



Oviatt Opens Guitar Archive

A free classical guitar performance and a chance to rub elbows with legendary guitarists. That's what's in store for attendees at the September 28th opening of the International Guitar Research Archive (IGRA), one of the Oviatt Library's largest and grandest collections. The unveiling of this unique collection will be accompanied by a gala reception at 6:00 p.m. and displays of a sampling of the archive's contents in the C. K. and Teresa Tseng Gallery.

A guitar performance featuring compositions of such guitar legends as Andrés Segovia, Vicente Gomez and Laurindo Almeida will add a unique auditory dimension to the opening. Ron Purcell, Professor emeritus and a principal architect of the collection, indicates that music will be drawn from the archive itself, and "...played from original scores in the collection." Several of CSUN's guitar faculty will perform, among them Dr. Steven Thachuk (who on Purcell's full retirement in June 2006 takes over as head of the guitar program) and Professor Ron Borczon. Many guitar students will add their renditions of selected pieces as well.

As if the auditory treat weren't enough of an enticement, attendees at the archive's opening will have an opportunity to socialize with the families of some whose works are represented in the archives. Representatives

of major luthiers, makers of guitars, are also expected.

So that you might better appreciate this unique collection, what follows is an overview of the archive and the woman whose contribution triggered its founding. Much of the information was provided by Purcell, but Tony Gardner (Curator, Special Collections/Archives) and Cindy Ventuleth (Library Development Officer) also contributed.

International Guitar Research Archive (IGRA)

The archive got its start with a contribution of thousands of guitar-related items, some from as far back as 1790, that had been amassed by Vahdah Olcott-Bickford-Revere, an award-winning classical guitarist and teacher. Purcell, himself a former student of this legendary woman, notes that "After meeting a representative of the Martin Guitar Company, Vahdah became an avid collector of guitar music and memorabilia..." In an article in

Cadenza she once wrote that "...there is nothing better than collecting everything written for guitar and playing it." In addition to her own materials, which were massive, she often bought up entire collections at estate sales and antiquarian book stores.

Near the end of her life, as she sought a home for her treasured collection Vahdah approached Purcell. "She was insistent



"Vahdah"

Ethel Lucretia Olcott





that all of the materials be available to students and researchers," he says. "She had approached the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress, but wasn't satisfied that they would accede to her wishes." A conference with representatives of the library staff convinced her that the University was the most suitable repository.

Initially, the collection—music scores, photos, guitar recordings, music prints, journals, guitar-related correspondence, even a vintage guitar made by the Martin Company to Vahdah's specifications—found its home in the Music Department under Purcell's watchful eye. But the unusual assemblage attracted additional contributions from other guitar devotees and with its expansion came an imperative for additional space and proper curatorial expertise. In 2002, the collection was moved to the Oviatt Library and placed in Gardner's capable hands. Says Gardner, "The collection's pieces now number more than 10,000 and reflect the advancement of guitar music through the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries."

In the years since its establishment, IGRA has been a focus of Gardner's attention. As a research

collection its contents must be readily available to interested scholars. A catalog of music scores compiled by Purcell is now available online (under the archive's name), and a companion computer database of 2,600 recordings of guitar performances is nearing completion. A listing of books and pamphlets is underway and when completed will also be available on the web. Says Ventuleth, the cataloging of the recordings, "...an enormously labor-intensive endeavor, was made possible by grants from the Augustine Foundation."

The Grand Lady of Guitar

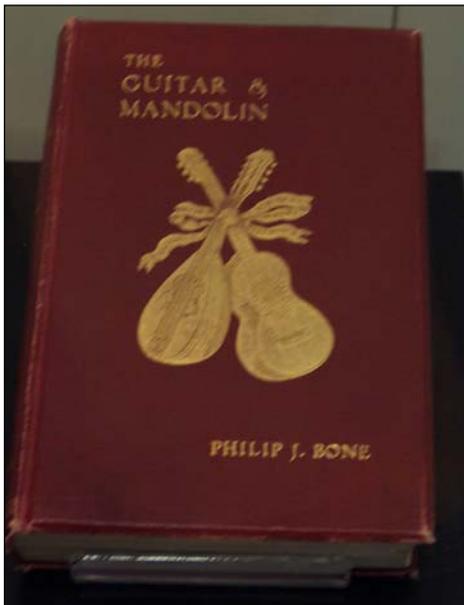
The woman whose collection started the archive was born Ethel Lucretia Olcott in 1885. After coming under the spell of astrology in her teens she abandoned her birth name and at the suggestion of her (and, incidentally, Teddy Roosevelt's) astrological mentor, Evangeline Adams, adopted the name "Vahdah." But to her admirers she was the "Grand Lady of Guitar," an honorific title bestowed because of her prowess as a classical guitarist and her role in promoting guitar music and in founding the American Guitar Society.

Purcell says that, "Vahdah was one of the few classic guitarists who could sight-read anything placed before her... Hers was North America's equivalent to Segovia's work." A gifted musician, she took up guitar at age eight and in her teens



Guitar Archive cont'd

honed her skills under the tutelage of Manuel Ferrer, the premiere American guitarist of the time. While living in New York she took top honors, a gold medal, in a competition as best instrumentalist, besting challengers playing more traditional concert instruments such as the violin and piano. She published her first opus at eighteen, authored two best-selling volumes on guitar instruction, and



taught guitar to numerous aspiring guitarists, among them children of the Vanderbilt and Baruch families. Alone among three female guitar teachers in the U.S. of the time, she was a specialist; says Purcell, "Her ads always specified, 'classical guitar only.'" At the height of a 1920s Hawaiian craze she deviated from her better known pathway long enough to publish an instruction manual for the ukulele.

Returning to Los Angeles in 1923, Vahdah threw herself into that city's world of guitar. The next several decades saw her almost single-handedly transform the city's music world with the creation of educational music programs, sponsorship of concerts and encouragement of composers, all while remaining actively engaged in performance and teaching. Her continual flurry of activities eventually led to her crowning off-stage achievement: the formation of the Los Angeles Guitar Society. "It was the first such society in the United States," says Purcell, "and ultimately metamorphosed into the American Guitar Society." Almost until her death, Vahdah served as the group's program director (her husband, Zarh Myron Bickford, was president) and was a regular fixture at monthly meetings on the

CSUN campus.

Justifiably proud of the collection he helped nurture, Purcell points out that "Nowhere else is there such a collection of guitar-related information. There simply is no other like it in the world." Gardner adds that this one-of-a-kind collection "...has brought considerable recognition to the University and to the Library." With

such plaudits, it's abundantly clear that this is an exhibit that shouldn't be missed. The performance at the archive's opening of a sample of the vintage works will surely make for a truly memorable event—music history at its finest!

— jd



All photos used in this article are from the International Guitar Research Archive.

Book Sale a Hot But Heady Affair

It strained credulity, but there they were! Hundreds of literary treasure seekers rummaging through a chaotic assortment of old books, the discards from someone else's home or office. Most stood in the hot sun hunched over rows of unordered books on tabletops, but others squatted on the ground, the better to access the tomes still ensconced in the boxes that had transported them. To prolong their treasure hunt, the more resourceful among them fashioned ersatz hats from grocery bags to ward off the relentless heat.

Treasure hunters they were, and treasures they found! When all was said and done—the new-found prizes toted home, the leftovers carted off to charitable organizations and senior centers—the open-air book mart had garnered an astounding \$1,879. Not bad for a market where top dollar for a hardback was just that—a dollar—and paperbacks were a steal at six for a buck.

By any measure the sale, at which more than



\$50-60 each to purchase and process, that represents a donation of more than \$150,000." Of the books unneeded in the collection, the finest are offered for sale in the Friends of the Library's cozy bookstore located in the northwest corner of the Oviatt's main floor. The remainder is made available at bargain prices at twice a semester sales in the Library's lobby.

If you're in the market for a good "read" at an affordable price, don't pass up the next lobby sale. Or, if you're willing to pay a bit more for your literary treasure, but still get a darn good deal, come browse the shelves of the Friends' bookstore any weekday between 10 and 2.

But while you're at it, why not clear your own bookshelves of unneeded but serviceable books and make a tax-deductible donation to the Library. Just call Vicki Campbell at 677-2638 for a pickup time. Making the donation will gain you both more space and a possible tax write off from Uncle Sam; the Library gets the books or money from their sale. That's a win-win situation any way you look at it!



16,000 donated books were available for purchase, was a huge success. It wasn't so much the cash taken in, though the near two grand will go a long way towards the purchase of much-needed library materials. For the volunteer bibliophiles who make up the Friends of the Library, the event's instigators, it was the merger of old but still serviceable books with appreciative readers at hard-to-beat prices that satisfied. And, though few would admit it, for many of those who gave up their Saturday to help transport and display the books it was also a chance to socialize with like-minded friends. A Saturday doesn't get much better than that!

But important as the proceeds from the April 16 sale are, they represent but a fraction of the value of the books donated to the Library each year. Says Library Dean Sue Curzon, "Over the past nine months alone the library has received 19,452 books from donors. Of these, 3,021, about 15%, were added to the collection. With new books averaging



Environmental Archives Gets \$21K—More Needed

One of the lesser-known gems of the Oviatt Library's Urban Archives Center is the Susan B. Nelson

Collection, an assortment of papers, maps, correspondence and personal writings documenting Nelson's decades-long endeavor to save the Santa Monica Mountains from development. It was largely through her passionate labors that the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area was established. "If it hadn't been for Susan's unyielding efforts," says Robert G. Marshall, Head of the Library's Urban Archives Center, "much of the mountains would now be covered by homes, the open space largely gone."

Nelson, a former resident of Mandeville Canyon in the Pacific Palisades, in the 1960s spearheaded the creation of a grassroots organization known as "Friends of the Santa Monica Mountains and Seashore." For the remainder of her life, says Marshall, "Susan was a tenacious champion of the Santa Monica Mountains who fought constantly to preserve the mountains and the surrounding terrain from urban sprawl."

But Nelson's efforts went far beyond mere persuasion and exhortation. To put flesh on her exhortatory "bones" she also created a tax-exempt companion foundation that successfully raised funds to support environmental projects, conferences, workshops, area studies, reports, mapping projects, each one a building stone in her effort to save the mountains.

By all accounts, Nelson was an extremely effective proselyte for the mountain's preservation. Her persuasive politicking style and her often vigorous confrontations gained her the respect, if not the adoration of elected officials at all levels: city, state and national. Among her admirers, hundreds of whom attended a seashore memorial

after her untimely death in an auto accident, the work of this dedicated environmental activist gained her the appellation "Mother of the Santa Monica Mountains." Even now, Nelson's legacy continues to impact southern California as each year thousands flock to the open space and outdoor activities the mountains offer.

The massive archive—when acquired, the manuscripts alone filled 161 boxes—is of critical importance to investigators interested in urban planning and environmental issues.

However, its state of preservation and the need to organize its contents has precluded its opening to scholars. Says Marshall, "A recent \$10,000 donation from the Santa Monica Mountains and Seashore Foundation, plus another \$11,250 received earlier from Susan's children, has helped, but much more is needed." Creating a "finder's guide" to the papers, identifying and eliminating duplications, and properly preserving those to be kept is estimated to cost about \$73,000 and to require the work of a full-time archivist and a graduate student assistant for a year.

Although the National Park Service vigorously sought Nelson's memorabilia, "Susan wanted the papers to stay local," says Marshall. To assure this, Nelson had begun negotiations with the University before her untimely death at 79. It is expected that the archive will be a major boon to the University's urban and environmental studies program, especially as a source of information for graduate students doing theses. Because of Nelson's seminal role in

preserving urban landscapes, it is also expected that once opened the archive will attract scholars from all over the world.

One more feather in the Oviatt Library's and the University's caps!
—jd



Friends of the Library News

Descanso Garden Outing Planned

A tour of Descanso Gardens has been scheduled for Friends of the Library members and their guests on June 24. The group will travel in a bus provided by County Supervisor, Zev Yaroslavsky's office; the bus leaves campus at 9:30 and returns about 2:30. Says June Frankenberg, Program coordinator, "The cost for the tour is just \$10 per person and includes admission to the garden, the tram tour, and a tip for the bus driver." Each participant is expected to bring his or her own lunch. A lunch stop in the garden's picnic area is scheduled following the tram ride at about noon. To sign up for the trip call June at 818-886-4870 or leave a message with Joyclyn or Vickie at 818-677-2638.

Volunteers Needed

According to Maurice Rotheiser, Volunteer Coordinator, help is needed in the Friend's bookstore where donated books are made available for sale at a nominal price. Says Maurice, "Volunteers may help price the books, organize them on the shelves and handle sales." The bookstore is open 10-2 weekdays. "We welcome as little as two hours a week but more would be wonderful," says Maurice. "We're also planning no-host lunches at the Orange Grove Bistro for next fall." Maurice can be reached at 818-893-1793.

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Contributing writer: Dr. Jim Dole**

FRIENDS OF THE OVIATT LIBRARY

Oviatt Friends

Oviatt Library
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330-8326

We are on the web:
<http://library.csun.edu/friends/>

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