
Ringo (James) Papers

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Mills College

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2021

Descriptive Summary

Title: Ringo (James) Papers

Dates: 1926-1990 (bulk 1950-1990)

Collection Number: Consult repository

Creator/Collector: Ringo, James, 1926-circa 1990.

Extent: 5 linear feet (5 boxes)

Repository: Mills College

Oakland, California 94613

Abstract: James "Jim" Ringo was a composer, writer, music critic, musicologist and 1951 graduate of Mills College with a master's degree. This collection documents Ringo's experiences at Julliard and in studying with Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messian; the musical scene in New York and, during the late 1960s, in Venice, where Ringo was doing research on Wolf-Gerrari.

Language of Material: English

Access

Collection is open for research.

Preferred Citation

Ringo (James) Papers. Mills College

Biography/Administrative History

James Ringo was born in St. Louis, Missouri, 4 March 1926. He attended Washington University for two years and then, because of his commitment to music, transferred to Julliard where he completed his degree in composition in 1945. Later that year, he was drafted into the army and served in the Philippines as a chaplain's assistant and organist and, at least for part of the time, worked in a leper colony there. During that period, he began keeping a journal. The original manuscript has disappeared, but his typed revision of it survives. It is a fascinating document, perhaps unique in capturing a strange world and a young American's reactions to it. Subsequently, Ringo enrolled in the music school at Mills College to study with Darius Milhaud, and after completing his master's degree there in 1951, he accompanied the Milhaud's to Paris where he continued his studies with both Milhaud and Olivier Messian. Three years later, circa 1953, he returned to the United States to work as editor of the *Composer's Alliance Bulletin* and continued to compose and to begin to write fiction. That activity was interrupted, however, when he was caught as one of perhaps ten thousand veterans who were recalled to military service; during this tour he served with NATO forces in Izmir, Turkey. Following that second tour of duty, he was employed by RCA Victor where he worked for many years, writing record album notes as well as the then-popular radio program, "Music You Want When You Want It." Through the sixties and seventies, his name regularly appeared at the foot of record album notes, for Victor, Angel, Seraphim, and other recording companies. Simultaneously, he wrote scores for several Off-Broadway productions including one of his own translation of *The Barber of Seville* (he spoke French fluently), which opened to excellent reviews at the Pennygate Theatre. Also, he wrote for *MD Magazine*, *American Record Guide*, and *Opera News*. He was the first writer to win the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for his music criticism, and he won third prize when the award was given for a second year. During the early seventies, he lived in Venice, doing research for a full-length study of Ernano Wolf-Ferrari. Earlier, he had been recognized as an authority on the composer, but for reasons perhaps implicit in his failure to sustain extended composition - either in prose or in music, as his journals indicate - he never completed this projected critical biography. He continued to write until his death. Nor did he ever stop composing: a string quartet, much music for solo instruments, song settings, and one nearly completed opera (in 12 tone scale) based on John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Ringo was described by those who knew him as generous and affable, but also complex, with a temper. He was witty and "fantastically intelligent", but "had trouble with the real world where you have to go out and seek recognition". His journals illustrate an internal sense of loneliness, insecurity, and self-consciousness about his appearance. He was increasingly convinced of his failure as a composer and a writer. The James Ringo Papers provide insight into the person: his internal struggles as well as his writings and compositions, preserved for posterity.

Scope and Content of Collection

The James Ringo Papers consists of the following series: *Miscellaneous Writings and Diaries*, *Manuscripts and Diaries*, *Typed Diaries*, *Diaries*, and *Correspondence*. The papers include writings about music, clipping scrapbooks, plays, novels, stories, drafts, juvenilia, photographs, correspondence, and diaries. Through these papers, the researcher will notice Milhaud's influence on Ringo's compositions. Among Ringo's correspondents are James Levine, Vladimir Golschmann, Darius Milhaud, and Virgil Thomson. The diaries are "remarkable, not only because of the musical scene they document for more than forty years but for their frequently cogent observations about the human condition we all share and, more pointedly, his own gradual emotional disintegration."

Indexing Terms

Composers.

Music critics.

Authors.

Mills College - History.

Archives.

Correspondence.

Diaries.

Milhaud, Darius, 1892-1974.
