

(Some of) The Outstanding Women of Arsis Press

May 21, 2021

Posted by: [Morgen Stevens-Garmon](#)

The following is a guest post by Music Division Archivist Dr. Stephanie Akau.

Earlier this year Processing Technician Anthony Edwards and I had the privilege of processing the [records of the Arsis Press](#). This music publishing company was founded in 1974 and run solely by intrepid school teacher, social activist, and composer Clara Lyle Boone (1927-2015) from her home in Washington, D.C., only a few Metro stops east of the Library of Congress. Boone sang, played piano, and studied composition with Walter Piston at Harvard and Darius Milhaud as a student at the Aspen Music Festival. After working briefly for the G. Schirmer music publishing company, Boone ran for Congress in Kentucky and worked on John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign. Arsis Press published sacred choral music, solo, and chamber works by living women composers, who often faced significant roadblocks trying to get larger publishing houses to publish their work.

In this collection there are works by more than 40 composers, and we can highlight only a few in this post. Other works published by Arsis Press are described in the finding aid to the Arsis Press Papers, and additional Arsis Press scores are cataloged in the Music Division's general collection.

The tireless efforts of Clara Lyle Boone to found and run Arsis Press were a hard-fought step in the direction of inclusion of women composers into classical music. This collection is a resource for soloists and chamber musicians looking to expand their repertoire or for anyone interested in how a solo entrepreneur built a small business.

Vivian Fine (1913-2000) was a piano prodigy who wrote her first piece at age thirteen and had her public premiere at sixteen. The Arsis Press Records contain a corrected score and viola part for her *Lieder for viola and piano*, written later in her career. The sketches for *Lieder* are in [her collection](#) of manuscripts here at the Library.

Allegretto $\text{♩} = 100$

Vivian Fine
Lieder for Viola and Piano

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177 Bay Street, SE, Washington, D. C. 20003
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This children's composition book falls into the category of "I would like to see this score and you have done it so beautifully. Truly, an excellent and beautiful job and well to keep up with yourself (you.)"

Vivian Fine. *Lieder for viola and piano*, 1987. Box 8, folder 10, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.

Box 2 Box 210
Hempstead Falls, N.Y. 11550
March 26/87

Dear Mr. Boone:

In going over the viola part I used the first proof and my original score. I found a number of errors in the proof, which may have been corrected in the second proof, which I would like you to check,

- 1) p. 2, meas. 1. Slurs in viola should be the same as in original score and the part.
- 2) No. II, p. 5, next to last meas. Third note in viola, D^{\sharp} , is a quarter note. The rhythm is that meas. is $\text{F}^{\sharp} \text{J} \text{J}$, as in original score and the part.
- 3) p. 5, meas. 5. Violin omit dot under first note.
- 4) p. 5, meas. 5. Violin third note is D^{\sharp} (high), as in orig. score and the part.
- 5) p. 11, last meas. of No. III. Violin add F under last note, as in orig. score and the part.
- 6) p. 14, first meas. Violin only one dot after first note.
- 7) p. 20, meas. 1. Violin second note is E flat, as in orig. score and the part.

I truly regret the trouble that may have been caused by my lack of clarity for the need of a separate viola part. I feel sure there will be an especially fine publication and look forward to telling my musician friends about it and Arsis Press.

Sincerely,



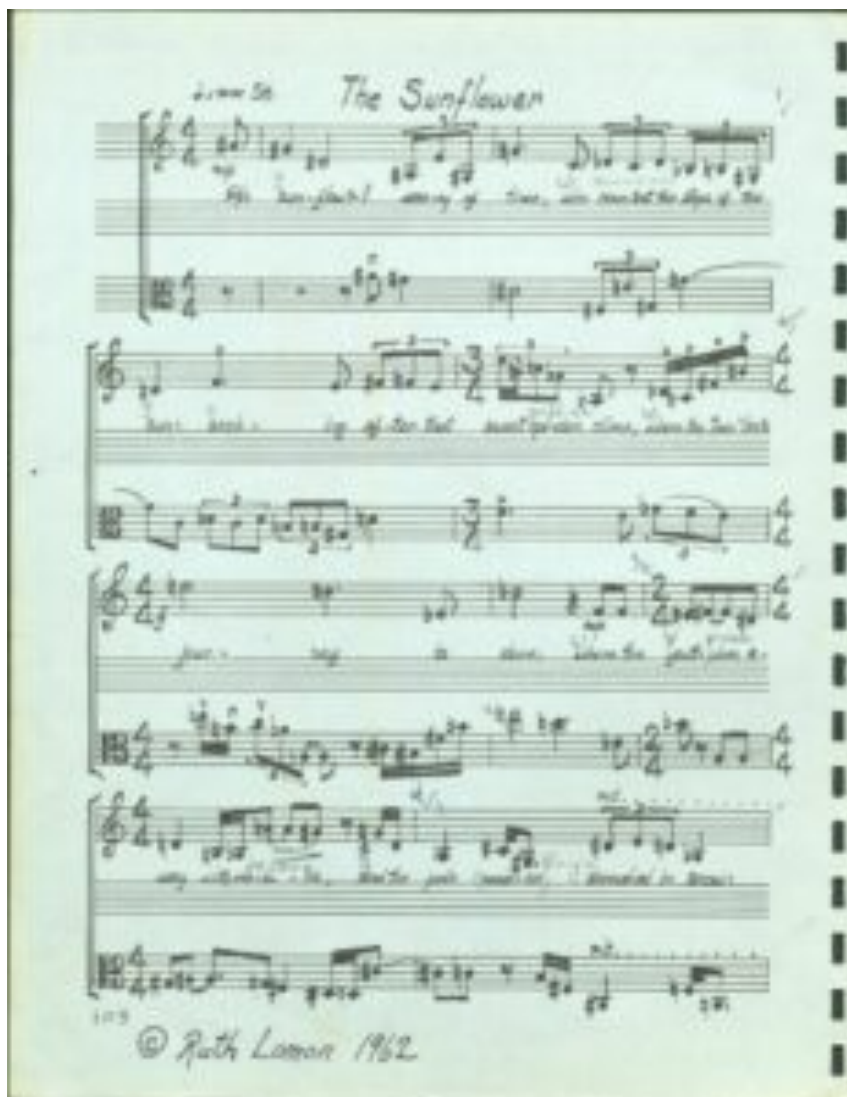
Vivian Fine

P. S. Viola part: pages 1 and 2 should be compressed onto a single page, like page with pages 2 and 7, and pages 5 and 6. This way there will be no page turns during the course of each piece.

Vivian Fine to Clara Lyle

Boone with corrections to a proof of *Lieder for viola and piano*, March 26, 1987. Box 14, folder 2, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.

Ruth Lomon (1930-2017) was a Canadian composer and teacher with several chamber and solo piano or organ works in the Arsis Press Records. Her compositions published by Arsis span the years from 1962, before the press's founding, to 2004. There is also prolific correspondence between Lomon and Boone. In addition to letters, Lomon shared clippings and programs with Boone when her works were performed.



Ruth Lomon, Five Songs After Poems by William Blake, 1962. Box 3, folder 2, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.

Ruth Schönthal (1924-2006) was, like Vivian Fine, a prodigy who started playing piano and composing as child. As the Nazi Party rose to power in Europe, her family fled their home in Hamburg, first moving to Sweden, then to Mexico, where she met composer and fellow German refugee Paul Hindemith.^[1] He invited her to study with him at Yale, where she graduated in 1948.

Schönthal authored more than 100 compositions ranging from solo instrumental works to opera; two of her chamber works are in the collection. She had a successful career as an educator and pedagogue, serving on faculty at New York University from 1979 until 2004 and had a successful career as an educator and pedagogue. Her students include composers Christopher Cerrone and Lowell Liebermann, and performer/songwriter Stephanie Germanotta, better known as Lady Gaga.

In the following letter to Schönthal from 1986, Clara Lyle Boone acknowledged Schönthal's musical and educational impact on the field of classical music. Boone writes,

The music in the AWC [American Women Composers] series has been consistently good...Women have come a long way, and you are an important reason why.



Clara Lyle Boone to Ruth Schönthal, December 1, 1986. Box 17, folder 5, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.



Ruth Schönthal, *Interlude for harp*, 1980. Box 5, folder 3, Arsis Press Records, Music Division

Dr. Jeanne Shaffer (1925-2007) began singing for radio commercials at age four and toured with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra from ages eleven to sixteen. She hosted two radio shows, "Eine Kleine Frauenmusik," about women composers, and "Non-American Orchestral Music," for Southeastern Public Radio Network. Shaffer served on the faculty of Huntingdon College (Alabama), and her works include musicals, symphonies, chamber music, an opera, and a ballet. Five of her chamber music scores are available in the collection.



Jeanne Shaffer, "Eternity."

Five Songs to Poems of William Blake for soprano and piano, 1992. Box 5, folder 8, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.

Dr. Elizabeth Walton Vercoe (b. 1941) was born in Washington, D.C., and has been featured on numerous prestigious music festivals and in artists' colonies in the U.S. and Europe. Arsis published three of her works by the time she finished her doctoral degree at Boston College. From 1997 she was on the music faculty at Regis College (Massachusetts). Many of her compositions center on the work or life of specific people ranging from well-known figures like Joan of Arc (*Herstory III*), the poetry of Emily Dickinson (*This is my letter to the World*), Japanese women's poetry set in (*Herstory II*), or collaborators, like pianist Christine Paraschos (*Pour Christine*).



Elizabeth Walton Vercoe, *Herstory III*, 1991. Box 7, folder 5, Arsis Press Records, Music Division.

The finding aid for the [Arsis Press Records](#) is now available. To further explore the topic of music by women composers in the collections of the Library of Congress, check out the research guide [In Search of the Woman Composer: Finding Music by Women Library of Congress](#).

[1] “Ruth Schonthal – the loss of a unique voice.” Vox Novus.
http://www.voxnovus.com/composer/Ruth_Schonthal.htm

Categories

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