

The Hunter College Concert Bureau Collection
1943 - 1976
Finding Aid



Archives and Special Collections



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Accession Number: 92-11

Size: 37.5 cu. ft.

Provenance: Hunter College Concert Bureau

Location: Range 3 Section 2 Shelves 7--11

Restrictions: None

Archivist: Julie Sorokurs

Date: August 2017

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



Founded in 1943 by President George N. Shuster and Dr. Benno Lee, the Hunter College Concert Bureau was an ambitious and impressive force to behold from its very genesis. In that first year, the Saturday Night Celebrity series presented five events – concerts by Vladimir Horowitz, Yehudi Menuhin, Jan Pearce, and Lotte Lehmann, and a lecture by Thomas Mann. By 1962, the series had grown to a full 12 concerts per season, all of which featured world-renowned performers of “first rank.”

When Dr. Benno Lee first immigrated to the United States from Vienna in 1940 (just barely escaping the fate which many Viennese Jews were to face, though he did not escape imprisonment in a concentration camp), he brought with him a whole host of contacts and connections that would prove vital to maintaining the reputation and popularity of the Concert Bureau. As the “leading impresario” of Vienna’s musical scene, Dr. Lee was introduced to Hunter’s President Shuster by none other than Lotte Lehmann, one of a great number of internationally-beloved performers Dr. Lee was able to “cajole” (to use his successor Norman Singer’s words) into considering the college as a worthy venue.

The first Saturday Night Celebrity series was followed by an equally impressive second series, which featured the above-mentioned names as well as Italian opera singer Ezio Pinza. In 1945, one of the “finest violinists of modern times,” Jascha Heifetz, was added to the lineup, as were classical pianist Rudolf Firkusny, violinist Erica Morini, and the New York Philharmonic under Bruno Walter. The list continued to grow well into the late 40’s and throughout the 50’s, as the likes of Zino Francescatti, Lauritz Melchior, Nathan Milstein, Arthur Rubenstein, and Isaac Stern helped solidify Hunter’s modest concert hall on Park Avenue as the preferred venue for over eighteen hundred subscribers by 1964.

Upon Dr. Lee’s death in 1961, it was decided that the Concert Bureau would function more effectively if it were reorganized and the breadth of its scope expanded. By the mid 60’s the Concert Bureau had added a children’s series, a piano recital series, a chamber music series, a Sunday afternoon family concert series, and many other sponsored concert series’ to its original Saturday Night Celebrity series.

The HCCB also had its administrative responsibilities extended to the college’s choir and the opera workshop. Additionally, the Bureau’s newly appointed administrator, Norman Singer, was to be the Chairman of the Committee of Assembly Hall and Playhouse Rental. Singer’s appointment was followed by the creation of a Concert Advisory Committee, established to “determine the general policies of the public music program of the college.” This seven-person committee included three members of the department of music, which effectively tied the hitherto autonomous Concert Bureau to Hunter College.

In 1969, Norman Singer was succeeded by his assistant, Omus Hirshbein. The son of poet Esther Shumiatcher and renowned playwright and journalist Peretz Hirshbein, Omus Hirshbein abandoned his initial ambitions of a career in performance, and instead dedicated his creative energy and drive to a

career in the presentation and organization of concerts. Hirshbein saw the continued growth and expansion of the Concert Bureau's operations up until 1973, by which time the organization had evolved to present dance, theater, rock music, and big names such as Cream, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin.

By 1974, the eventual demise of the HCCB was neither unexpected nor avoidable. The programs slated for the 1974/1975 season were to be the Bureau's last, as foundation after foundation (the Rockefeller Foundation, The Mellon Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, etc.) failed to renew their plans for funding its programs. Consequently, the Concert Bureau was left no choice but to cut back and cancel a sizeable amount of its 1974/1975 season. In the *Letters* section of the August 19th 1974 edition of *New York Magazine*, Alan Rich discredits Hunter President Jacqueline Wexler's repeated insistences that the Concert Bureau is not on its very last leg. In response to Wexler's own concessions of there being a recent loss of funding and sponsorships, Rich writes:

“...the fact is that Hunter's Concert Bureau has been in a process of dismantlement since Gerald Freund moved in from Foundationland... Freund and his academics (a sorry arts faculty, by any standards) began chipping away at the bureau while it was under Omus Hirshbein's strong, imaginative direction. Despite Wexler's protests, no leadership is being provided, nor have plans been announced beyond this coming season's long-arranged commitments.”

From its promising inception in 1943 to its inevitable collapse in 1975, the Hunter College Concert Bureau could boast an audience of devoted performers and subscribers alike, and the few salvaged relics of the administrative files in this collection reflect this devotion. Though the Concert Bureau's troubles were in no way unique or limited to the administration of Hunter College, they contextualize the truly miraculous fact that such an organization ever existed in the first place.

Written by Julie Sorokurs, July 2017

Bibliography

- Kozinn, Allan. "Omus Hirshbein, Classical Music Impresario, Dies at 77." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 06 Jan. 2012. Web. 17 Dec. 2015.
- Robbins, Richard. "The Hunter College Concert Bureau: 25 Years...development...determination...dedication." *Hunter Alumni Quarterly* (Spring 1968): 6-8. Web.
- Singer, Norman. "The Story of the Hunter College Concert Bureau." *Hunter Alumni Quarterly* (Spring 1964): 14-15. Web

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Hunter College Concert Bureau collection is the record of an administration that struggled to financially justify its increasingly ambitious cultural endeavors. The majority of this collection, as it was inherited by the archives, consists of the correspondence and publicity-related material circulated in the final years of the Bureau's existence. Recurring themes and concerns exchanged in interdepartmental letters center around having to cut back on decades' old, beloved programming and experimental performances alike. Though the Bureau was never for want of significant performers or loyal audiences, this collection reflects that a lack of funds and an almost comically ill-equipped concert venue was to be the administration's eventual downfall.

The most compelling aspect of these files is the dedication of all three of the Bureau's administrators - Benno Lee, Norman Singer, and Omus Hirshbein. Correspondence written by Lee, Singer, or Hirshbein is never without its personal enthusiasm, determination, or humor. So apparent is the creative energy and nerve of these letters, that a researcher with little to no background in classical music would likely still appreciate the endeavors of this administration and the need to highlight them in any celebration of Hunter College history.

The final series of this collection is made up of the scrapbooks put together by the administration for its own uses. They are largely unfinished and unreliable for the researcher looking for a thorough review of the administration's programming. What they do showcase, presumably, are its most well-received and critically-lauded events.

The Hunter College Concert Bureau collection would be of interest to anyone researching Hunter College's role in the climate and reputation of New York City concert culture from the late 50's and into the mid 70's. Researchers with an interest in classical music and 20th century British theatre, especially, will appreciate the respect Hunter College garnered from the likes of Vladimir Ashkenazy, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, and Jonathan Winters.

SERIES DESCRIPTION

Series I – Administration

This first series is a record of administrative responsibilities and correspondence. Included are some of the letters exchanged between Concert Bureau administrators and their colleagues, as well as a number of Hunter College presidents. “Management” is a subseries containing negotiations and other such exchanges between administrators and artists’ managers. The subseries “Fundraising” details some of the benefit concerts and other special events that the administration attempted, often unsuccessfully, to organize. This series also contains all performers’ contracts from the final six years of the Concert Bureau’s existence.

Series II – Seasonal Programs and Events

Series II is made up of five subseries detailing the various programs and events curated by the Concert Bureau. In addition to its ongoing classical music cycles, the administration showcased internationally-touring theatre shows and dance ensembles. Screenings of educational or culturally significant films were also organized by the Concert Bureau.

Series III – Press and Publicity

Series III contains the advertisements, flyers, and press releases issued to subscribers, newspapers, and the general public. Included are (mostly) favorable reviews of various Concert Bureau performances, ad and program drafts, and correspondence with the relevant cultural critics.

Series IV – Students and Audiences

Series IV is a record of the comments, complaints, and suggestions sent by audiences and retained by the administration. The folder titled “Subscription Cancellation” contains subscribers’ acknowledgements of the administration’s shutdown, a significant number of which include heartfelt condolences and implorations to reconsider. Correspondence regarding student-related programs and collaborations is also included in this series.

Series V – Scrapbooks and Photographs

Scrapbooks put together by the Concert Bureau make up this final series. The majority of the programs and other records in these scrapbooks can be found elsewhere in the Hunter College Concert Bureau collection; nevertheless, they provide insight as to the administration’s vision of itself. A folder containing the autographed portraits of a few musicians and children’s performers concludes this series.

CONTAINER LIST

SERIES I – ADMINISTRATION

Subseries 1.1 Administrators

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
1	1	Benno Lee, Miscellaneous articles, 1950, 1952 – 1961
	2	Benno Lee Graduate Scholarship in Music, 1962, 1966 – 1971
	3	Benno Lee, Correspondence, 1945 – 1946
	4	Correspondence, 1947 – 1949
	5	Correspondence, 1950 – 1960
	6	Norman Singer, Agency of Performing Arts vs. HCCB, 1969 – 1971
	7 - 8	Candidates for Position of Bureau Admin, 1962
	9	Correspondence with Insurance Brokers, 1965
	10	Correspondence with President John J. Meng, 1962 – 1965
	11	International Association of Concert Managers, 1964 – 1968, 1970, 1972, 1976
	12	Reorganization of the Concert Bureau, 1962
2	1 - 4	Omus Hirshbein, International Association of Concert Managers, 1971 – 1972
	5	Lectures, 1972
	6 – 9	Staten Island Community College, 1968 – 1970

Subseries 1.2 Contracts

3	1	1967 / 1968
	2	1968 / 1969
	3	1969 / 1970

CONTAINER LIST

SERIES I – ADMINISTRATION

Subseries 1.2 Contracts

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
3	4	1970 / 1971
	5	1971 / 1972
	6	1972 / 1973
	7	1973 / 1974
	8	1974 / 1975
	9	1975 / 1976

Subseries 1.3 Facilities

4	1 – 4	Assembly Hall and Playhouse Information, 1969 – 1973
	5	Buildings and Grounds, 1962, 1970, 1972 – 1975
	6	Central Reservations, 1974
	7 – 11	Equipment, 1965 – 1975
5	1	Office Services, 1969, 1971 – 1972
	2	Playhouse Drapery, 1973
	3	Rental of Halls, 1955, 1957, 1961 – 1969, 1971 – 1972, 1974
	4	Security, 1967 – 1969, 1971 – 1974
	5	Stage Technicians, 1967 – 1973
	6	Student Rentals, 1972
	7	Supplies, n.d
	8	Tully Hall, 1969

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SERIES I – ADMINISTRATION

Subseries 1.3 Facilities

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
5	9	Ushers, 1966 – 1973
	10	Record, Hunter Arts, 1975 – 1977
	11 – 12	Record, Mezzanine & Balcony, 1963 – 1972
6	1 – 2	Record, Mezzanine & Balcony Sunday Subscription, 1970 – 1977
	3 – 4	Record, Orchestra Categories 1 & 2, 1963 – 1973
	5	Sunday Subscription, 1970 – 1974
	6	Sunday Subscription Zones A – B, 1973 – 1977
	7	Sunday Afternoon, Mezzanine Balcony, 1976 – 1977

Subseries 1.4 Financial Records

7	1 – 2	Balance Sheets, 1968, 1974 – 1975
	3 – 5	Box Office Reports, 1968 – 1969, 1973 – 1975
	6	Budgets, 1968, 1972 – 1976
	7	Checks and Statements, 1967 – 1971
	8 – 11	Correspondence, 1962 – 1970
8	1 – 4	Correspondence, 1971 – 1975
	5 – 7	Financial Statements, 1947 – 1951, 1954 – 1956, 1961, 1965 – 1967, 1969 – 1976
9	1	Income and Expenses, 1963 – 1966, 1973 – 1974
	2	Insurance, 1964, 1966, 1968 – 1973

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SERIES I – ADMINISTRATION

Subseries 1.4 Financial Records

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
9	3	Purchase Orders, 1963 – 1973

Subseries 1.5 Fund Raising

	4	1970
	5	1971
	6	1972
	7	1974 / 1975
	8	Appeals to Suscribers, 1973 – 1975
	9	Blue Hill Troupe, 1972 – 1974
	10	Centennial Fund for Hunter College, 1967 – 1970
	11	Centennial Fund “Special Gifts,” 1967
	12 – 14	Commission Concerts, 1968 – 1975
10	1 – 3	Contributions, 1971 – 1973
	4 – 5	Correspondence, 1965 – 1974
	6	Foundations, 1958 – 1972
	7	Hour of Music, 1963 – 1968
	8	International Piano Library, 1970
	9 – 13	Met Opera Fisher Fund, 1964, 1966 – 1972
	14	NY Foundation for the Arts, 1972
	15	NY State Council on the Arts, Correspondence, 1964 – 1967

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SERIES I – ADMINISTRATION

Subseries 1.5 Fundraising

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
11	1	NY State Council on the Arts, Meetings, 1964 – 1968
	2	Rockefeller Foundation, 1971, 1974
	3	Stefan Wolpe Benefit, 1970
	4 – 5	Thanks, 1971 – 1975
	6	Theatre Development Fund, 1973

Subseries 1.6 Management

7	American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, 1963 – 1975
8	Columbia Artists Management inc., 1970 – 1973
9	Center for Inter-American Relations, 1970 – 1973
10	Hurok Concerts, 1972 – 1974
11	Miscellaneous Management, 1968 – 1970, 1972

SERIES II – SEASONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Subseries 2.1 Ensembles

12	1	Beaux Arts Trio, 1968 – 1972
	2	Blues & Jazz, 1966, 1971 – 1972, 1976
	3	Choir of Hunter College, 1967 – 1971
	4	Mineapolis Opera Centre “The Mother of Us All,” 1971

Subseries 2.2 Concert Series

5	American Symphony Concert Series, 1973 – 1974
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SERIES II – SEASONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Subseries 2.2 Concert Series

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
	6	Art of the Piano Series, 1973 – 1974
12	7	Beethoven's Birthday Series, 1969 – 1970
	8	Chamber Music Series, 1963 – 1964, 1969 – 1971
	9	1972 – 1974
	10	1974 – 1975
	11	Contemporary Trends Series, 1964 – 1965
	12	Distant Lands Series, 1962, 1968 – 1969, 1971
	13	French Chamber Music Series, 1963 – 1964
	14	Guitar Series, 1969 – 1971
	15	Harpsichord Series, 1967 – 1972
13	1	International Composers Series, 1963 – 1964, 1971
	2	Latin American Series, 1969 – 1975
	3	Murray Perahia Series, 1971 – 1972
	4	New Images of Sounds Series, 1970 – 1971
	5	Piano Series, 1963 – 1967, 1969
	6	1970 – 1973
	7	Pierre Boulez Series, 1967 – 1971
	8	Renaissance Music Series, 1967 – 1969
14	1	Saturday Evening Series, 1968 – 1969

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SERIES II – SEASONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Subseries 2.2 Concert Series

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
14	2	Saturday Evening Series, 1969 – 1970
	3	1970 – 1971
	4	1971 – 1972
	5	1972 – 1973
	6	1973 – 1974
	7	1974 – 1975
15	1	Song Cycle Series (Britten and Pears reunion), 1966 – 1970
	2	Song Cycle Series, 1964 – 1966
	3	1967 – 1969
	4	1969 – 1972
	5	Subscription Series, 1941 – 1950
16	1	Sunday Afternoon Series, 1969 – 1975
	2	Three Special Events Series, 1968 – 1969, 1972
	3	Two Piano Series, 1967 – 1970
	4	Wednesday Evening Series, 1971 – 1972
	5	Winds Series, 1969 – 1970
	6	Young Concert Artists Series, 1963 – 1964, 1970, 1972 – 1973

Subseries 2.3 Dance

7	Miscellaneous, 1967 – 1970
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SERIES II – SEASONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Subseries 2.3 Dance

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
16	8	Miscellaneous, 1973, 1974, 1975

Subseries 2.4 Film / Television / Radio

17	1	Clay – Fraizer Fight Screening, 1971
	2	Film Screenings, 1970 – 1974
	3	Record Companies, 1970, 1972 – 1973
	4	WNYC AM/FM Broadcast Schedule, 1972

Subseries 2.5 Lectures and Readings

5	Auden, W.H, 1973
6	Gassman, Vittorio “Dante Anniversary, 1965 – 1966
7	Gianturco, Elio “On Italian Music,” 1962 – 1964
8	Gielgud, John “Men and Women of Shakespeare,” 1967
9	Mann, Thomas, 1943 – 45, 1947

Subseries 2.6 Theatre

18	1	“An Entertainment for Elizabeth,” 1972
	2	At Hunter, 1970, n.d

Children’s Theatre

3	Mime, 1970 – 1971
4	National Chorale, 1970 – 1971
5	National Theatre of the Deaf, 1967 – 1969

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SERIES II – SEASONAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Subseries 2.6 Theatre

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
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Children's Theatre

18	6	Paper Bag Players, 1971 – 1973
	7	Proposition Circus, 1976
	8	Salzberg Marionettes, 1968 – 1969

Shakespeare

9		An Evening of Shakespeare, 1963 – 1964
10		Oxbridge Theatre Company "Midsummer Night's Dream," 1968
11		Oxbridge Theatre Company "Twelfth Night," 1969
12		Oxbridge Theatre Company "Hamlet," 1970

SERIES III – PRESS AND PUBLICITY

19	1	Announcements and Press Releases, 1967 – 1970
	2	1971
	3	1972 – 1973
	4	1973 – 1974
	5	1975 – 1976
	6	Correspondence, 1969 – 1970
	7	1971 – 1972
	8	1972 – 1973
20	1	1973 – 1974

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SERIES III – PRESS AND PUBLICITY

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
20	2	Hunter Envoy, 1972 – 1973
	3	Miscellaneous Press File, 1966, 1971, 1972, 1975
	4	Programs, 1945 – 1949
	5	1950 – 1959
	6	1960 – 1969
	7	Programs, 1971 – 1975
	8	1974 – 1975
	9	Reviews, 1963 – 1965, 1970 – 1972

SERIES IV – STUDENTS AND AUDIENCES

21	1	Complaints, 1948, 1961, 1969 – 1973
	2	Hospital Audiences, 1971
	3	Playwrights' Project, 1973
	4	SEEK, 1969 – 1972
	5	Senior Citizens, 1970, 1972, 1975
	6	Student Relations Events, 1968 – 1969, 1972
	7	Subscription Cancellation, 1976
	8	Testimonial, 1963 – 1972

SERIES V – SCRAPBOOKS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

22	1	1969/1970 Vol. I
	2	1969/1970 Vol. II

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SERIES V – SCRAPBOOKS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
22	3	1970/1971 Vol. I
	4	1970/1971 Vol. II
23	1	1972/1973 Vol. I
	2	1972/1973 Vol. II
	3	1972/1973 (Faculty Series) Vol. I
	4	1972/1973 (Faculty Series) Vol. II
24	1	1973/1974
	2	1973/1974 (Publicity Material) Vol. I
	3	1973/1974 (Publicity Material) Vol. II
	4	1974/1975 (Chamber Music Series)
25	1	1974/1975 Vol. I
	2	1974/1975 Vol. II
	3	1975/1976 Vol. I
	4	1975/1976 Vol. II
	5	Autographed Photographs, 1972

What follows is a list (in chronological order) of all the artists who performed for the Hunter College Concert Bureau between 1943 & 1974