The Virginia Martin Howard Lecture Series • Fall 1992

Restoring and Conserving Musical Instruments

Saving Musical Treasures At The Met
Kenneth Moore ~ Dept. of Musical Instruments
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York)
Sunday, September 13, 1992
2:00 p.m. ~ School of Music Recital Hall

The Care and Preservation of Musical Instruments
Robert Barclay ~ Conservation Laboratory
Canadian National Museum (Ottawa)
Sunday, October 11, 1992
2:00 p.m. ~ School of Music Recital Hall

The profession of preserving and repairing rare music instruments is a talent equal to that of famous painting restorers. This Fall, we will share such knowledge on the second Sundays of September and October with the experts listed above. Their lecture/demonstrations will take you behind the scenes of great museums to their special workshops and laboratories. Also, it will provide insights into the problems of instrument repair that may be part of your own concerns. Mr. Moore is a specialist in African and Asian music and will bring up the problems of conservation decisions that must be made on items that come from a different cultural world. Mr. Barclay is a well known maker and restorer of historical brass instruments.

Tetewsky Violin Bow Collection

The Stearns instruments from the European art music tradition have been enriched by eight excellent violin bows. They are the gift of Dr. Hyman Tetewsky of Tonowanda, NY and come from the estate of his late brother, Henry Tetewsky, who was a professional violinist in New York City.

Dr. Tetewsky was anxious to perpetuate his brother’s memory in both a museum and performance context, so Michigan was a logical choice. The surprise was that the gift should also complete a historical circle. It began when Henry Tetewsky was a student at Julliard. He roomed with William Salchow, a cellist, who later studied bow making in France. Salchow then practiced that special

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The Stearns has acquired over 2,000 instruments under a host of circumstances for almost one hundred years. In the process, documentation is sometimes lost or incorrect. Part of the excitement of working with such a collection is to discover both old and new facts about treasures that have always been before us but remained hidden from our understanding. One of the first issues of the Newsletter (Vol. 1, no. 2) told you of the Loomis saxophone, one of 8 models of the prototype for the modern instrument. We have yet to discover how we obtained it, but are grateful that visiting scholars have helped us to recognize the historical importance of such items. In that context, recall that Volume 4, No. 1 of the Newsletter noted the excitement of visiting French musicians when they discovered our rare holdings in French folk instruments. Hubert Boone, the author of La Cornemuse, the major book on bagpipes of Northern France and the Lowlands, added to our knowledge when he came here to research a cornemuse pipe set that previously he had only seen in paintings! Your director has enjoyed similar intellectual pleasures as he has investigated Japanese materials that entered the Collection in the last century. First there were two instruments from the Ainu peoples who had been pushed to the most northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. [Last year we added to the collection a CD of social protest rock music performed by remnants of those islanders to the Collection.] The most exotic Japanese treasure to emerge from our dusty shelves is a small lute called the biwa. Various forms of this instrument were used by blind narrators to recite and preserve great Japanese epics, not unlike the traditions of the ancient blind bards of Greece and Europe. The particular instrument found in the Stearns was originally used by itinerant priests who traveled from village to village, singing Buddhist sutra blessings in houses. The tradition was called blind (moso) biwa, because it was a common profession for visually challenged persons. Our instrument might also have been called a kitchen (koin) biwa because it was there that most of the blessings were performed. The Stearns instrument is in exceptionally good condition and its type is rarely found in Japan today. The neck and string box detach and the frets are set in grooves for easy removal. Thus, some century ago, a wandering Japanese musician could pack away his precious tool until he came to another home in need of extraterrestrial help. The spectrum that came with the instrument has a cross-like design that might relate to the few 16th century Christian Converts who briefly performed new religious messages in Japan. More needs to be studied. The Stearns Collection research obviously offers a host of intellectual and musical adventures for those who will pursue them. Qualified volunteers are always welcome to taste the flavor of research attached to hundreds of Stearns instruments that now sit quietly and safely in bags waiting for their secrets to be told. Let us know if you wish to join the expeditionary force.

One of our recent explorers is David Sutherland, an Ann Arbor harpsichord maker. His first major connection with The Stearns was in 1977 when he and Robert Warner, then Stearns director, attempted to restore what was known as the Giusti harpsichord. At the present, Sutherland is involved in a further restoration of that instrument in order that Edward Parmentier, our harpsichord professor, can use it in a recital this year. In addition, the collection has given Sutherland access to yet another European puzzle. It is a three manual harpsichord listed in the 1924 catalogue as a 1702 product of Bartolomeo Cristofori, the craftsman who eventually produced the first new instruments known today as the pianoforte. We have known for some time that our “antique” was fabricated from several different instruments in the 19th century by Signor Francioli, an entrepreneur whose fake instruments are found in most instrument collections of the world. Because the Stearns has continued on page 4
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ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING
The Friends of the Stearns Annual Business Meeting will take place on
Sunday, September 13, 1992 at
1:15 p.m. The meeting will immediately precede the Virginia Martin
Howard Lecture presented by
Mr. Moore. The results of the
election of Board members will be
announced at this time. The Board
generates much of the energy that
helps the collection grow.
Remember that it is elected by
members of the Friends. If you are
unable to attend the meeting,
please mail your ballot to arrive
at the Stearns Collection before

BECOME A FRIEND OF THE STEARNS

With your help, additional instruments may be restored, played, displayed, and appreciated by the musical public. Friends receive
The Stearns Newsletter, invitations to the Virginia Martin Howard Lectures and announcements of upcoming exhibits and
performances. Your contribution will help support all activities of The Stearns Collection.

Membership in the Friends of the Stearns is available in the following categories:
☐ Benefactor $1,000 ☐ Patron $500 ☐ Sustaining $100 ☐ Friend $30
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Uncovering The Secrets Of The Stearns continued from page 2

research laboratory space, it has been possible to disassemble this non-instrument and search for the sources of its parts. In its three manual form, it appears to be a nicely built but unplayable 19th century antique. The tuning pegs would not even hold the necessary tension to bring the instrument to pitch. However, as the interior construction is further scrutinized, earlier repairs and rebuilding emerged that point to the work of the Cristofori 18th century workshop after all. Once more it seems that we may have something rarer than we thought!

Another Stearns exploration has begun on the chant book from Santiago, Spain that is seen in the lobby of the McIntosh Theater. The drawings imply it is from the 18th century. The pictures show us Saint Iago fighting the Moors and Saint Jerome being converted from reading Virgil to studying the Bible. The scene contains a new church being raised to heaven by angels. What church is it? What are the script styles being utilized? At the same time, the old vellum end papers that held the book to its wooden cover seem older and almost Moorish. Are they 15th century leftovers? We don’t know yet, but this Newsletter and volunteer researchers will let you know.

Keep your membership active and join us in our exceptional musical adventures. There’s more to the Stearns than handsome displays and fine lectures. There are opportunities to participate in the unusual process and findings of organology, the science of studying musical instruments.

Tetewsky Violin Bow Collection continued from page 1

skill in New York where David Orlin of Ann Arbor became one of his students. The last issue of the Newsletter announced that David Orlin was our speaker on bows for the February, 1992 Virginia Martin Howard Lecture Series. Thus, Mr. Orlin completed the cycle by going to Tonawanda to share information on the bows with Dr. Tetewsky and then transport them to Ann Arbor.

The collection includes works by the best French makers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Vuillaume, Voirin, and Louis Tourt. A display of the collection can be seen in the Music Library Case, yet another gift of Mrs. Howard a decade ago. The exhibit includes a rare French Charnot violin whose body shape is influenced by that of a guitar. When not on display, the bows will be carefully stored or used by faculty and qualified graduate performers.

To grow a music museum depends on friends and on imaginative donors. Dr. Tetewsky is thanked for being both.