“Beauty of Belaieff” Reveals FAU Library Treasures

“The Beauty of Belaieff” has finally rolled off the presses. The 368-page large format art book, with 143 full-page color plates, represents a life’s work for author Richard Beattie Davis.

An exhibit relating to the book may be seen for a limited time outside Special Collections at FAU’s Wimberly Library.

Richard and Gillian Davis are British citizens with a winter home in Boynton Beach. They are longtime benefactors to FAU, having donated a priceless collection of first and second edition musical scores to Special Collections.

“Beauty of Belaieff” is Richard Davis’ crowning achievement. It chronicles of stunning achievement of Russian composers and the publishing house that printed exquisitely beautiful covers and scores from 1836 to 1904. The book is a who’s who of Russian music, from A (Antipov) to V (Vitol). It retails for 65 pounds sterling, (around $130), plus shipping.

Richard Davis began his research on the M.P. Belaieff publishing house after mustering out of the British Army in 1946. He learned Russian and continued researching and buying during his career as a surveyor, and he began working on the book in earnest upon his retirement in 1982.

“Up until now the book was just too expensive to produce,” said Davis in Boynton Beach. “But with modern computer technology, we finally were able to reproduce beautiful frontispieces with excellent color on coated paper.”

A reception in anticipation of the book was held at FAU Library in February before Richard and Gillian Davis returned to England.

“We’ve been trying to get the book published for 20 years,” explains William Miller, head of FAU Libraries. “It is a classic example of British amateur scholarship that will be of value to musicologists, libraries and collectors.”

Richard and Gillian Davis had hoped to travel to Russia this summer to promote the book, but Richard’s health prevented it.

A doctoral candidate at Oxford has volunteered to translate the English text back into Russian. One of the title pages was used on a new CD, “Balakirev and Russian Folksong.” Another title page is in a new book on Russian art, “The Art of Ilya Repin.”

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