



# THE Stearns Newsletter

THE STEARNS COLLECTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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## As the Stearns Collection Turns 100 Years Old

By JOSEPH S. C. LAM, DIRECTOR, THE STEARNS COLLECTION OF  
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Friends of the Stearns Collection, greetings! The second century of the collection has begun, and we are ready for actions. We have not only reorganized the Board of Directors to oversee the operation and development of the collection, but also set up a Centennial Committee to organize a black-tie gala event to celebrate the centennial birthday and launch new fundraising efforts. The gala event will be held on November 12, 1999 in the School of Music; details are being finalized at this point. For further information, please contact: Dr. Joseph Lam, the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, School of Music, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109-2985; tel: 734-647-9471; fax: 734-647-1897; email: jsclam@umich.edu.

All these exciting happenings are results of efforts that started more than a year ago. Last spring, the Board decided to hold the centennial celebration in April of 1999, to reorganize, and to invigorate the programs of the collection. Last fall, I prepared a sketch book of the collection to describe its history and treasures, and Mrs. Virginia Patton Moss, a long time board member, used the sketch book to introduce the collection to many established Arbor citizens, and invited them to join the Board. On November 1, 1998, twenty-four of them came and joined the board meeting of the day. After the initial greetings, they and the board members immediately engaged in a lively discussion of the cultural, musical, and educational significance of the collection, and how its mission can be effectively implemented. The discussion led to the following understanding. As one of the largest collections of musical instruments in North American universities, and as a precious cultural and musical asset of the University of Michigan and of Ann Arbor, the collection should be supported and promoted. To achieve its mission of preserving musical instruments, advancing organological research, and promoting understanding of world cultures and musics, the collection needs not only long-term plans of operation but also secured financial support in the form of permanent endowments. To develop the plans and launch fundraising efforts, the Board will reorganize, and the centennial celebration that was scheduled to take place in April of 1999 will be postponed until the fall of that year; the event will celebrate not only the first 100 years of the collection but also launch exciting programs for its next millennium.

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## Virginia Martin Howard, a musician and a patron of the Stearns Collection

Who is Virginia Martin Howard? Why does the name appear on the front side of a display case in the School of Music, and in the title of the lecture series of the Stearns Collection? On one level, the answers are simple. Mrs. Howard is a musician and a philanthropist who has donated the case to the School of Music, and established an endowment, the incomes of which pays the expenses of the lectures. On another level, the answers are not so simple: Mrs. Howard has a long involvement with the Stearns Collection.

Born Mildred Virginia Martin on May 27, 1916 in Memphis, Tennessee, Mrs. Howard lives in the South, but has many Michigan ties. Her mother was from Hartford, Michigan, and her father was almost a Michigander—he was from a northern Indiana town that lies next to Edwardsburg, Michigan. During the years of 1930-39, Mrs. Howard spent summers in Linden Hills, a quiet little resort by Lake Michigan, where her mother had bought a cottage. In 1940, Mrs. Howard married Mark Eugene Howard of Benton Harbor, Michigan, a graduate of Michigan Tech. Since the mid 1940s, she has lived in the Alexandria-Pineville area of Louisiana, where her family has a lumber business.



Mrs. Virginia M. Howard, 1972

Like her four younger siblings, Mrs. Howard is musical, a talent that probably came from her mother—musical ability was strong in several generations of the mother's family. Mrs. Howard and her three brothers and one sister sang and played several musical instruments: clarinet, drums, French horn, organ, piano, and violin. All through their grammar and high school years, they were always making music, singing and/or playing musical instruments. And as their talents became known, they were invited to perform at many

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## As the Stearns Collection Turns 100... *continued from page 1*

It was decided that until a new Board of Directors was officially formed, Dr. John Psarouthakis, Mrs. Virginia Patton Moss, and Mr. John DeVine, would serve as the interim chair, the vice interim chair, and the interim chair of developments. Immediately and enthusiastically, they started working for the collection. And in the next four months, they and I met a number of times to develop various ideas and plans, holding long meetings in their homes and in restaurants; we frequently talked over the phone, and sent fax and email messages to one another. By January 1999, a long list of persons who would serve on the Board were identified and formal invitations sent to them. And to allow the Board to focus on long-term plans and issues, a special Centennial Committee was organized to design the centennial celebration. On February 10, we met Dean Paul Boylan of the School of Music, discussed various long-term plans, and coordinated details of the first organizational meeting which was held on March 9 in the School of Music. A few days after this meeting, November 12, 1999 was chosen, for various logistical reasons, as the day for the centennial celebration.

Almost fifty people attended the organizational meeting of March 9, 1999, which was held in the Margaret Dow Towsley Wing



**A snapshot from the reception**



**A snapshot from the discussion**

of the Earl V. Moore Building of the School of Music. The meeting began at 6:00 p.m., with a reception and a viewing of various musical instruments displayed in lobbies and galleries throughout the Margaret Dow Towsley Wing. The attendees were all fascinated by the special exhibition of guitars and other displays, many of which were beautifully updated by Ms. Christine Arveil, an art designer who just moved to Ann Arbor from France; they were

also intrigued by the sounds and sights of the shimmering gamelan, which was introduced by Ms. Julia Byle, a graduate student in the ethnomusicology program in the School of Music. Buffet supper was served by 6:30 p.m. And as people settled in the Blanche Anderson Moore Organ Recital Hall by around 7:15 p.m., Dean Paul Boylan welcomed the attendees, explained the significance and uniqueness of the Stearns Collection, and outlined plans and needs for future acquisitions and development. Following Dean Boylan's speech, Mr. Wu Tong of Beijing, China, a



**Dean Paul Boylan gives his welcoming remarks, and talks about the future of the Stearns Collection**



**Mr. Wu explains his music and musical instruments; Dr. Joseph Lam translates**



**Dr. John Psarouthakis presents plans for the Stearns Collection**

virtuoso of wind instruments, performed on the *shuangguan* (double shawn) and the *sheng* (mouth organ). The lyrical melodies played on the former instrument and dramatic tunes that came out of the pipes of the latter enraptured the audience. After the performance, they asked Mr. Wu many questions about the music and his instruments. By around 7:45 p.m., when the attendees had acquainted themselves, Dr. Psarouthakis started the discussion part of the meeting, explaining the purpose of the Board, and outlining the tasks ahead. By around 8:40 p.m., the meeting was adjourned.

The Board of Directors and the Centennial Committee met again on March 28, electing officials of the Board, approving the revised constitution and bylaws, and discussing the long-term fundraising proposal and operation budget that I prepared. Dr. Psarouthakis and Mrs. Moss were formally elected as chair and vice chair of the Board. Mr. and Mrs. William Conlin were elected as the co-chairs of the Centennial Committee. They led discussions on details of the gala event on November 12—to prepare for the discussion, they had met with Mrs. Moss and me, and inspected the halls in the School of Music on March 20. The Board and the Committee will meet again on April 27 and 28. The gala event of November 12 is only six months away and many tasks lie ahead.

As revised, the constitution and bylaws of the Friends of the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments become the constitution and bylaws of the Board of Directors and Friends of the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments. The Board of Directors are distinguished from the Friends so that the former can promptly formulate plans and policies as a group of elected officials. Friends of the collection remain the core of the organization which exists to further the mission of the collection, and are open to anyone who wishes to join.



**Ms. Sue Barber President Emerita of the Board**

As I close this report, I would like to say thank you to Ms. Sue Barber, Mr. Bruce Paxton and Mr. David Sutherland, who served in the old Board, and had offered many valuable services to the collection. Ms. Barber was the president of the old Board, and under her presidency, the collection experienced many exciting moments. The performance of the *Return of the Green*

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## Stearns Collection Turns 100... *continued from page 2*

*Hornet*, for example, is now a much discussed chapter in this history of the collection. Ms. Barber will remain on the Board, and continue to help shape the future of the collection.

As approved on March 28, 1999, the new Board of Directors and the Centennial Committee include a group of established Ann Arborites who are devoted to cultural causes and are experienced with fundraising and other civic activities. They are:

### Board of Directors

John Psarouthakis, chair  
Virginia Patton Moss, vice chair

Sue Barber  
Ann Black  
Jan Brandon  
Allen Britton  
Nan & William Conlin  
Sheila & Ronald Cresswell  
John DeVine  
Jack Edman  
Dorothy Farhat  
Linda Grekin  
Carole Holmes  
Virginia Martin Howard  
Jewell Hunter  
Jan Lyons  
William Malm  
Michael Montgomery  
Lester Monts  
Karen O'Neal  
Constance Osler  
James L. Telfer  
Jerry Weidenbach  
Eileen & Ron Weiser  
Robert Whitman

Paul Boylan  
*ex officio*, Dean, School of Music  
Joseph S.C.Lam  
*ex officio*, Director, the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments

### Centennial Committee

Nan & William Conlin,  
co-chairs

Menakka Bailey  
Mimi & Ronald Bogdasarian  
Beverley & Daniel Burlingame  
Nancy Clark  
Sandra Connellan  
Jane Dorr  
Cheryl Elliot  
Fred Erb  
Judy & Frank Fike  
Peter Fletcher  
Jennifer Flores  
Trudy Huebner  
Nancy & Ted Heusel  
Laura Spaid Hindle  
Mitzi Irwin  
Howard King  
Chris Larsen  
Alice & Henry Landau  
Caroline & Paul Lichter  
Stephanie Lord  
Judy Maugh  
Susan & Mark Obert  
Laura Ottenwess  
Wally & Heinz Prechter  
Tom Roach  
Anne Rubin  
Lois Russell  
Judy & Don Rumelhart  
Ann Schriber  
Lois Stegeman  
Paul Ungrodt Jr.  
Marina & Robert Whitman

## Virginia Martin Howard... *continued from page 1*

local institutions, such as the Rotary Club, veterans' hospitals, high school assemblies, and churches. Even during the summer months, when Mrs. Howard's family vacationed by Lake Michigan, they had plenty of music. Their cottage became the music center of the resort: they and other vacationers would improvise programs of hymns, folksongs, duets, operatic arias, and more—as Mrs. Howard fondly remembers those summer experiences of music, punch, and cookies, she recalls that Marie Nash, one of the blond high school students who sang arias then, became a star in George M. Cohen's productions. And because of these impromptu programs, Mrs. Howard learned to play music in almost any key, and in many styles and genres.



Mrs. Virginia M. Howard as the soloist in the Claude Almand concert; from the *Alexandria Daily*, April 13, 1950

From 1933 through 1938, Mrs. Howard pursued formal music studies in the Oberlin Conservatory of Music of Ohio, and the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, earning a bachelor degree in music. She also did further graduate studies of piano and choral music in Oberlin Conservatory of Music in the years of 1939-40. In 1944, she had private lessons with concert musicians like Max Kotlarsky of New York and Chester Barris of Bloomington, Illinois. In 1951, she graduated from Louisiana State University with a Master of Music in piano. During the decades of the 1940s through 60s, Mrs. Howard performed all over central Louisiana.

In 1938, Mrs. Howard became interested in Moravian music and culture, an interest that would eventually lead her to become a board member of Moravian Music Foundation. And in 1972, she discovered the Stearns Collection. While visiting Ann Arbor, she attended a lecture by Dr. Robert Warner, who was then assistant dean of the School of Music and director of the collection. At the end of the lecture, Mrs. Howard introduced herself to Dr. Warner, and found that they shared a common interest in Moravian music. Before she took the plane back home to the South in the following Monday morning, Dr. Warner took Mrs. Howard to the Stearns Building on Baits Drive, where the collection was housed during the years of 1975-86. And before the tour ended, Dr. Warner was given a check for a large glass cabinet for displaying musical instruments. Thus, a tradition of supporting the Stearns Collection began.

In subsequent visits to Ann Arbor, Mrs. Howard became involved with Dr. Warner's efforts to organize a "Friends" group to support the Stearns Collection. Gradually, she became acquainted with many School of Music faculty and students: Bill Albright, Allen Britton, Penelope Crawford, Tom Kruger, Bill Malm, Warner Steel, Louis Stout, David Sutherland, and many others. She has now become an honorary life-time member of the Board of Directors, and a patron of the collection. For health reasons, Mrs. Howard no longer comes to Ann Arbor, but her interest in the collection remains active. Right after she learned of the call to raise funds for the centennial celebration last fall, she immediately sent a check to show support and encouragement.



Mrs. Virginia M. Howard with her great-grandson, 1998

