

The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Music Division

Guide to the
Charles Buel papers
1949-2003
JPB 13-08

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, May 2013

Summary

Creator: Buel, Charles, 1943-1994

Title: Charles Buel papers, 1949-2003

Size: 6.01 linear feet (22 boxes)

Source: Donated by Paula M. Buel in 2008.

Abstract: The papers of the composer Charles Buel hold scores, technical notes on composition and recording, composition lists, programs, clippings, writings, art, school records, subject files, and correspondence.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying and photography will apply. Advance notice may be required. Audio materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

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Creator history

Charles Buel (1943-1994) was a California-based composer. Born in San Francisco, he lived in Germany from 1946 to 1952. His father was an Army officer and later a school superintendent during the American occupation. In Karlsruhe, at age seven, he received piano instruction and began writing music. With the bassoon as his principal instrument, he attended San Francisco State University for undergraduate studies in music. He completed graduate work at the University of California at San Diego, where his composition teachers included Robert Erickson, Kenneth Gaburo, and Pauline Oliveros. For his M.A. thesis, he composed *Four Theater Pieces*.

In all, Buel wrote more than 100 works in a variety of styles and genres, utilizing a wide range of instrumentation and media. Some early vocal works, from the period prior to his graduate studies, have approximate pitch and are free of bar lines. Among these is *Truthful Words Are Not Beautiful*, written in 1968 for twelve-part chorus and scored on a long scroll of paper several feet long. There are also dissonant and complex works from the era such as the delicately scored *Summer Music* for clarinet, cello and piano (1965).

Buel's writing eventually settled into a more tonal style, though he continued to seek new ideas and inspirations. A series of works allude to esoteric spirituality, including *The Syphinx* [sic] for 15 saxophones (1977), *The Hierophant* for brass, percussion, piano and bass (1979), *The Two of Cups* for woodwind quintet (1976) and *Avatars* for saxophone quartet (1983). There is also an emphasis on winds, with four pieces for band, three works that feature bassoon, and nine works for various combinations of saxophones, including the solo *Reflections on Raga Todi* (1972), which was inspired by Ravi Shankar's autobiography.

Vocal and choral compositions appear throughout every period of Buel's writing, and from the 1970s through the early 1990s, he completed five settings of poetry by the contemporary gay author Edward Field. These include *The Lost, Dancing*, a piece that addresses AIDS and was premiered by the Golden Gate Men's Chorus in a program of the Society of Gay and Lesbian Composers in 1991. Buel's involvement in gay causes also led him to write *Freedom Day March*, a programmatic work in two movements entitled "Struggle to be Free" and "Joy of Being Free."

Many of Buel's works were highly conceptual and called on such large and unusual forces that their realization was difficult, and often unrepeatable. He was also a practical and practicing musician who organized a variety of performances and events throughout his life. While at San Francisco State, he helped to start the Collegium Musicum for Renaissance Music, and in 1981 he founded the short-lived group *Lambda World Music Ensembles*. Many of his works were written for special occasions and in tribute to others, such as the uncompleted *Requiem for Harry Partch*. Buel died of AIDS in San Mateo, California, at the age of 51. After his death, Buel's family and friends released a selection of his later music on a CD entitled *Charlie Buel: Last Works*.

Source: Dalton, Joseph. [Biography of Charles Buel]. The Aids Estate Project for Artists with AIDS. <<http://www.artistswithaids.org/artforms/music/catalogue/buel.html>> Accessed April 26, 2013.

Scope and content note

The Charles Buel papers hold personal files and scores. The personal files, dating from Buel's grade-school days to 2003, contain technical information on Buel's compositional process and his use of four-track tape recorders; composition lists; clippings; concert programs, including one autographed by John Cage; program notes by Buel; school records, including Buel's thesis on his composition *Four Theater Pieces* for the University of California, San Diego; subject files on *Lambda World Music Ensembles*, the Independent Composers Association, the Great American Yankee Freedom Band of Los Angeles, and the Society of Gay and Lesbian Composers; a file on Buel's deceased partner, Ken Agnes; a file documenting Buel's memorial and letters of condolence; non-musical art (drawings, computer art, and writings); and general files of notes and correspondence. Papers dating from after Buel's death were assembled by his sister, Paula.

The scores hold Buel's manuscripts dating from the 1950s until his death. They include all his titled and untitled compositions, sketchbooks, loose sketches, and score fragments. Buel's compositions are described in detail at the website of The Estate Project for Artists with AIDS (<http://www.artistswithaids.org/artforms/music/catalogue/buel.html>). Consult that site for composition titles and dates. Researchers should be aware, however, that a few titles in the collection do not appear in the Estate Project's catalog. These are mainly early or unfinished compositions.

The collection contains 251 cassette tapes, four 7-inch and two 5-inch open-reel tapes, and 10 copies of the CD *Charlie Buel: Last Works*. The cassettes consist of four-track works in progress, mixdowns from four-tracks, live recordings, taped rehearsals, and compilations of finished works. They date from the

mid-1980s to 1992. The undated open-reel tapes are likely from the mid-1970s. The CD compilation was produced by Buel's family and friends in 1996.

Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound (rha@nypl.org). Audio materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement

The collection is in two divisions, personal files and scores. Personal files were not altered from their original order, in which files of the same subject or format were grouped together. Scores are arranged alphabetically by title.

Key terms

Subjects

Composers

Music -- 20th century

Occupations

Composers

Musicians

Names

Buel, Charles, 1943-1994

Society of Gay and Lesbian Composers

Special formats

Clippings (information artifacts)

Personal correspondence

Poetry

Programs (documents)

Promotional materials

School records

Scores

Container list

- b.1 f.1-12 Personal Files, 1949-2003
- b.2 f.1-19 Personal Files, 1949-2003
 - b.21 f.7 Personal Files, 1991
 - Scores, 1957-1994, undated
 - b.3 Early Compositions and Sketchbooks
 - b.21 f.6 Sketches and Score Fragments
- b.4 f.1-16 A - B
- b.5 f.1-8 A - B
- b.6 f.1-18 Ca - Fin
- b.7 f.1-10 Ch - Es
 - b.8 f.1-6 *Five Pieces for Ten Players*
 - b.22 f.1-7 *Five Pieces for Ten Players*
- b.9 f.1-12 Fi - Gi
- b.10 f.1-3 Fo - Fr
- b.11 f.1-7 Fu - Lo
- b.12 f.1-8 Gl - Lo
- b.13 f.1-2 *Love's Dreamogram*
- b.14 f.1-19 Lo - Pe
- b.15 f.1-9 O - Tr
- b.16 f.1-12 Pi - Q
- b.17 f.1-10 Ra - Re
- b.18 f.1-18 Ro - Sp
- b.19 f.1-15 Su - Twe
- b.20 f.1-12 Two - W
 - b.21 f.1-5 Two - Z
- b.20 f.13-15 Untitled