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Guide to the

Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. papers

1931-2002

Sc MG 763

Processed by William Gibbons, December 2006.

Summary

Creator: Kerr, Thomas Henderson, Jr.

Title: Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. papers

Date: 1931-2002

Size: 3.83 linear feet (14 boxes)

Source: Gift of Cynthia Reid, September 2006.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. was a composer, pianist, and teacher; his papers reflect his activities in these various roles.

Conditions Governing Use: Permission from donor is required to photocopy music scores.

Preferred citation: [Item], Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. papers, Sc MG 763, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

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Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Creator History

Composer Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. began playing and studying piano at an early age; he was self-

taught on the organ, and, as early as fourteen, played for church services as well as in Baltimore's nightclubs. He studied at Howard University, remaining there for one year before transferring to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. At Eastman, he studied piano with Cecile Genharadt and graduated *summa cum laude*.

Following his studies at Eastman, he was appointed to the Music Faculty at Knoxville College in Tennessee. He was also the recipient of a Rosenwald fellowship for work in composition. Two years later, Dean Warner Lawson of the School of Music, Howard University, appointed him as Professor of Piano and Chairman of the Piano Department in the School of Music, where he served for more than thirty years, before retiring in 1976. During his tenure at Howard, his career flourished as he composed and arranged music for significant events directly and indirectly affecting the University, such as the Howard University Centennial; the installation services for James Nabrit, president of the University; the U.S. Bicentennial; and the deaths of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Despite more than sixty-five compositions to his credit, Professor Kerr never referred to himself as a composer.

For over thirty-five years he served as the organist at Plymouth Congregational Church in Washington, D.C. As a pianist, he performed concerts at a variety of places including the National Gallery of Art and the Phillips Collection, and he appeared twice as a concert soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The Thomas Henderson Kerr, Jr. papers reflect his activities as a composer, organist, pianist, scholar, and teacher. The Personal series, 1937-1988, is comprised of individual files on Kerr and his family and includes biographical statements and sketches; high school and college records; scrapbooks; organizational affiliations; newspaper articles and essays published in various publications; letters; obituaries; and memorabilia from the wedding to his second wife, Hortense R. Kerr. There are newspaper clippings about Thomas H. Kerr dating from 1950 to 1988 regarding performances.

The Professional series, 1934-1988, consists of a small file on Kerr relating to his work at Howard University in the Piano Department, including letters from colleagues and scholars until his death in 1988. There are also programs of Kerr's concerts from the 1930s-1980s, and notes drafted for recital programs.

The Music series forms the major part of the collection and consists of compositions and arrangements. A printed catalog compiled by Constance Tibbs Hobson and Cynthia A. Reid of his works, spanning a period of five decades (1937-1987), documents more than 100 of his compositions and arrangements, many of which are in the collection. There are also works by other composers, including his father, Thomas Kerr, Sr., and other well known composers.

The Hortense Kerr series is comprised of her files on Kerr documenting her effort to catalog and copyright Kerr's music. There is also general correspondence, cards, and letters following Kerr's death; program for recitals in Kerr's honor; and contracts to perform her husband's music.

Arrangement: Arranged into four series: I. Personal; II. Professional; III. Music; and IV. Kerr, Hortense R.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American composers

African American musicians

Authors, Black

Organists

Pianists -- United States

Names

Kerr, Hortense R. (Hortense Reid)

Kerr, Thomas Henderson, Jr.

Kerr, Thomas Henderson, Sr.

Container List

Personal 1937-1988

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical sketches
- b. 1 f. 2 Douglass High School 1931
- b. 1 f. 3 Knoxville College School of Music, music instructor 1940-1941
- b. 1 f. 4 Letters received 1961-1988
- b. 1 f. 5 Letters sent 1986-1987
- b. 1 f. 6 Family correspondence 1979-1987
- b. 1 f. 7 Organizational affiliations 1979
- b. 1 f. 8 Clippings on performances
- b. 1 f. 9 Commemorative Music Society
- b. 1 f. 10 Cartoon collection
- b. 1 f. 11 Family papers 1938-1986
- b. 1 f. 12-14 Black artists and composers
- b. 2 f. 1-3 Plymouth Congregational Church testimonial to Kerr and letters
congratulating him 1942
- b. 2 f. 4-6 Scrapbook, "Notes on Thomas H. Kerr, Jr." 1979

Professional 1934-1988

- b. 3 f. 1 Howard University
- b. 3 f. 2 Letters received 1958-1988
- b. 3 f. 3 Letters sent 1958-1988
- b. 4 f. 1 Royalties 1987
- b. 4 f. 2 Program notes drafted for recitals

Recital programs

- b. 4 f. 3 1930s
- b. 4 f. 4 1940s
- b. 4 f. 5 1950s
- b. 4 f. 6 1960s
- b. 4 f. 7 1970s
- b. 4 f. 8-10 1980s

Music 1937-1988

- b. 5 f. 1 *Catalog of Compositions and Arrangements of Thomas H. Kerr, Jr.,
1915–1988, compiled by Constance Tibbs Hobson and Cynthia A. Reid*
- b. 5 f. 2 Music directory
- b. 5 f. 3 Patron list
- b. 5 f. 4 Organ diagrams 1984
- b. 5 f. 5 Organ pedals
- b. 6-8 Compositions by Kerr 1937-1987
- b. 9 Arrangements by Kerr 1941-1975

Fragments

- b. 10 Titled, not listed in catalog

Music (cont.)

Fragments (cont.)

- b. 11 Untitled
- b. 12
- Other composers
- b. 13 f. 1 Kerr, Thomas H., Sr
- b. 13 f. 2-3 Black composers
- b. 13 f. 4-7 Other composers
- Kerr, Hortense, R 1965-2002
- b. 14 f. 1 Personal papers 1965-1992
- b. 14 f. 2 General correspondence 1982-2001
- b. 14 f. 3 Condolences
- b. 14 f. 4 Programs and recitals in Kerr, Jr.'s honor 1976-2002
- b. 14 f. 5 Correspondence requesting permission to perform Kerr's, Jr. music 1988
- b. 14 f. 6 Contracts to perform Kerr, Jr.'s music 1993-2000
- b. 14 f. 7 U.S. copyright forms 1988-2002
- b. 14 f. 8 Composer Recording, Inc 1992
- b. 14 f. 9 Royalties 1990-2002