

Papers from the John Secrist Jr. Collection

Authors: Jennifer Lewis and Karen Fishman



**Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound
Division, Library of Congress**

Washington, D.C.

2006

Encoded by Marsha Maguire, 2008

**Finding aid prepared using DACS (*Describing
Archives: A Content Standard*)**

Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mbrsrs/eadmbrs.rs006001>

Latest revision: 2008 April 16

Collection Summary

Title: Papers from the John Secrist Jr. Collection,

Inclusive Dates: 1919-1973

Bulk Dates: 1949-1958

Creator: Secrist, John, 1918-1958

Extent: 5.75 linear feet (18 boxes)

Language: Collection materials are in English

Repository: Recorded Sound Section, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Papers, including discographic and photographic materials, included in the John Secrist Jr. Collection of nearly 1,700 operatic sound recordings.

Location: Recorded Sound Reference Center

Key Subjects and Formats

The following headings represent names, topics, places, and formats of major significance in the collection.

Names

Secrist, John, 1918-1958--Archives

Ponselle, Rosa, 1897-1981--Correspondence

Drummond, Harold John--Correspondence

Farrar, Geraldine, 1882-1967--Correspondence

Caruso, Enrico, 1873-1921

McCormack, John

Ponselle, Rosa, 1897-1981

Ponselle, Rosa, 1897-1981--Photographs

Thomas, John Charles, 1891-1960

John Secrist Jr. Collection (Library of Congress)

Topics

Collectors and collecting--United States

Sound recordings--United States--Collectors and collecting

Opera

Soranos (Singers)--United States--Photographs

Soranos (Singers)--United States

Tenors (Singers)

Baritones (Singers)--United States

Forms of Material

Record labels

Letters (Correspondence)

Photographic prints

Publicity photographs

Scrapbooks

Notes

Discographies

Group portraits

Negatives

Inventories

Publications

Administrative Information

Acquisition of the Papers

This collection was donated to the Library of Congress in 1963 by John B. and Florence Secrist in memory of their son, John Secrist.

Additions

No further additions to the papers are expected.

Processing Information

The papers were processed by Jennifer Lewis in 2004. Information about the papers was updated by Karen Fishman in 2006.

Restrictions on Use of the Papers

Restrictions may exist on copying, quoting, or publishing materials included in the papers. For additional information, contact a reference librarian in the Recorded Sound Reference Center, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 20540-4690; (202) 707-7833.

Restrictions on Access to the Papers

The Papers from the John Secrist Jr. Collection are open for research.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [Container number, e.g., Box 3], Papers from the John Secrist Jr. Collection, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress.

Biography of John Secrist, Jr.

Record collector and mathematician John Bert Secrist, Jr., was born in Kansas City, Kansas, on August 14, 1918, to Florence and John B. Secrist. Secrist received a bachelor of arts degree in mathematics (Phi Beta Kappa) from the University of Richmond in 1939 and a master of arts in mathematics from the University of Virginia in 1941. He taught math for several years at the United States Naval Academy, Emory University, and Columbia University, where he continued his graduate course work. In 1953 he joined the staff of IBM in New York, working as a mathematician. His projects included computer technology, satellite communications, and missile defense.

Secrist began acquiring records as a high school student and continued to have an interest in collecting vocal recordings throughout his college career. After moving to New York in 1945 and meeting others who shared his interests, he became a more avid collector and was a founder and member of the Vocal Record Collectors' Society, a non-profit organization for those interested in collecting classical vocal recordings of all eras.

Secrist collected early record catalogs and began compiling more detailed discographies for his favorite artists. The first, of Rosa Ponselle, was published in the 1950 issue of *The Record Collector*. While compiling the Ponselle discography, Secrist was granted an interview with Miss Ponselle, and they became friends for many years. In 1951 he published a discography of Enrico Caruso in the same journal and later published it in conjunction with Francis Robinson's *Caruso, His Life in Pictures*.

As a prominent record collector, Secrist was known for his exacting standards. Although he kept much of his collection in his parents' home in Atlanta, a large portion was held in New York as well, especially items he kept for trade. Secrist was meticulous in his efforts to find not just copies of particular recordings, but those as close to perfect as possible. Discographer Aida Favia-Artsay referred to his methods in the following way: "His was the selective, purposeful way: only classical vocal recordings, related material, and mainly quality above quantity!"

Secrist died in New York City at the age of 40 on October 11, 1958. In January of 1963, his parents transferred the majority of his collection (1,700 opera recordings) to the Library of Congress.

Scope and Content of the Papers

These papers comprise a small part of the major collection of nearly 1,700 operatic recordings acquired by John Secrist. Strengths of the recorded sound collection include large runs of Enrico Caruso and Rosa Ponselle recordings; the collection is further distinguished by being in near-mint condition due to Secrist's exacting standards. The papers explain and index the Secrist recordings, while discographic and photographic materials provide information on the artists whose work he collected.

Arrangement of the Papers

The papers are arranged in 5 series:

- Series 1: Correspondence (1949 December 3 - 1958 September 9, undated)
- Series 2: Discographic Materials and Collection Notes (circa 1941-1958, undated)
- Series 3: Photographs (1919-1932, undated)
- Series 4: Scrapbooks (circa 1955-1973)
- Series 5: Record Label Photographs (undated)

Description of Series

Container

Series

Series 1. Correspondence, 1949 December 3 - 1958 September 9, undated

Series 1 consists of correspondence to John Secrist from collectors and performers. An index to correspondence with dates and summaries is available in Folder 1. The most frequent subjects addressed include Secrist's discographies, requests for information on recordings and artists, and recordings or catalogs offered for sale or trade. Prominent or frequent correspondents include Rosa Ponselle, Harold John Drummond, Geraldine Farrar, Lloyd Garrison, and George Keating.

Materials are arranged alphabetically by last name of correspondent.

Series 2. Discographic Materials and Collection Notes, circa 1941-1958, undated

Series 2 consists of notes on Secrist's record and catalog collections as well as discographies and other biographical information regarding opera singers such as Enrico Caruso, Rosa Ponselle, John McCormack, and John Charles Thomas. A notebook containing an inventory of Secrist's collection arranged by artist is included here as are a variety of lists of recordings and catalogs. Also available in this series are various publications, many of which have been annotated by Secrist, including Julian Morton Moses's *Collectors' Guide to American Recordings, 1895-1925* (1949). One folder of song and aria lyrics can also be found here.

Materials in this series are arranged alphabetically by description.

Series 3. Photographs, 1919-1932, undated

Photographs of Rosa Ponselle are primarily publicity portraits for operas in which she performed. Secrist has labeled the verso of the majority of these photographs with the title of each opera as well as where and when the photograph was published, if known. Two folders of group photographs are filed at the end of the series. Most of the photographs are later copy prints (probably dating from the 1950s), but some originals are included.

The individual publicity portraits of Rosa Ponselle in costume are arranged alphabetically by opera name.

BOX 3

Series 4. Scrapbooks, circa 1955-1973

This series consists of three leather-bound scrapbooks compiled by John Secrist's parents, Florence and John B. Secrist, Sr., after his death. The scrapbooks include clippings, correspondence, photographs, and other miscellaneous items relating to John Secrist, Jr., and his collection. Many of the letters and clippings concern the donation of the John Secrist Jr. Collection to the Library of Congress and the resulting publicity.

Series 5. Record Label Photographs, undated

This series consists of over 3,000 black-and-white, 4 x 6-inch photographs of record labels displaying the title, composer, performers, record company, and catalog number of each record in Secrist's collection. Matrix numbers for each recording are indicated also. Record labels include Victor, Victrola, Columbia, Gramophone, Pathé, Brunswick, Odeon, and HMV, among others.

The label photographs are arranged in alphabetical order by the performer's last name.

Detailed Description of the Papers

Container

Contents

Series 1. Correspondence, 1949 December 3 - 1958 September 9, undated

.1 linear feet

Series 1 consists of correspondence to John Secrist from collectors and performers. An index to correspondence with dates and summaries is available in Folder 1. The most frequent subjects addressed include Secrist's discographies, requests for information on recordings and artists, and recordings or catalogs offered for sale or trade. Prominent or frequent correspondents include Rosa Ponselle, Harold John Drummond, Geraldine Farrar, Lloyd Garrison, and George Keating.

Materials are arranged alphabetically by last name of correspondent.

BOX 1
FOLDER 1

Index to correspondence, undated

The index is ordered by name; entries include date and summary.
Alda, F. - Drummond, Harold John, 1949 December 3 - 1958 August

BOX 1
FOLDER 2

Farrar, Geraldine - O'Harra, R., 1950 February 2 - 1958 July 14

BOX 1
FOLDER 3

Park, B. - Zussman, H., 1950 June 24 - 1958 September

BOX 1
FOLDER 4

Series 2. Discographic Materials and Collection Notes, circa 1941-1958, undated

.32 linear feet

Series 2 consists of notes on Secrist's record and catalog collections as well as discographies and other biographical information regarding opera singers such as Enrico Caruso, Rosa Ponselle, John McCormack, and John Charles Thomas. A notebook containing an inventory of Secrist's collection arranged by artist is included here as are a variety of lists of recordings and catalogs. Also available in this series are various publications, many of which have been annotated by Secrist, including Julian Morton Moses's *Collectors' Guide to American Recordings, 1895-1925* (1949). One folder of song and aria lyrics can also be found here.

Materials in this series are arranged alphabetically by description.

BOX 1
FOLDER 5

Caruso, Enrico: biography and record lists, circa 1950

BOX 1
FOLDER 6

Caruso Discography, by John Secrist, circa 1951

Typescript and photocopy.

BOX 1
FOLDER 7

Caruso Discography, by John Secrist, circa 1957

Printers proofs with introductory page to *Caruso: His Life in Pictures* by Francis Robinson.
Catalog lists, circa 1951-1958

BOX 1
FOLDER 8

Collection inventory notebook, indexed by artist, circa 1941-1958

BOX 1
FOLDER 9-10

With one set of photocopies of the notebook.

Series 2. Discographic Materials and Collection Notes, circa 1941-1958, undated

| <i>Container</i> | <i>Contents</i> |
|--------------------|--|
| BOX 1 FOLDER 11 | <i>The Finest Voices on Record</i> , Bulletins 1-3, circa 1953-1958 From the Connoisseurs Record Club. |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 12 | <i>Collector's Guide to American Recordings, 1895-1925</i> , by Julian Morton Moses, 1949 Includes Secrist's handwritten collection notes. |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 13 | McCormack, John: <i>John McCormack: The Complete Discography</i> , by L.F.X. McDermott Roe, 1956 Signed by the author. Includes Secrist's handwritten collection notes. |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 14 | McCormack, John: recording lists, undated |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 15 | Ponselle, Rosa, circa 1953-1958 |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 16 | Song and aria lyrics, miscellaneous, undated |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 17 | Thomas, John: recording list and notes, circa 1948-1958 |
| BOX 1 FOLDER 18 | Miscellaneous and unidentified writings and recording lists, undated |

Series 3. Photographs, 1919-1932, undated

.42 linear feet

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The individual publicity portraits of Rosa Ponselle in costume are arranged alphabetically by opera name.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| BOX 2 FOLDER 19 | <i>L'Africaine</i> , circa 1922, undated 3 photographs Three of the photos are copies of 1922-1923 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 20 | <i>L'Amore dei Tre Re</i> , 1928, undated 14 photographs Most are copies of 1928-1930 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 21 | <i>Andrea Chénier</i> , undated 5 photographs Copies of 1923-1925 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 22 | <i>Carmen</i> , undated 34 photographs Copies of 1935-1936 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 23 | <i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i> , undated 7 photographs Copies of 1934, 1937 originals. |

Series 3. Photographs, 1919-1932, undated

| <i>Container</i> | <i>Contents</i> |
|-----------------------|---|
| BOX 2 FOLDER 24 | <i>Don Carlos</i> , undated 8 photographs Copies of 1921-1924 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 25 | <i>Ernani</i> , undated 9 photographs Copies of 1921-circa 1929 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 26 | <i>La Forza del Destino</i> , 1927, undated 4 photographs Most are copies of circa 1927 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 27 | <i>Luisa Miller</i> , undated 3 photographs Copies from 1929-1930 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 28 | <i>Oberon</i> , 1919, undated 3 photographs Three of the photographs are copies of 1919-1920 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 29 | <i>Le Roi d'Ys</i> , 1922 3 photographs <i>La Traviata</i> , undated |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 30 | 10 photographs Copies from 1930-1931 and 1934 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 31 | <i>Il Trovatore</i> , undated 4 photographs Copies from circa 1933 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 32 | <i>La Vestale</i> , 1925-1926, 1933 10 photographs Some are copies from 1925-1926 and 1933. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 33 | <i>William Tell (Guillaume Tell)</i> , 1923, undated 11 photographs Some are copies of 1923 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 34 | Miscellaneous and unidentified, 1925, undated 12 photographs Most are copies from 1917-1927 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 35-36 | Group photographs, undated 57 photographs Most are copies of 1925-1952 originals. |
| BOX 2 FOLDER 37 | Negatives, undated 4 photographs |

Series 4. Scrapbooks, circa 1955-1973

Container

Contents

BOX 3

Series 4. Scrapbooks, circa 1955-1973

.42 linear feet

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Series 5. Record Label Photographs, undated

4.25 linear feet

This series consists of over 3,000 black-and-white, 4 x 6-inch photographs of record labels displaying the title, composer, performers, record company, and catalog number of each record in Secrist's collection. Matrix numbers for each recording are indicated also. Record labels include Victor, Victrola, Columbia, Gramophone, Pathé, Brunswick, Odeon, and HMV, among others.

The label photographs are arranged in alphabetical order by the performer's last name.

BOX 4

Abendroth, Irene - Caruso, Enrico, undated

BOX 5

Caruso, Enrico, undated

BOX 6

Caruso, Enrico - Chamlee, Mario, undated

BOX 7

Clemént, Edmond - Fabbri, Guerrina, undated

BOX 8

Farrar, Geraldine - Koshetz, Nina, undated

BOX 9

Kruszelnicka, Salomeja - McCormack, John, undated

BOX 10

McCormack, John, undated

BOX 11

McCormack, John - Muzio, Claudia, undated

BOX 12

Muzio, Claudia - Ponselle, Rosa, undated

BOX 13

Ponselle, Rosa - Ruffo, Titta, undated

BOX 14

Ruffo, Titta - Sembrich, Marcella, undated

BOX 15

Slezak, Leo - Tauber, Richard, undated

BOX 16

Tetrazzini, Luisa - Zenatello, Giovanni, undated

BOX 17

Duplicates, undated

BOX 18

Duplicates and microfilm, undated