



The New York Public Library
Music Division

Guide to the

William Mayer papers

1956-2016

JPB 17-18

Processed by Susan M. Kline in 2017.

Summary

Creator: Mayer, William, 1925-2017

Title: William Mayer papers

Date: 1956-2016

Size: 4 linear feet (6 boxes, 4 volumes)

Source: Donated by William Mayer, 2017.

Abstract: William Mayer (1925-2017) was an American composer and former trustee of the Composers Recordings, Inc. record label. The William Mayer papers date from 1956 to 2016 and contain scores composed by Mayer, correspondence and meeting minutes documenting his involvement with Composers Recordings, Inc., and clippings.

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>

Preferred citation: William Mayer papers, JPB 17-18. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan M. Kline in 2017.

Creator History

William Mayer (1925-2017) was an American composer who has worked in multiple genres and a former trustee of the Composers Recordings, Inc. record label. Born in New York City on November 18, 1925, Mayer was interested in the piano as a child. He briefly attended Yale before being drafted into the United States Army and ending up in U.S. occupied Japan. Mayer returned to Yale in 1947 and committed himself to his passion for music, enrolled at the Juilliard Summer School, and graduated

from the Mannes College of Music in 1952. Bennington College faculty member and trumpeter, Robert Nagel, commissioned Mayer to write a piece for his woodwind and brass ensemble. The result *Essay for Brass and Winds* was completed in 1954. Subsequent commissions included the children's works *The Greatest Sound Around* and *Hello World* (both with lyricist by Susan Otto) and *Overture for an American* which was requested by the Chautauqua Society to commemorate Theodore Roosevelt's Centennial. Following these works, Mayer composed many orchestral, choral, and vocal pieces and a ballet based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*, which debuted in 1963. Much of Mayer's music has incorporated poems and texts such as those written by e.e. cummings, Langston Hughes, Keats, and A.A. Milne. Other compositions, specifically his *Piano Sonata* and *Octagon* reflect Mayer's longstanding affinity for the piano. During his residency at the MacDowell Colony in 1969, Mayer started working on an opera that would become his most well known work, the award winning *A Death in the Family*, which debuted at the Minnesota Opera Company in 1983. Mayer was active with the Composers Recordings, Inc. contemporary classical music record label, as a trustee for 30 years and the recipient of National Endowment for the Arts grants and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Scope and Content Note

The William Mayer papers are primarily comprised of scores. Many of the scores are published copies, most published by Theodore Presser. Some scores are annotated. For most of Mayer's works, ancillary material in the form of reviews and article clippings about Mayer accompanies the scores unless otherwise noted. The materials were divided into the following categories by the creator: chamber music, children's music, choral music, dramatic music, early works, orchestral music, piano music, and songs. Within each category the compositions are arranged alphabetically by the work's title. Box 1 contains biographical information, correspondence and meeting minutes pertaining to Composers Recordings, Inc. (1972-1992) and a few photographs.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)
Minutes (administrative records)
Scores

Occupations

Composers.
Musicians.

Subjects

Music -- United States -- 20th century
Music -- United States -- 21st century

Names

Mayer, William, 1925-
Composers Recordings, Inc.

Container List

- b. 1 Biographical and Composers Recordings, Inc
Biographical information, correspondence and meeting minutes pertaining to Composers Recordings, Inc. (1972-1992) and a few photographs.
Compositions
Chamber Music
 - b. 2 f. 1 *Brass Quintet* 1965-1996
 - b. 2 f. 2 *Brief Candle* 1967-1985
 - b. 6 f. 1 *Brief Candle* circa 1969
Conductor's score with notations. Stage directions pasted inside.
 - b. 2 f. 3 *Celebration* circa 1950s-1970s
Score only.
 - b. 2 f. 4 *Country Fair* 1973
Score only.
 - b. 2 f. 5 *Distant Playing Fields* 1995, 1998
 - b. 6 f. 3 *Dream's End* 1976-2007
 - b. 2 f. 6 *Eight Miniatures* 1978
Score only.
 - b. 6 f. 2 *Enter Ariel* circa 1960s-1998
 - b. 2 f. 7 *Essay for Brass and Winds* 1960s-1970s
 - b. 2 f. 8 *Fern Hill* circa 1993
 - b. 2 f. 9 *First Song* 1990
Score only.
 - b. 2 f. 10 *Largo for String Trio* circa 1950s-1970s
Score only.
 - b. 2 f. 11-12 *Messages* 1975-2007
 - b. 3 f. 1 *Nights Go By*
Score only.
 - b. 3 f. 2 *Passage* 1993
Score only.
 - b. 3 f. 3 *Summer Glints* 2002-2003
 - b. 3 f. 4 *Two News Items* circa 1968-1978
Score only.
 - b. 3 f. 5 *Unlikely Neighbors* 1993
Score only.
 - b. 3 f. 6 *Yankee Doodle Fanfare* 2004
Score only.
- Children's Music
 - b. 4 f. 1 *Bongo, Hello World* 1956-1960s
 - v. 1 *The Greatest Sound Around* circa 1956
 - b. 4 f. 2 *The Greatest Sound Around, Zoom-bah* circa 1956
Score only. Has notations.
 - v. 2 *Hello World* circa 1956
 - b. 4 f. 3 *Subway in the Sunlight* circa 1996

Compositions (cont.)

Choral Music

- b. 4 f. 4-5 1960s-1970s
- b. 4 f. 4 *Eve of St. Agnes* 1968-1969
- b. 6 f. 4 *Eve of St. Agnes* 1968-1969
Score only.

Dramatic Music

- b. 4 f. 6-9 *A Death in the Family* 1981-2012
- b. 4 f. 10 *Good King Wenceslas* 1994, 1997
- b. 4 f. 11 *One Christmas Long Ago* 1962-2009
- b. 5 f. 1 *Scenes from the Snow Queen* 1973
Score only.
- b. 6 f. 5 *Sobbing Pillow of a Man* circa 1980
Score only. Score has notes and revisions.
- b. 3 f. 7 **Early Works** circa 1950s-1970s
Allegro Interroto, Angles, Largo for String Trio. Scores only.

Orchestral Music

- b. 5 f. 2 *Andante for Strings* 1970-2008
- b. 5 f. 3 *Inner and Outer Strings* 1982-1993
 - v. 2 *Inner and Outer Strings* circa 1970s
Score only.
- b. 5 f. 4-5 *Octagon* 1970s-2009
The score includes lecture notes.
- b. 5 f. 6 *Of Rivers and Trains* 1988-1989, 1998
Full orchestra version.
 - v. 3 *Of Rivers and Trains* circa 1988
Score only. Chamber version with annotations.
- b. 5 f. 7 *Overture for an American* 1963-1966
- b. 5 f. 8 *Scenes from the Snow Queen* 1963-1989
- b. 5 f. 9 *Two Pastels* 1967-2007
For orchestra.
 - v. 4 *Two Pastels* circa 1960
Score only. Composer's copy with notes.

Piano Music

- b. 3 f. 8 *Abandoned Bells* 1982-1990s
- b. 3 f. 9 *Angles* circa 1950s-1970s
Score only.
- b. 3 f. 10 *Appalachian Echoes* 1991
For harp solo. Score only.
- b. 3 f. 11 *Concert Piece for Trumpet and Piano*
Score only.
- b. 3 f. 12 *Elegy* circa 1960s
For organ. Derived from *Brass Quintet*. Score only.
- b. 3 f. 13 *A Most Important Train* circa 1971
- b. 5 f. 10 *Piano Sonata* 1960s-1970s

Compositions (cont.)

Piano Music (cont.)

b. 5 f. 11 *Subway in the Sunlight and Other Memories* circa 1996
Score only.

b. 5 f. 12 *Toccata* 1970s

b. 5 f. 13 *Two Moods* circa 1969
For clarinet. Score only.

Songs

b. 3 f. 14 *Khartoum* circa 1968
For voice and piano. Score only.

b. 3 f. 15 *Last Song* circa 1996
To Christine Brewer. Derived from *A Death in the Family*. Score only.

b. 6 f. 6 *Lover's Lament* circa 1960s-1970s
For tenor. Score only.

b. 3 f. 16 *Pop Songs* circa 1970s-2010s
Scores only.

b. 5 f. 14-15 *Various Compositions* 1960s-1990s
Barbara-- what have you done?, Always, Always Forever Again, Dream Variations, Paradox, That Purple Bird, What Lips My Lips Have Kissed.