

ANNOUNCEMENT

The University of Kansas Libraries has acquired the James E. Seaver recorded sound collection of more than 20,000 discs, albums, cylinder records, and tapes. With this acquisition, the University possesses one of the half-dozen most extensive collections of opera and art song recordings in the world. The Seaver collection is the only one of its kind in the Midwest.

Begun in 1931, it concentrates on all the great singers and on the greatest variety of operatic repertoire preserved in sound recordings from 1896 to the present. Although the collection has its share of unique and rare items, its value resides in its quality and scope.

"Not since George Keating's collection was sold more than a decade ago for more than \$100,000.00 has such a collection been available," stated professional appraiser Edward J. Smith, record collector and producer, Forest Hills, Long Island. In a letter to Seaver, Smith commented: "Your collection is that of a true musical scholar and is as splendid a representation of the more than 70-year history of the phonograph as is to be obtained anywhere."

Seaver is professor of history at the University of Kansas and an opera enthusiast. Since 1952, he has hosted "Opera Is My Hobby"--a weekly hour-long program on the University's public radio station--and he hasn't missed a show in 26 years. Seaver has produced the radio show and taught classes in opera on the basis of his excellent collection.

The collection is very rich in discs and cylinders of the 1900-1910 era, including most recordings of Enrico Caruso and Geraldine Farrar. Another era of concentration is the 1920-1930 period, ending with the advent of the depression. On several occasions Seaver was able to purchase the stock of a dealer discontinuing record sales.

Most of the famous 78 rpm opera sets on Victor and Columbia are in the collection, especially Wagner, Mozart, and Verdi operas. Most are products of the 1930-1940 era. The collection is also very rich in operatic singles and sets of the first 20 years of the LP era (1950-1970) when Seaver was actively collecting.

Among the rare and remarkable recordings in the collection, early Italian discs predominate. Seaver gathered these when he spent a year in Italy after World War II and became friends with numerous Italian collectors.

The earliest record in the collection is a seven-inch Berliner disc of 1896--a recording of Ferruccio Gianini singing Schubert's Serenade. The latest records are LP stereo discs of 1973.

The collection is rich in recordings of the great Neapolitan tenor

Fernando de Lucia, G. & T., Fonotipias, Fonotypes. A complete recording in the Seaver collection of Verdi's Rigoletto performed by de Lucia may be the only complete set in the world. A set was known to exist in Cuba, but has not been heard of since the Castro take-over. This is the gem--the rarest item in the whole Seaver collection.

Among the Russian discs the rarest are Medea Mei-Figner's Tosca - (Vissi d'arte) G. & T. 23134 and Olimpia Boronat's Rigoletto--both G. & T. discs made in St. Petersburg.

The collection includes about 1,200 pirated recordings by record companies and private individuals, who recorded opera performances without permission. Pirated recordings are especially valuable. In many cases they are unique examples of certain operas or singers.

One of these private recordings is especially meaningful to Seaver. In 1938 when he was a student at Stanford, he attended a performance of Umberto Giordano's Andrea Chenier given by the San Francisco Opera Company. The performance featured Beniamino Gigli, a famous tenor, who was then in his prime and on his last tour of the United States. A pirated recording of part of the performance was made, which Seaver found and bought years later.

The Seaver collection will be a rich source of study and research for performers and scholars interested in the history of singing, vocal techniques, interpretation, history of opera (including sociological aspects), history of taste (the repertoire chosen for recording and styles of singing), history of conducting, and styles of opera. The large number of different performances of standard operas and arias invite comparative and chronological studies.

To make the collection accessible to music scholars and operatic collectors, the University plans to prepare indexes and publish a catalog of the collection.