Concert, exhibit to showcase ‘Gems from the Davis Collection’

Semi-retired at 76, Gillian Davis (née Wimbourn) devotes herself and her time to a labor of love—carrying on her late husband’s legacy around the world and teaching ballet to adults.

Married in 1983 to Richard Beattie Davis, a native of England, musicologist and collector of first-edition books, musical scores and manuscripts, the Davises were married for a productive 26 years before he died in 2008.

Prior to that, in 1984, Davis established an ongoing collection, called the Richard Beattie Davis Music Collection, which is lodged at Florida Atlantic University, and includes many first editions of Beethoven, Hummel, Hummel, Russian chamber works and many other rare scores.

“Richard was a passionate person who shared his love of music with everyone,” Davis said. “As a teenager, he became fascinated with Russian piano music by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, and devoted his life to rescuing, cataloging and preserving rare first editions, especially of Russian music.”

Dividing her time between England and Boynton Beach, Davis dedicates her energy and efforts in Florida to honoring her husband’s memory and passion by maintaining, promoting and curating the collection.

Beattie Davis’ passion for Russian music led him around the world amassing a vast anthology of first and early editions of Western and Russian music.

Comprising more than 700 items dating from the 1790s to the first two decades of the 20th century, the collection is currently housed at FAU’s Wimberly Library.

To honor Davis’ memory, FAU’s Department of Music presents “Gems from the Davis Collection,” a concert including works in the Richard Beattie Davis collection of rare music, underwritten by the library.

“It is quite meaningful to me to have this music performed at FAU,” Davis said. “It means that Richard’s name is not forgotten.”

“Professor Treer (professor of music and co-founder of the FAU Chamber Soloists) selected music which Richard loved, including ‘Ave Maria,’ by Adolph Henselt, a duet arrangement which I composed in 2009 in my husband’s memory. Richard was the Honorary President of the International Henselt Society in Germany.”

“This piece was arranged by Richard’s protégé, the British pianist Daniel Grimwood and published by Fountayne Editions of London. It premiered in England in 2010, and will make its American premiere here at FAU.”

“Professor Treer has created a lovely tribute to my husband, including a video that will be shown which Richard made when the Taneviev was last performed by the FAU Chamber Soloists.”

The concert program includes the American premiere of Taneviev’s ‘Ave Maria’ for piano and cello; a piano quintet by Sergei Taneviev and music by Nikolai Medtner; Aleksandr Nikolayevich Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Paul Juon and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

The theme, now in its fourth year, will be performed by Leonid Treer, piano; Sandra McClain, soprano; the Delray String Quartet; Mei Mei Lu and Tomas Cotik, violins; Richard Fleischman, viola; and Claudio Jaffe on the cello.

“One piece that Richard loved is Taneviev’s Piano Quintet in G Minor, which I last performed 14 years ago,” Treer said. “The slow movement was performed at his funeral. It’s an outstanding piece of music, difficult to master and rarely performed.”

Piano Quintet in G Minor was published by Edition Russe de Musique in 1909.

“I compare the music to the story of Romeo and Juliet – there is suffering, sadness and tribulation but the music ends triumphantly and victoriously. There is light after the dark,” Treer said.

In complement to the concert, limited items from the collection of first and early editions of music will be on display at FAU for the final time.

Some of the highlights of the collection include a numbered copy of the first edition of the full score (a limited edition No. 12) of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s ‘The Tale of Tsar Saltan,’ a Russian opera written in 1895; first editions of Rimsky-Korsakov’s three penultimate operas, and operas by A.N. Serov, A. Rubinstein and N. Teirestin.

The collected works also feature full scores of first German editions of the nine Beethoven symphonies and several other of his orchestral works, a miscellaneous collection of 19th century editions of choral, orchestral and piano music, and more than 60 editions of piano works by J.N. Hummel.

Additionally, there are more than 60 chamber works by a variety of composers, and in excess of 200 Russian scores, almost all first editions, dating from the mid-19th century to the years leading up to the Russian Revolution.

The Thomas B. Pittfield Collection, the only archive of his work in the United States, includes musical and artistic works, letters, recordings and books of the English composer, and personal letters to the couple.

Stewart Robertson, the music director of the Atlantic Classical Orchestra in Stuart, spent time last year reviewing the archives in the Davis collection and was amazed and excited about what he found.

“The collection is a treasure trove of 19th and early 20th century music with so much of interest and value,” he said. “I found two serenades that I didn’t even know existed: a piece by Alexander Glazunov and another by Rimsky-Korsakov that are a perfect fit for a classical orchestra.”

“The caliber and range of the collection, along with the musicalological and historical significance and rarity value make this collection a unique asset.”

The concert and exhibit have special meaning to Davis, who worked alongside her husband on his many projects, including co-authoring a 368-page book titled, “The Beauty of Belaief,” the definitive reference work on Russian music publisher M.P. Belaief.

She recalls fondly, “We were two-halves of the same person.”

FAU Chamber Soloists will perform Gems from the Davis Collection at 3 p.m., Feb. 18 at the University Theatre on the Boca Raton campus, 777 Glades Road. Suggested donation is $10.

Highlights from the Davis Collection will be on display through April 6 at the Wimberly Library. Visit fau.edu/music or call 561-297-3787 or 561-297-3820.