Towards a Works List for Louise Talma

Kendra Preston Leonard

English Abstract

Until recently, researchers cataloguing the works of American composer Louise Talma (c.1906-1996) have had to speculate about the existence, dates, and whereabouts of a number of her pieces. With the bulk of Talma’s scores now available at the Library Congress and with new identifications of scores and score fragments in other collections, it is possible to create a much more definitive catalogue of Talma’s works, including information on their forces, publication status, and availability.

French Abstract

German Abstract

In her will, American composer Louise Talma (c. 1906–1996) appointed the MacDowell Colony, where she had spent many productive retreats working, her legal heir. After her death in 1996, the MacDowell Colony took possession of the bulk of Talma’s correspondence, her own manuscript and printed scores, and scores, generally in manuscript form, that had been given to her (Talma’s personal copies of published scores and her books were distributed to friends and former students2) and entrusted them to the Library of Congress. In 2005, music librarian Sarah Dorsey partially catalogued the materials, now known as the Louise Talma Collection, processing some 7,300 items.3 Dorsey was able to identify many of the completed and printed compositions in the collection, but many other items remained unidentified.

Some works by Talma had gone to other collections, as well; manuscripts and fair

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2 Author communication with Patricia Woodard, November 2010.
copies were also located in the Thornton Wilder Collection and Louise Talma Papers at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the Nadia Boulanger Collection at Harvard University’s Isham Memorial Library, and in at least one private collection. Fair copies of some works also reside in the archives of the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France.

Collecting information for all of Talma’s works was not always as straightforward as compiling a list of pieces held in these many locations: the titles of some works changed as Talma worked on them; some works became parts of others, or were left in various stages of completion; some scores are still missing, although recordings of the works prove their existence. The “Christmas Carol” was found tucked inside a letter at Yale; at the Library of Congress, pages for works were out of order, unnumbered, and sometimes inserted into the pages of other works. Fortunately, Talma was a seemingly inexhaustible correspondent. She wrote to her friends constantly, in some cases more than once a day, describing the events of her life and detailing her work as a composer. Working with her letters in conjunction with earlier lists of her extant compositions and her letters, lists, notes, and other archival materials in the various Louise Talma Collections allowed for the compilation of a new and more complete record of her works. Clear delineations in her compositional approaches also made to possible to toughly date any undated works and fragments: Talma herself suggested three periods of composition consisting of a tonal, neo-classical period up to 1952; a serial approach from 1952 to 1973; and a non-serial atonal period from 1973 until her death.\(^4\) Of special interest were the discoveries of very early works, mostly songs, which were composed before Talma began studying with Nadia Boulanger and very shortly thereafter. Many of

\(^4\) Luann Dragone, “Stylistic tendencies and structural design in the music of Louise Talma” (PhD, City University of New York, 2003), iv.
these early pieces have not been previously catalogued. The *Mass for the Sundays of the Year*, listed as a 1984 work in the 1994 *Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* edited by Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel, appeared in previous works listings created by Talma but is missing, and there are no indications of sketches or other materials related to it, calling its entire existence into doubt. While Talma may have provided the title as a projected work, it seems never to have been begun.

Talma also left behind a large number of incomplete works, including an orchestral work from 1927, the beginning of a requiem, a string quintet, two works for woodwind quintet, a part-song, a setting of “Death Be Not Proud,” an overture to be based on Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, a fanfare for tenor sax and band, and fragments so short that they cannot be definitively identified with either a title or genre. Incomplete works are listed at the end of the catalogue of complete, extant scores. This catalogue also includes the completed works that have been recorded, but for which the score is currently missing. (If anyone has information as to the location of scores for these missing works, I would be most grateful to receive it.)

Publishers are listed for published works, as well as the location of manuscripts where known. Talma also sent out reproductions of her holograph manuscripts to prospective performers, conductors, and awards and grant committees and these may be found in some library collections. Copies at New York Public Library (US-NYP) have been noted. Songs written as stand-alone works and later incorporated into song cycles or collection are listed by date of composition and also included in collection information.

**Complete Works** (MS locations indicated by RISM sigla)


24. “Infanta Mariana.” 1943. SSAA and piano. Text by Wallace Stevens. Missing. This may have been reworked for the 1988-90 “Infanta Marian” for solo soprano and piano.


37. “Glory be to God for Dappled Things” (also known as “Pied Beauty”). 1949. Voice and piano. Text by Gerald Manley Hopkins. Published in *Seven Songs*


74. *Seven Songs for Voice and Piano* “One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted,” Emily Dickinson (1941); “Rain Song,” Jean Garrigue (1973);
“Glory be to God for Dappled Things,” Gerard Manley Hopkins (1949);
“Spring and fall: to a young child,” Gerard Manley Hopkins (1946); “Sonnet:
I Wake and Feel the Fell of the Dark,” Gerard Manley Hopkins (1946);
“Sonnet: No, I’ll not go,” Gerard Manley Hopkins (1950); “Leap before you
US-Wc (Louise Talma Collection).
   Collection).
   Frederic Owen,” recorded October 22, 1989 at the Manhattan School of
   Collection).
   US-Wc (Louise Talma Collection).
   for the Feast of Corpus Christi (New York: Friends of Liturgical Music,
   1996).”

US-Wc (Louise Talma Collection).

Incomplete works

1. Orchestral work. 1927.


3. Orchestral work. 1932.


US-Wc (Louise Talma Collection).


**Nonexistent Works**

**Commercial Recordings**

Recordings are listed by date and include publisher and catalogue, date, and a list of Talma’s works on the recording. In addition to these commercial recordings, the New York Performing Arts Library and the Library of Congress hold recordings of Talma’s music on a number of reel-to-reel and cassette tapes. Often, these were private donations to the library from Talma or the performers. Some are recordings of radio broadcasts and performances by college or university performers. As these were never publically available, they are not listed here. Other recordings of interest include *A Celebration for Louise: A Concert of the Music of Louise Talma*, a recording of a concert held at Hunter College for Talma’s 80th birthday, and *In Thanksgiving for the Life and Music of Louise Talma*, the recording of a memorial concert for the composer held a few weeks after her death in 1996. *A Celebration* was recorded February 5, 1977 at the Hunter College Playhouse, and contains recordings of the Piano sonata no. 2, *Terre de France, Summer Sounds, All the Days of My Life, Voices of Peace*, and *Four-handed Fun*. It is in the Louise Talma Collection of the Library of Congress. *In Thanksgiving*, recorded at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, on November 6, 1996, includes several spoken word tracks by Virginia Davidson, Ned Rorem, and others who knew Talma. The musical program consists of *Conversations, In Praise of a Virtuous Woman, Carmina mariana*, “Glory be to God for dappled things,” “Adieux a la meuse,” *Soundshots, Alleluia in form of toccata,*
“Ploughing on Sunday,” “Falling leaves,” Wreath of Blessings, and Give Thanks and Praise. It is held by the New York Performing Arts Library.

Finally, an additional recording of Holy Sonnets: La Corona is included on the recordings made to accompany the textbook Historical Anthology of Music by Women, edited by James R. Briscoe and published by Indiana University Press.

   Four-handed fun.
2. Letter to St. Peter, Leap Before you Look, One Need not be a Chamber to be Haunted. New York: Arts Recording Studios, 1946.  
   “Leap before you look,” “One need not be a chamber to be haunted,”  
   “Letter to Saint Peter.”
   Song and Dance.
   Toccata for Orchestra.
   Holy Sonnets: La Corona.
   Six Études for Piano.
   Piano sonata no. 2.

   *Alleluia in the Form of a Toccata.*

   *Three Duologues."

    *Alleluia in the Form of a Toccata.*

    *Let’s Touch the Sky.*

   *Three Duologues.*

    Piano Sonata no. 1.

    *Diadem.*

    *Pastoral Prelude.*

*Have you heard? Do you know?: Divertimento in Seven Scenes, Variations on Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.*


*A Wreath of Blessings, Voices of Peace, Holy Sonnets: La Corona.*


*The Ambient Air, Full Circle, Lament, Three Bagatelles, Kaleidoscopic Variations, Four-Handed Fun.*


Piano sonata no. 1.


*Terre de France.*


“Pied Beauty,” “Leap Before You Look,” “Rain Song.”


*Conversations.*


Violin Sonata.


“Psalm 115,” “Prayer” (excerpt from *Voices of Peace* (mvt. V, rehearsal numbers 114-117)).


*Diadem.*


*Diadem.*


*Dialogues, The Tolling Bell.*


*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.*


*Soundshots.*

“One need not be a chamber to be haunted,” “Rain Song,” “Glory be to God for Dappled Things,” “Spring and Fall: to a young child,” “Leap Before You Look.”


*The Ambient Air, Lament, Seven Episodes, Variations on Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird, Conversations, Soundshots, Full Circle.*


*Carmina Mariana.*


*Diadem.*