for concerts in addition to the radio broadcast rights for the music in the ACA catalog. This is how



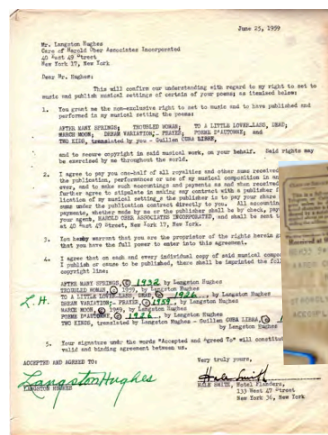
had a bit of an identity crisis. I believe we are still very much working to clarify the image of what ACA is and does. There were multiple, simultaneous missions over the years.



In the 1940s and 50s, Aaron Copland and other ACA composers worked with the US Information Agency and traveled to other countries in support of American music concerts and promoting American culture.

In the 1950s, ACA leaders established a live concert series presented at the Museum of Modern Art, curated by Leopold Stokowski and broadcast on WNYC (see photo bottom-right, from left: tenor William Hess with ACA members Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Jacob Avshalomov, and Henry Brant). In addition, the record company CRI was founded by ACA—as well as the American Composers Orchestra in the 1970s. Each of these branched

to an individual or organization for their “distinguished service in fostering American music.” (on bottom of previous page,



1969, from left ACA President John Les-

through the 1950s and 60s.

Within the ACA archives at SCPA, you will find not only thousands of music score masters, but also files with text permissions for lyrics, composers' writings, and various photos of events, correspondence and business of the founders and members of ACA over the years.

What was an appropriately flexible rights agreement between composer and publisher in the middle 20th century has again become viable.

In recent years, music publishers in the U.S. have been closing and/or reducing staff and services, or they've been absorbed by larger companies who pick and choose the works they will continue to support, especially for contemporary music. Titles easily go out of print. The task of disseminating and archiving composers' music has become ever more important.

Text permission letter from Langston Hughes for composer Hale Smith; Telegram from Deems Taylor to Aaron Copland at the start of ACA activities in 1938.

sard, with award recipients Charles Wuorinen and Harvey Sollberger, on behalf of the Group for Contemporary Music).

Sharing the award in 1959 were choreographer Martha Graham and comedian

Jack Benny. (Photo top of previ-

ous page, 1959, Martha Graham with ACA composer Robert Ward)

Jack Benny (middle of previous page)

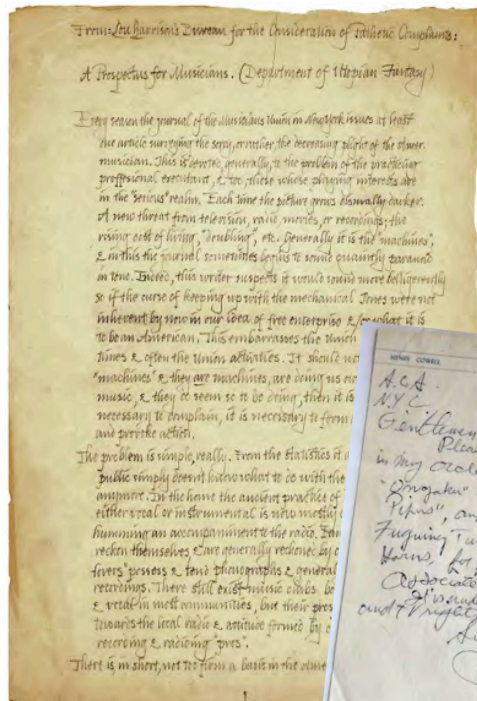
was honored by ACA for his fundraising efforts for American orchestras through performing his comedy

sketches and playing the violin. He is pictured with his piano accompanist Richard Nixon (at left) who was Vice-President of the United States at that time, and ACA President Ben Weber (right) presenting him with the Laurel Leaf award.

Oliver Daniel also revived the publication *ACA Bulletin* (see cover images on next page)



Composers Henry Brant (standing), Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Jacob Avshalomoff and tenor William Hess (left) take time out at the Museum of Modern Art to look over one of their scores which Leopold Stokowski will conduct at the Concert of Contemporary American Music presented by the American Composers' Alliance.

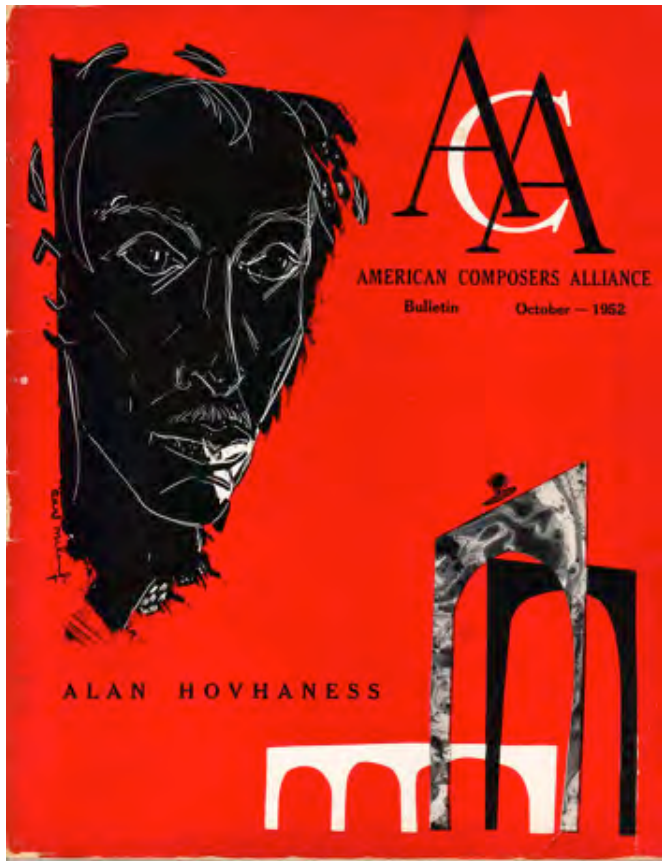


Lou Harrison's Prospectus for Musicians (1957) p.1, and a letter from ACA member Henry Cowell, requesting a transfer of rights for three of his ACA works over to Associated Music Publishers.

off and became separate successful entities.

Oliver Daniel, an important and colorful character in music publishing, in 1951, inaugurated for ACA the prestigious Laurel Leaf Award.

It was given by the ACA Board of Governors in a ceremony almost every year



What is ACA's mission today? Is it a publisher?

Yes, but composers do not assign their copyright – they merely grant certain exclusive and nonexclusive rights to ACA for a period of time that can be forever, or they can revoke.

Is it a licensing organization? Yes, but composers can, if they want, license their own recordings and dramatic performances.

Is it an arts organization? Not really. It's an incorporated business that controls legal limited rights of many individual works and has a fiduciary responsibility to its composers.

A nonprofit since 2009, ACA is not owned by any one person or its Board of Governors– it's owned collectively by its members and any surplus of income needs to be recycled back into its programs and mission.

ACA's 75th anniversary in 2012 was celebrated with a concert at Symphony Space, featuring the League of Composers Orchestra.

Will the ACA Archives at SCPA be the last stop for the music collection?

How can a group like ACA stay relevant into the future?

Two thoughts:

1. Even with social media and web-sites, there is still a huge body of American composers' work that isn't likely to be found in music stores, libraries, streaming or for sale online, or heard in performances and recordings, if representative advocates do not take responsibility and care for it. ACA provides publishing services and score access for composers who want more than self-publishing, but also to retain a level of ownership and control over their music; as well as ser-

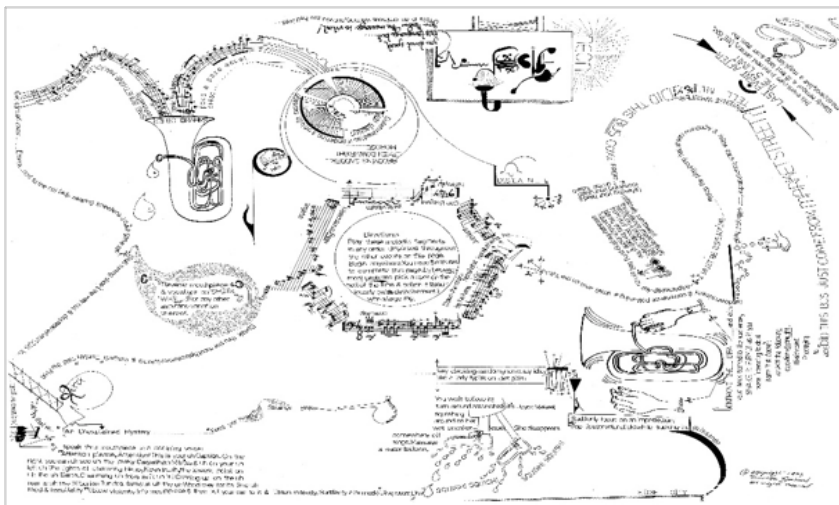


Image above: Tuba-Tuba (1973) by Burr Van Nostrand – example of a composer whose work has enjoyed a substantial renaissance since 2012, largely due to the efforts between SCPA, New England Conservatory Library, and ACA, with his ACA scores now listed online and print on request services available to performers.

vices for composers who have no interest or skills to get their music into mainstream markets.

See excerpt below, from “Building Music Scores Collections in the World of Web-Based, Self-Publishing Composers”, a paper by Kent Underwood (NYU) presented at IAML Congress 2015:

“Regardless of a composer's reasons for conducting [his or] her career outside the traditional channels of commercial publishing and distribution, the routines that libraries typically follow to identify and purchase new scores are clearly not well-connected to self-publishing individuals. The result is that a sizable quantity of significant contemporary music is falling through the cracks. And those cracks seem to be widening. The danger, long term, is that libraries will miss the opportunity to preserve and document the musical culture of our time faithfully for posterity.”

2. The original plan of ACA as a flexible rights organization that handles some aspects of publishing and shares other rights and chores with its composers seems win-win for both sides. This was set up so that composers could

leave ACA if they were signed to a commercial publisher, or if any of their particular works were chosen for more mainstream publication by larger companies.

Examples of composers who joined ACA and then moved on to bigger publishers include John Cage in the late 1940s, Henry Cowell and Elliott Carter in the 50s. Leslie Bassett, Charles Wuorinen and Joan Tower in the late 60s. These composers moved on from ACA, but each left many early works to continue being published and distributed by ACA.

Other composers joined ACA permanently and established a custodial agreement for the continued distribution of and access to their music after their death – Miriam Gideon, Ben Weber, Otto Luening, Karl Weigl, Robert Helps, and nearly 100 others have many scores with ACA, earning performance royalties for the organization until it closes, or until the works are in the public domain. ACA continues to print on request some of the earliest works in the catalog that are likely no longer in copyright.

The current business model of licensing – allocating bits and pieces of your copyright to different companies for specific purposes is the foundation of how the

music business benefits songwriters and composers. ACA, in licensing, but not owning copyrights, has been ahead of other concert music publishers in this respect.

I see the potential of ACA as a valuable resource, a necessary extension of traditional publishing. Even though the composers may be prolific, writing in multiple genres, the requests coming in are for specific pieces, often 'one-off' copies. Publishers with a 'for profit' structure have a difficult time managing small requests on the one hand, and libraries don't want to do the work of publishers, on the other. ACA can provide these services with the support it receives from BMI, from fundraising, and through licensing and selling music, if it is managed carefully.

The structure of ACA is a great opportunity for music business students, archivists, and music librarians in training. In our "connected age", composer members around the country are helping to manage aspects of their ACA collective together.

What does the future hold?

Managing more and more members requires an administrative infrastructure that siphons funding away from creative projects. This is an ongoing problem for many smaller nonprofits.

This is where SCPA has been so valuable. ACA could not have shouldered the costs on its own for the storage of score masters and the professional care they have received for the past 15 years.

The support from SCPA and BMI has absolutely saved ACA—it's that simple. ACA is now fully functioning to distribute works from its vast music catalog on request to individual performers and ensembles, and also to specialty re-sellers such as Theodore Front Musical Literature and Harrassowitz Booksellers, among others.

ACA score sales have increased exponentially as have performance royalties earned from our catalog at BMI since 2009, but also important to note is that making the collection more visible has resurrected works otherwise forgotten. ACA has also

welcomed more than 30 new or returning member composers, expanding the collection considerably in the past 5 years.

In addition to establishing the status of the physical ownership of all of the materials, ACA is currently working with SCPA on an agreement to make available a collection of more than 4,000 digital scores and parts to students around the world. Our PDF collection continues to grow by the day — as we scan more of the older score masters at SCPA and also receive deposits of new works from current composers in born-digital format.

In developing a process of electronic access to ACA scores, SCPA and ACA both have acknowledged that the needs and interests of an archive are not always congruent with the needs and interests of a publisher or performance library.

We intend to continue our collaboration with SCPA, working together so that these scores by American composers will remain available in a shared database with access to materials for researchers and also performers.

We keep moving forward with our digi-

tal preservation program so that scores can remain widely available beyond our own lives.

(This essay is an edited version of a paper presented at The International Association of Music Libraries and Documentation Centres (IAML) and the International Musicological Society (IMS), June 2015).

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