

Entertainment

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It's music notes, not bank notes, in Getty's studio

By Hillary Hauser
News-Press Staff Writer

Every morning, Gordon Getty gets down to hard work in the studio of his mansion overlooking the San Francisco Bay, and he doesn't stop until long after the sun goes down.

As the fourth son of the oil magnate J. Paul Getty, Gordon Getty has a reported annual inherited income of at least \$70 million — but his daily labors have little to do with oil or bank notes.

Getty's work is dedicated to music notes.

His compositions — written for piano, orchestra, chorus and operatic performance — have created a big stir in U.S. and foreign music circles, and they are coming to Santa Barbara.

From Thursday to Feb. 7, Getty will be at UCSB, taking part in a series of concerts and forums that are free to the public.

On Friday at 2 p.m., he will participate in a composer's forum with Los Angeles Times music critic Martin Bernheimer, in UCSB music room 1145. At 8 p.m. the same day, Getty will attend a concert in Lotte Lehmann concert hall, where compositions by UCSB faculty members will be performed.

His own works will be performed by the UCSB music department 8 p.m. Saturday in Lotte Lehmann concert hall.

All events are free to the public, with space-reservation tickets available through the UCSB music office.

Getty's compositions are chiefly characterized by a unique amalgamation of literature and musical ideas, and they have been played by major symphonies, premiered at notable music festivals, and performed by illustrious operatic stars.

Some snicker about Getty's money buying performances for his work, but Getty doesn't care about such comments. He likes his music — that is the main thing — and he can't write fast enough to solidify all the musical ideas that come to him each day.

When reached by telephone one recent morning, Getty was already at work, proofreading a collection of choruses for a February recording session. He didn't mind being interrupted for an interview, and talked enthusiastically about his compositions, which spring from a lifetime love of English literature and music.



Composer Gordon Getty will be at UCSB beginning Thursday for concerts and forums.

He began studying piano at the age of 4 and while in college, he took to the stage to perform works by Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Schubert.

He also studied singing during his high school and college years, later performing the role of Germont in Verdi's "La Traviata" in both San Rafael, Calif., and Madrid.

However, Getty doesn't take any deep bows for his experience on stage, and said he prefers now to leave the public executions of his own compositions "up to the professionals."

About his vocal stage performances, he said, "I'm not that good." About his past piano performances, he said, "The third movement of the Moonlight Sonata was pretty heavy going — I don't think I took it at the same tempo as you hear in your CDs."

If Getty lacked something in delivery, he is apparently making it up in original output. His com-

positions range from a song cycle titled "The White Election," based on the poetry of Emily Dickinson, to "Plump Jack," based on excerpts from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Of all his compositions, "The White Election" is the work Getty said he was most proud of. "It has a reputation on."

"The White Election is based on the poetry of Emily Dickinson. It was (Emily Dickinson) who lived a reclusive life and to symbolizes purity, also. We're married in white and her life was something of a marriage to Reverend Wadsworth."

Getty said he became interested in Dickinson's poetry years after he had studied

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versity of San Francisco, where he earned a degree in English literature in 1956.

"I saw that her poetry could be a perfect text for a song cycle," Getty said. "So I started to work on it in 1980. Pretty soon I'd written several songs, and within nine or ten months, I'd finished 32 of them."

"The White Election" will be performed at UCSB by four student singers.

For those who worry about modern composers thrusting dissonant, atonal music on their romantic ears, Getty is sympathetic.

Modern music, he said, is too often "fingernails on the blackboard," written by composers who feel that "anything that irritates the audience must be good for them."

Atonal music, introduced by the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg over 70 years ago, Getty said, "is a dissonant wasteland."

"Excuse me, I think atonalism is a failure," he said. "But I think new composers are picking up a thread of tonality and harmony — not where Rachmaninoff and Strauss left off, but from the whole."

Getty described his music as conservative — also "aesthetic, eclectic, and embracing the whole history of music."

"But it's not that deliberate," he said. "We have to write the sounds we hear in our head and feel in our juices."

Getty's music has been described as an "uncomplicated melodic gift influenced by Schubert but without Schubert's restless harmonic adventuring."

Schubert is one of Getty's favorite composers. "For my two bits, the three greatest were Bach, Beethoven and Schubert," he said.

Getty's first composition was written during his university days — an a cappella chorus called "All Along the Valley." It was first published in 1959 by Composer's Press. Since then he has written five more a cappella choruses, and is now writing optional French horn and piano accompaniments for these works.

His favorite chorus is one called "Annabelle Lee," and his favorite piano piece is a German

title meaning "Deeper and Deeper." No matter what the medium or the message, Getty said his style is apparent.

"From my first pieces to the last, you can tell it's the same composer," he said.

Getty said he didn't write a note between 1962 and 1980.

"I spent 18 years without doing a thing," he said. "Until 'The White Election,' I didn't write anything. I ran into a dead end."

But he is philosophical about the creative process — which realistically includes dead ends.

"There are times I just plain don't have it," Getty said. "But this is one of the wonderful times that every burner is full up and every pot is on the boil. That's fine. Pretty soon, my desk will be clear and then I may go back to another 18 years of twiddling my thumbs."

Getty said he likes to hear whole pieces in his head before he sits down to write, and that he writes from about 9 a.m. to sunset.

About one hour a day is spent with financial advisers, who come to his studio to consult with him about business matters. And he shares an abundant social life with his wife, Ann.

Getty said he is known as an "absent-minded sort" who seems to be wishing he were somewhere else — like in his studio, composing.

"People who know me make allowances," he said. "I enjoy going out, I enjoy a normal life. I can be composing all day, and can still have a good time at dinner."

Getty said he writes to please himself. "If the audience doesn't like it, heck, they can do something else," he said. "So far, I sense audiences and I are on the same wave length. I sense that they respond to the same things I respond to."

Getty also said his experience with music critics has been fortunate.

"That isn't to say there hasn't been a torpedo once in a while," he said. "I just keep my fingers crossed, accept the occasional torpedo, bail and patch, and hope that the whole experience goes on as it has."