FAU Libraries Host ‘The Bessel Archives’ Display of Rare Scores Published before the Revolution by Renowned Russian Company

BOCA RATON, FL (February 17, 2011) – Florida Atlantic University Libraries’ Special Collections department is hosting a display of rare first and early edition music scores published by the V. Bessel & Company, one of the leading music publishers in Russia prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917, through Friday, March 25, at the Wimberly Library on FAU’s Boca Raton campus, 777 Glades Road.

“The Bessel Archives” display is a microcosm of the library’s Bessel archives and features replicas of Russian edition music scores and copies of title pages published by the Bessel company in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The display includes a juxtaposition of two works, “The Marriage” by M. Mussorgsky, published by V. Bessel & Co. in 1911, and “The Marriage” by M. Mussorgsky, published by the State Music Edition - Moscow in 1934; and black and white photos, including one of composer Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky.

The showcase, just outside of the special collections department on the second floor east, is intended to draw attention to the Richard Beattie Davis Music Collection, which was established by musicologist Richard Beattie Davis in 1984. The music collection consists largely of first and early editions of scores from the early 1790s to the first two decades of the 20th century. Davis died in England in 2008 but frequented the library annually during his winters in Boynton Beach with his widow, Gillian Davis, a ballet teacher, who continues to promote his legacy, whether she is in Florida or abroad.

Many Russian music title pages of the 19th century were distinguishable by their interesting and colorful designs, which resulted with the change from engraved printing to lithography. “The music scores, many of them now completely forgotten, were adorned with the beautiful frontispieces that oblige one to view them as part of the evolution of Russian art,” said Davis.

Vasily Bessel founded the Bessel publishing company with his brother, Ivan Bessel, in 1869 in St. Petersburg. To save the company from being nationalized by the State Music Publishers after the Revolution, Basil Bessel, V. Bessel’s son, moved the firm to Paris in 1920.
Many of the works in the Davis collection were collected after Gillian Davis met her husband in 1979. The couple traveled the world and worked side-by-side researching music.

A substantial part of the Davis collection comprises works by Johann Hummel, and one of the rarest items is a set of variations for keyboard published by Hummel in 1792 when he visited England at age 14. The bottom right corner bears the composer’s autograph, and the music is engraved. The work was printed for the author three years after its composition was entered at Stationers’ Hall, London, which registered publications before the Copyright Act of 1842.

Richard Davis drove to Paris to collect scores and archives from the firm of V. Bessel after the lease came to an end. Bessel’s granddaughters, Marina and Dinette, later gave Davis special permission to include the Bessel Archives in the Davis collection.

Since her husband’s death, Davis has continued traveling and researching on behalf of the collection. She traveled to London in 2010 to visit Dinette Bessel and recorded her reaction to the Bessel display at the Wimberly Library.

“I am always happy talking about the collection because it brings me nearer to my beloved Richard,” said Davis. “Each piece triggers a happy memory, a wonderful trip, a lovely performance or just the sound of his fabulous voice.”

FAU’s department of music will present a tribute to her husband by performing music from the collection in a concert titled “FAU Chamber Soloists: Gems from the Davis Collection” on Sunday, February 20, at 3 p.m. at the University Theatre. Suggested donation for the concert is $10. For more information, call 561-297-3820 or visit www.fau.edu/music.

The Richard Beattie Davis Collection is open from 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday or by appointment. For more information, call 561-297-3787 or e-mail lysca@fau.edu.

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