

The Virgil Thomson papers, 1920-1980

An inventory of holdings at the American Music Research Center



American Music Research Center, University of Colorado at Boulder

Descriptive summary

Title	Virgil Thomson papers
Date(s)	1920-1980
ID	COU-AMRC-89
Creator(s)	Thomson, Virgil, 1896-1989
Repository	The American Music Research Center University of Colorado at Boulder 288 UCB Boulder, CO 80309
Location	Housed in the American Music Research Center
Physical Description	25 linear feet (21 boxes)

Scope and Contents

Personal papers of Virgil Thompson (1896-1989), American composer and music critic, writer for the Boston Transcript and New York Herald Tribune, including correspondence with numerous composers; general correspondence; travel notes and genealogy. Collection consists of photocopies of original materials held by Yale University.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically and alphabetically by correspondent.

Access

Open, however, original collection owned by Yale University.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Virgil Thomson papers, University of Colorado, Boulder

Index Terms

Access points related to this collection:

Personal names

Thomson, Virgil, 1896-1989

Corporate names

American Music Research Center

Subject headings

Thomson, Virgil, 1896-1989 -- Correspondence

Thomson, Virgil, 1896-1989 -- Archives

Biographical Sketch of Virgil Thomson

Virgil Thomson, noted American composer and critic was born in Kansas City, Mo., November 25, 1896. His collaboration with Gertrude Stein produced two highly unusual stage works, and his career in journalism established him as one of the sharpest music critics in the United States.

He began his music career at age five when he learned to play piano and later organ. In 1919, he entered Harvard where he was influenced by three men: French trained composer Edward Burlingame Hill, with whom he studied orchestration and modern French music; French trained Archibald T. Davison, conductor of the Harvard Glee Club, for whom he was assistant and accompanist; and S. Foster Damon, a Blake scholar, poet, and composer, who introduced Thomson to the works of Satie and Gertrude Stein.

Thomson began to compose at Harvard in 1920. In 1921 he went to France where he studied at the Ecole Normale with Boulanger. During this time he composed and wrote music notices for the Boston Transcript, his first published critical work. He graduated from Harvard in 1923 and with a grant from the Julliard School in New York, he studied conducting with Chalmers Clifton and counterpoint with Rosario Scalera.

Returning to Paris in 1925, Thomson lived there until 1940. He met Gertrude Stein in Paris and began composing for many of her texts, and together they produced an opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which was Thomson's most famous work. He continued to expand his technical facility, especially in writing for string instruments.

In October 1940, Thomson was appointed music critic of the New York Herald Tribune. During the 14 years at the Tribune he established himself as one of the major critical writers of the era. His newspaper pieces were later published in three Anthologies: *The Musical Scene*, *The Art of Judging Music*, and *Music, Right and Left*.

Thomson continued to compose and in the 1950's and 1960's he traveled widely, lecturing at Universities and participating in conferences, writing articles, and conducting in the United States and Europe.

During his long career, he worked with several styles of music, but the greatest influence on Thomson was the music of Satie, and the Satian ideals of clarity, simplicity, irony, and humor which underlies the diversity of his work. Thomson received numerous awards which included an appointment to the Legion d'honneur. Virgil Thomson died in New York on September 30, 1989.

This collection consists of photocopies of correspondence from originals held by Yale University. Consult with Yale University before publication of any of this material. It contains materials from composers, conductors, performing artists, writers, and Thomson's family.

Detailed Description

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14	7	Correspondence, 1953 (Jul – Dec)
14	8	Correspondence, 1954 (Jan – Feb)
14	9	Correspondence, 1954 (Mar – Jul)
14	10	Correspondence, 1954 (Aug – Dec)

15	1	Correspondence, 1955
15	2	Correspondence, 1956
15	3	Correspondence, 1957
15	4	Correspondence, 1958
15	5	Correspondence, 1959
15	6	Correspondence, 1960
15	7	Correspondence, 1961
15	8	Correspondence, 1962 (Jan – Jun)
15	9	Correspondence, 1962 (Jul – Dec)
15	10	Correspondence – Misc. Personal, 1962
15	11	Correspondence, 1963 (Jan – JunQ)
16	1	Correspondence, 1963 (Jul – Dec)
16	2	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Writers, Performing artists, 1963
16	3	Correspondence, 1964 (Jan – Jun)
16	4	Correspondence, 1964 (Jan – Jul)
16	5	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1964
16	6	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Writers, Critics, 1964
16	7	Correspondence, 1965
16	8	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1965
16	9	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1965
16	10	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1965
16	11	Correspondence, 1966
16	12	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1966
16	13	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1966
16	14	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1966
16	15	Correspondence, 1967
16	16	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1967
16	17	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1967
16	18	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1967
17	1	Correspondence, 1968
17	2	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1968
17	3	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1968
17	4	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1968
17	5	Correspondence, 1969
17	6	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1969
17	7	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1969
17	8	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1969
17	9	Correspondence, 1970
17	10	Correspondence – Virgil Thompson at 75th Birthday, 1970 (Nov. 25)
17	11	Correspondence – Fan mail, 1970
17	12	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1970
17	13	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1970

17	14	Correspondence – Writers, 1970
17	15	Correspondence, 1971
17	16	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1971
17	17	Correspondence – Fan mail, 1971
17	18	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, Architects, 1971
17	19	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1971
17	20	Correspondence, 1972
17	21	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1972
17	22	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1972
17	23	Correspondence – Poets, Painters, Sculptors, 1972
17	24	Correspondence – Theatre, 1972
17	25	Correspondence, 1973
17	26	Correspondence – Fan mail, 1973
17	27	Correspondence – Performing artists, 1973
17	28	Correspondence – Writers, 1973
17	29	Correspondence, 1974
17	30	Correspondence – Critics, Writers, 1974
17	31	Correspondence – Painters, Poets, Architects, Sculptors, 1974
17	32	Correspondence – Theatre, Performing artists, 1974
18	1	Correspondence , 1975
18	2	Virgil Thomson 80th Birthday, 1975 (Nov. 25)
18	3	Correspondence – Critics, 1975
18	4	Correspondence – Dance, Theatre, Film, 1975
18	5	Correspondence – Painters, Sculptors, 1975
18	6	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1975
18	7	Correspondence – Poets, 1975
18	8	Correspondence – Writers, 1975
18	9	Correspondence , 1976
18	10	Correspondence – Composers, 1976
18	11	Correspondence – Conductors, 1976
18	12	Correspondence – Dance, Theatre, Film, 1976
18	13	Correspondence – Miscellaneous, 1976
18	14	Correspondence – Painters, Sculptors, 1976
18	15	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1976
18	16	Correspondence – Poets, Writers, 1976
18	17	Correspondence , 1977
18	18	Correspondence – Composers, 1977
18	19	Correspondence – Conductors, 1977
18	20	Correspondence – Painters, Sculptors, 1977
18	21	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1977
18	22	Correspondence – Poets, Writers, 1977
18	23	Correspondence – Theatre, Cinema, 1977

18	24	Correspondence , 1978
18	25	Correspondence – Fan Mail, 1978
18	26	Correspondence – Painters, 1978
18	27	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1978
18	28	Correspondence – Poets, Writers, 1978
18	29	Correspondence , 1979
18	30	Correspondence – Fan Letters, 1979
18	31	Correspondence – Painters, 1979
18	32	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1979
18	33	Correspondence – Poets, Writers, 1979
19	1	Correspondence , 1980
19	2	Correspondence – Fan Letters, 1980
19	3	Correspondence – Painters, 1980
19	4	Correspondence – Performing Artists, 1980
19	5	Correspondence – Poets, Writers, 1980

Personal files and Genealogy

Box	Folder	
19	6	Condolences re Death of May Thomson
19	7	Genealogy – Diary of Reuben E. McDaniel , 1836, 1841
19	8	Genealogy – History of Bullittburg Church
19	9	Genealogy – Gaines and Graves
19	10	Genealogy – Letters from R. E. McDaniel to Delia McDaniel, 1835 – 1843
19	11	Genealogy – Letters from Delia McDaniel to R. E. McDaniel, 1936 – 1943
19	12	Genealogy – McDaniel, Kirtley, Thomson
19	13	Genealogy – May Thomson
19	14	Genealogy – Virgil Thomson
19	15	Genealogy – Virgil Thomson
19	16	Genealogy – Virgil Thomson
19	17	Harvard (re scholarship)
19	18	Institute for Studies of American Music (Univ. of Kansas City)
19	19	Kansas City, Mo. , 1916 – 1940s
19	20	Kansas City, Mo. , 1940 – 1972
19	21	Letters to Family , 1917 – 1920
19	22	Letters to Family , 1922 – 1930
19	23	Letters to Family , 1931 – 1940
19	24	Letters to Family , 1940 – 1952
19	25	Letters to Family , 1953 – 1963
19	26	Letters to Family , 1964 – 1971
20	1	Letters to Family , 1972 – 1974
20	2	Letters to Family , 1975 – 1976

20	3	Letters to Family, 1977 – 1979
20	4	Old Times (Harvard, etc.)
20	5	Programs, 1966
20	6	World War II

Travel

Box	Folder	
20	7	Boston Evening Transcript / H.T. Parker, 1925
20	8	Asia , 1961
20	9	Brazil / Margarida Guedes Nogueira, 1955
20	10	England , 1961
20	11	Europe , 1954
20	12	France, Paris, pre-1940
20	13	France, Paris – Robert Brussel: Introduction to Theatre/Orchestra, 1925
20	14	France, Paris – Concerts, 1928
21	1	France/Europe , 1940 – 1944
21	2	France/Europe , 1942 – 1947
21	3	France/Europe , 1948 – 1953
21	4	France/Europe , 1953 – 1957
21	5	France/Europe , 1958 – 1960
21	6	France/Europe, 1961 – 1962
21	7	Italy , 1954
21	8	Persia , 1961
21	9	South America , 1951 – 1961
21	10	Turkey , 1954