



The New York Public Library
Music Division

Guide to the

Robert Kurka papers

1941-1982 [bulk 1941-1957]

JPB 03-03

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2013

Summary

Creator: Kurka, Robert, 1921-1957

Title: Robert Kurka papers

Date: 1941-1982 [bulk 1941-1957]

Size: 2.38 linear feet (9 boxes)

Source: Donated by May Kurka in 2002.

Abstract: Robert Kurka (1921-1957) was a composer best known for *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1956-1958), an orchestral suite which he expanded into an opera. He also wrote works for instrumental soloists, chamber groups, chorus, and orchestra. The Robert Kurka papers, dating from 1941 to 1982, hold scores, professional correspondence, clippings, books, and a professional journal.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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Preferred citation: Robert Kurka papers, JPB 03-03. Music Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2013 The Music Division foldered and alphabetized the scores soon after the collection's donation. Otherwise, original order was not disturbed.

Creator History

Robert Kurka (1921-1957) was born near Chicago, Illinois, but his family later moved to New York City. He received his B.A. (1946) and M.A. (1947) from Columbia University, where he studied with Otto Luening. Kurka also studied for one summer with Darius Milhaud at the Berkshire Music Center. He wrote chamber and orchestral works, string quartets, vocal pieces, and concerti in a neo-classical style.

Kurka was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation fellowship (1951-1952), membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1952), and a MacDowell Colony fellowship (1956). That year, Kurka wrote an orchestral suite called *The Good Soldier Schweik*, based on *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik in the World War*, a novel by Jaroslav Hašek. The following year, he expanded it into an opera, with a libretto by Lewis Allan. Kurka died on December 12, 1957, without having finished the opera's orchestration. It was completed by Hershy Kay, and successfully premiered with the New York City Opera in 1958. The opera has since been performed often.

Source: James Wierzbicki. "Kurka, Robert." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed October 22, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O902504>.

Scope and Content Note

The Robert Kurka papers, dating from 1941 to 1982, hold scores, correspondence, clippings, books, and a professional journal. The papers are in two divisions: scores and professional files.

The scores, which date from 1942 to 1957, hold about 40 of Kurka's compositions, unfinished compositions, and sketches, mainly in the form of manuscripts and manuscript reproductions. They include the operatic version of *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1957); three symphonies; four string quartets; sonatas or concerti for solo instruments and piano, chamber group, or orchestra; and a few choral works. Some have parts and piano reductions in addition to full scores. *The Good Soldier Schweik* has a typescript of the libretto (in a one-act version); the full score manuscript for Act II; and a published piano-vocal score of the entire opera, with annotations.

The professional files hold correspondence, clippings, books, and a journal. The correspondence dates from 1947 to 1982, though the bulk is from 1947 to 1957. About half of it is with Kurka's publishers and the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP); this correspondence also includes contracts and royalty statements. Other correspondence is with presenters, funders, and orchestras regarding performances of Kurka's work, and with the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the Edward MacDowell Association concerning his fellowships. A small set of letters document Kurka's teaching engagements. Correspondents include the Paderewski Fund, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Ravinia Festival, the Oklahoma City Symphony, Sarah Lawrence College, and Harvard University. Correspondence dating from after Kurka's death is with his widow, May Kurka.

The clippings date from 1946 to 1957, and are arranged chronologically. They document performances and criticism of Kurka's music. Many have programs attached to them, and a few have correspondence from friends or colleagues as well. The professional journal (titled *Journal of Musical Events*) logs the performances of Kurka's music from 1941 to 1957.

The books consist of two copies of the novel *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik in the World War*, by Jaroslav Hašek (one in English and one in Czech). They contain notes from Kurka regarding the composition of *The Good Soldier Schweik*.

Arrangement: The papers are arranged in two divisions: scores and professional files. The scores are arranged alphabetically, and the professional files by document type.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Books
Clippings (information artifacts)
Commercial correspondence
Diaries
Personal correspondence
Scores

Occupations

Composers
Musicians

Subjects

Music -- United States
Ravinia Festival

Names

Allan, Lewis, 1903-1986
Hašek, Jarosla, 1883-1923
American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers
Edward MacDowell Association
Harvard University
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra
Paderewski Fund for Polish Relief
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
Sarah Lawrence College

Container List

Scores 1942-1957, undated

- b. 1 f. 1-9 A - D
- b. 2 f. 1-15 *E - The Good Soldier Schwiek*
- b. 3 f. 1-13 *The Good Soldier Schwiek - P*
- b. 4 f. 1-9 So - St
- b. 5 f. 1-5 Sy - W
- b. 6 f. 1-2 *Symphony No. 1*
- b. 5 f. 6-8 Untitled Compositions
- b. 5 f. 9 Sketches
- b. 7 f. 1 Sketches

Professional Files

- b. 8 Books 1946, 1952
- b. 9 Clippings 1946-1957
- b. 7 f. 2-4 Correspondence 1947-1982
- b. 7 f. 5 Professional Journal 1941-1957