

# Robert Helps

## Biographical Sketch

Robert Helps\* was Professor of Music at the University of South Florida, Tampa, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He was a recipient of awards in composition from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim, Ford, and many other foundations. He was a recipient of a 1976 Academy Award from the Academy of Arts and Letters. His orchestral piece "Adagio for Orchestra," which later became the middle movement of his *Symphony #1*, won a Fromm Foundation award and was premiered by Leopold Stokowski and the Symphony of the Air (formerly the NBC Symphony) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. His *Piano Concerto #1* was commissioned by the Thorne Music Fund and premiered by the composer with the Manhattan Conservatory orchestra. His *Piano Concerto #2* was commissioned through the Ford Foundation by Richard Goode and performed by him with the Oakland (CA) Symphony.

Mr. Helps previously served as professor of piano at the New England Conservatory, the San Francisco Conservatory, Princeton University, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Manhattan School of Music. He was artist-in-residence (pianist) at the University of California-Davis in 1973.

He recorded extensively as pianist, composer, and pianist/composer on such labels as Victor, Columbia, Composers Recordings Inc., Deutsche Grammaphon, New World, Desto, Son Nova, and GM Recordings. Many of his compositions, including his *Symphony #1* (Naumburg Award) and *Gossamer Noons* for voice and orchestra, are recorded.

His works are published by C.F. Peters, Associated Music Publishers, E.B. Marks, and the American Composers Edition. He was revered as a solo and chamber music pianist all over the country with such descriptions as "a fantastic technique, incredible rhythmic power, a superb tone," and "understood musical romanticism and all that it demands by way of singing tone, relaxation, freedom, and grandiose display" (Alfred Frankenstein--*San Francisco Chronicle*--reviewing the Liszt Piano Concerto #2 with Pierre Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony); "playing of astonishing virtuosity" (Richard Dyer--*Boston Globe*); "stunning pianism--Helps' composition Portrait demands much of the pianist and tempts one to add Helps to the line of famous composer/pianists of the 19th and 20th centuries" (James Bossert--*Los Angeles Times*). Mr. Helps' major teachers were Abby Whiteside, piano, and Roger Sessions, composition.

He toured extensively with such internationally famous performers as Bethany Beardslee, soprano; Isidore Cohen, violinist; Rudolf Kolisch, violinist; Phyllis Curtin, soprano, and Aaron Copland, composer/pianist, and has for many years performed solo and chamber works, many of them world premieres, for internationally known chamber music and contemporary music organizations in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Minneapolis, and elsewhere. Historic concerts included memorial solo recitals of the music of renowned American composer Roger Sessions at both Harvard and Princeton Universities; an all-Ravel recital at Harvard, a solo recital in Town Hall, NY; four summers with Chamber Music West, the well-known San Francisco based summer festival; with Jorja Fleezanis, violinist and concert

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\*New Groves Dictionary of American Music, S.v. "Helps, Robert." and New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians, S.v. "Helps, Robert."

master of the Minnesota Symphony in Minneapolis, San Francisco, New York and Detroit; with Bethany Beardslee, soprano, in Boston, New York City (Town Hall) and Colorado Springs.

His late works included *Symphony No. 2 (2000)*, *Piano Trio No. 2*, *Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello (1993)*, several transcribed works for solo piano, *Eventually the Carousel Begins* for 2 pianos (commissioned by Norma and Leonard Mastrogiacomo from Tallahassee on a National Endowment for the Arts award), *A Mixture of Time* for guitar and piano which was premiered in San Francisco in June 1990 by Adam Holzman and the composer, *The Altered Landscape (1992)* for organ solo and *Shall We Dance (1994)* for piano solo written on commission for the Boston-based pianist Russell Sherman.

Season 1995-96 included two concerts in Merkin Hall, NYC--an all John Ireland recital and, in collaboration with Jorga Fleezanis, concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra, an all Roger Sessions recital celebrating his 100th birthday year. It also included an all Helps piano recital for Detroit's chamber music society, "Pro Musica," and, in 1997, much the same recital in New York City and Berlin, Germany, as a guest of Spectrum Concerts Berlin. He returned to Berlin in November 2000 for another solo recital with Spectrum and a performance of his Quartet for piano, violin, viola, and cello.

His most recent compositions are *Trio #2 for Piano, Violin and Cello*, commissioned by the University of South Florida for the Lions Gate Trio (performed by them in Tampa, France, Finland and New York City); the other, *Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello*, commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Inc. for the San Francisco based Dunsmuir Quartet and recently performed by them in many places including the National Gallery in Washington D.C. and the Composers Inc. series in San Francisco.

He recently completed *Symphony No. 2*, commissioned by the Institute for American Music at the Eastman School of Music. It was premiered February 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000, in Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater, Florida, by the Florida Orchestra, Jahja Ling, conductor.

Mr. Helps has received an honorary "Doctor of Humane Letters" from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

# Robert Helps

## Compositions

from C. F. Peters, Inc.

### PIANO SOLO

<i>Three Etudes</i>	P6998	1956 <sup>1</sup>	1966 <sup>2</sup>
<i>Recollections</i>	P66167	1959	1968
<i>Portrait</i>	P6997	1960	1966
<i>3 Hommages</i>	P66525	1971	1972
<i>Quartet for Piano</i>	P66404	1971	1972
<i>Nocturne</i>	P66563	1972	1974
<i>Waltzes by 25 Contemporary Composers (includes Valse Mirage by Helps)</i>	P66404	1977	1978
<i>Shall We Dance</i>	in production	1994	

### ONE PIANO FOUR HANDS

<i>Saccade</i>	P66282	1968	
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### TWO PIANOS FOUR HANDS

<i>Eventually the Carousel Begins</i>	P67209	1987	1991
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### PIANO SOLO AND PIANO FOUR HANDS

<i>Berceuse</i>	in production	1995	
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### VOICE AND PIANO

<i>The Running Sun</i> (poems by James Purdy)	P66650	1972	1976
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### CHAMBER MUSIC

<i>Trio #2 for Piano, Violin and Cello</i>		1996	2000
<i>Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello</i>		1997	2000

### ORCHESTRAL

<i>Concerto #1 for piano and orchestra</i>		1968	
<i>Gossamer Noons (for voice and orchestra) -- (poems by James Purdy)</i>		1974	
<i>Symphony #2</i>	in production	2000	2000

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<sup>1</sup> Date of composition

<sup>2</sup> Date of publication

**from Associated Music Publishers (G. Schirmer)**

<i>Symphony #1</i>	1955	
<i>Concerto #2</i> (for piano and orchestra)	1973	
<i>Music for Left Hand</i> (3 Etudes for Piano Solo)	1975	1976
<i>In Retrospect</i> (5 pieces for piano)	1977	1980
<i>Second Thoughts</i> (for solo flute)	1977	1980

**from Lawson-Gould (G. Schirmer)**

<i>New Music for the Piano</i> (includes Helps' <i>Image</i> )	1966	1967
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**from American Composers Edition**

170 W. 74th Street  
New York, NY 10023  
(212) 362-8900

<i>Two Songs for Voice and Piano</i> (Herman Melville)	1950	
<i>String Quartet</i>	1951	
<i>Fantasy</i> (for Piano)	1952	
<i>Trio</i> (for Violin, Cello and Piano)	1957	
<i>Nocturne</i> (for String Quartet)	1960	
<i>Solo</i> (for Piano)	1961	
<i>Fantasy</i> (for Violin and Piano)	1963	
<i>Postlude</i> (for Horn, Violin and Piano)	1964	
<i>Quintet</i> (for Violin, Cello, Flute, Clarinet and Piano)	1975	
<i>A Mixture of Time</i> (for Guitar and Piano)	1990	

**in manuscript**

<i>Duo for Cello and Piano</i> (1977)	1977	
<i>The Altered Landscape</i> (for organ) (1992)	1992	
<i>Chatting</i> (for 2 cellos) (1997)	1997	

**SONG TRANSCRIPTIONS**

<i>Schilflied</i> Mendelssohn-Helps (1988)	1988	
<i>Love Is a Sickness Full of Woes</i> John Ireland-Helps (1995)	1995	
<i>Chanson Pour Jeanne</i> Chabrier-Helps (1998)	1998	
<i>Testament</i> Duparc-Helps (1998)	1998	

## Recordings

### CDs

#### as COMPOSER & PIANIST

- Solo Flights--Robert Helps (*In Retrospect-5 Pieces for Piano*), CRI CD 864, 2000
- American Masters--ROBERT HELPS: *Symphony No. 1* (Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Zoltan Rozsnyai, cond.), *Gossamer Noons* (Bethany Beardslee, soprano; American Composer's Orchestra; Gunther Schuller, conductor), *3 Etudes* (piano), *Recollections* (piano), *3 Hommages* (piano), Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD717, 1996
- Robert Helps (*The Running Sun*) *But Yesterday Is Not Today*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Robert Helps, piano, New World Records 80243-2, 1996
- Robert Helps (*Nocturne* for String Quartet; *Hommage à Fauré*, *Hommage à Rachmaninoff* and *Hommage à Ravel*), David Del Tredici, Jan Radzinski and Tison Street, *New Chamber & Solo Music*, Robert Helps, piano, Members of Spectrum Ensemble Berlin (performing the *Nocturne*) and The Tel Aviv String Quartet, CRI CD 649, 1993
- Robert Helps (*Image*), Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, Irving Fine, Otto Luening, Virgil Thomson, William Albright, George Walker, Harvey Sollberger, Curtis Curtis-Smith, Ned Rorem, Joan Tower, Guy Klucevesk, Michael Gordon, Victoria Jordanova, Tan Dun and Alice Shields, *The Composer-Performer: The 40th Anniversary*, Cowell, Partch, Fine, Luening, Helps, Thomson, Albright, Walker, Sollberger, Curtis-Smith, Rorem, Tower, Klucevesk, Gordon, Jordanova, Dun and Shields, performers, CRI CD 680, 1994

#### as COMPOSER

- Piano Trios by Robert Helps [and others] (*Trio #2*), Lions Gate Trio, Centaur CRC 2410, 1999
- Incantations (pieces for solo flute--Robert Stallman, flautist), includes *Second Thoughts* for solo flute by Robert Helps, VAI Audio VAIA 1112, 1995
- Robert Helps (*Hommage à Fauré*), John Adams, Todd Brief and Roger Sessions, *Christopher O'Riley*, piano, Albany Records, TROY038-2, 1990
- Robert Helps (*Nocturne*, *Three Hommages: Hommage à Fauré*, *Hommage à Rachmaninoff*, *Hommage à Ravel* and *Schilflied--Mendelssohn/Helps*), Louis Moreau Gottschalk and Amy Beach, *The American Romantic*, Alan Feinberg, piano, ARGO 430 330-2, 1990
- Robert Helps (*Second Thoughts* for solo flute), Arthur Woodbury, Howard Buss, Hilton Kean Jones, Ingold Dahl and Robert Constable, *Premiers Plus One*, the McCormick Duo, Kim McCormick, flute and Robert McCormick, percussion, HoneyRock RM01, 1994
- *Trio #1 for Piano, Violin and Cello*; Francesco Trio; Contemporary American Piano Trios, Vol. 2, Music & Arts CD-933

#### as PIANIST

- Solo Flights--Leopold Godowsky (*Studies on Chopin's Etudes, No. 45*), CRI CD 864, 2000
- LEO KRAFT: *Allegro Giocoso*, Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD-799, 1998
- ROBER SESSIONS: *Sonata 3*, Robert Helps, piano, New World Records, 80546-2, 1998

- ROBER SESSIONS: *Sonatas 1-3, From My Diary*, Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD800, 1998
- A Tribute to Soprano Bethany Beardslee, *To Prove My Love* (Godfrey Winham), Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD724, 1996
- American Masters--VIVIAN FINE: *Sinfonia and Fugato for Solo Piano*, Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD692, 1995
- David Del Tredici (*Scherzo* for piano four-hands), Robert Helps and David Del Tredici, piano, CRI CD 689, 1995
- Arthur Berger (*Two Episodes*), *American Masters*, Paul Jacobs, Gilbert Kalish, Robert Helps, pianists, the Brandeis Festival Orchestra, Izler Solomon, cond., and the Columbia Chamber Ensemble, Gunther Schuller, cond., CRI CD 622, 1992
- Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy, *Stories, Airs and Verse*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, and Robert Helps, piano, GM Recordings GM2029CD, 1990
- Aaron Jay Kernis (*Brilliant Sky, Infinite Sky*), *Love Scenes*, Sanford Sylvan, baritone, Jorja Fleezanis, violin, Daniel Druckman, percussion, Robert Helps, piano, CRI CD 635, 1992

## LPs

### as COMPOSER & PIANIST

- Robert Helps (*The Running Sun*), *But Yesterday Is Not Today*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Robert Helps, piano, New World Records NW 243

### as COMPOSER

- Robert Helps, *Symphony No. 1*, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Zoltan Rozsnyai, cond., Columbia MS 6801
- Robert Helps, *Symphony No. 1*, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Zoltan Rozsnyai, cond., CRI SD 411
- Robert Helps (*Valse Mirage*), *The Waltz Project*, John Cobb, piano, Nonesuch D-79011
- Robert Helps, *Music of Robert Helps*, David del Tredici (*Three Etudes*), William Masselos (*Recollections*) and Robert Helps (*Quartet*), pianists, Desto Records DC-7122
- Robert Helps (*Gossamer Noons*), *Premiere*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, with American Composers Orchestra, Gunther Schuller, cond., CRI SD 384
- Robert Helps (*Saccade*), *American Contemporary*, Genevieve Chinn and Allen Brings, pianists, CRI SD 383

### as PIANIST

- Igor Stravinsky (*Requiem Canticles*), *The New Stravinsky*, Robert Craft, cond., Robert Helps, piano, Columbia MS 7386
- Arnold Schoenberg, *The Book of the Hanging Gardens*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Robert Helps, piano, SON NOVA 2
- *Music of Mel Powell & Milton Babbitt*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Robert Helps, piano, SON NOVA 1
- Arnold Schoenberg (*Pierrot Lunaire*), *The Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, Bethany Beardslee, soprano, Robert Helps, piano, and the Columbia Chamber Ensemble, Columbia MS 679

- Roger Sessions, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Robert Helps, piano, New World Records NW 307
- Roger Sessions, *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Robert Helps, piano, AR/Deutsche Grammophon 0654 086
- Roger Sessions, *Piano Sonata No. 1*, Robert Helps, piano, CRI 198
- *New Music for the Piano* (music by 24 composers), Robert Helps, piano, RCA Victor LSC-7042
- *New Music for the Piano* (music by 24 composers), Robert Helps, piano, CRI 288