

## Martha Pryor Collection of Robert Shaw Letters, 1961-1967

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*The following notes were compiled during the course of processing the collection in the summer of 2012. The notes include author designation, quotations from the letters, and summaries of the respective letter's content.*

### Series I. Audition/Preseason letters August, September 1961 (3 letters)

1. August 9, 1961 – from Edna-Lea Burress
2. September 24, 1961 – from Robert Shaw
3. Undated – September 1961? – from Edna-Lea Burress

### Series II. 1961-1962 Season

4. October 12, 1961 3 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Punctuality at rehearsals: “Everything’s not coming up daises. There’s a frightful amount of ploughing, sowing, irrigating, fertilizing, and weeding to be done.”
  - Sectional attendance, leaving at intermission: “A chorus in performance is an overwhelming, apparently spontaneous, combustive union of hearts, minds, physical energies and sound. Such spontaneity is a lie... In art, as in a good many other affairs of men, miracles don’t just happen. They’re earned.”
  - “‘Intimation of morality’ unavailable to the solo performer”
  - Importance of the individual within the chorus
  - “If two rehearsals on a Benjamin Britten cantata do not short-cut and simplify the problems of learning a Walton cantata, then the conductor also should leave rehearsal at intermission – and stay away.”
  - “It all can be learned, and joyfully performed – but only if our work is informed with constancy, free from the drip-drop erosion of tardiness, absence, inattention.”
  - “Onward and upward, men! Ladies, stomp out sloth! We have nothing to choose but our lanes.”
5. October 20, 1961 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - “Dear monsters – ‘about time for the bi-animal progress report.’ “Omnium gatherum last Monday night [orchestra and chorus rehearsal] – and not a moment to swoon. “
  - G-himSzelf
  - [rehearsing Britten]
  - Very sarcastic, quotes from Grove – scholarly, creative remarks
  - Belshazzar’s feast by William Walton – cantata – 1931
  - Poem written by Robert Shaw
6. October 25, 1961 3 pages





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- “The COC is not the worst chorus in the world (it is not even the worst chorus in the United States), but think for a moment how far we are from having a common body of rhythmic awareness and technique – how variously we interpret dotted rhythms and the eighths and sixteenths which follow; how anarchistic is our sensitivity to pitch and tonality – how we flounder when faced with a cappella measures; how lame are our enunciative procedures – stopping three or four times each phrase for repetitive errors; and how limited is our tonal palette – geared primarily to outshout (or, on rare occasion, outshine) a symphony orchestra in full flight, but how seriously incapable of lightness and deftness, of madrigalesque clarity and flow. – Not that this state is any more your fault than that of your conductor (There are no bad choirs – only bad conductors) – but it is the state of union and more’s the pity.”

11. April 19, 1962 1 page

- From Robert Shaw
- Summing up the last concert of the 1961-62 season – St. John’s passion
- Explained the rules for the auditioned members of the Festival Casals trip

### Series III. 1962-1963 Season

12. October 16, 1962 2 pages

- From Robert Shaw
- Consonants! Lots of information regarding three types of consonants: those capable of sustained pitch (M, N, NG, also L, R and Z), those which have a fractional initial pitch (B, D, G, V, J, L, R, and Z), and those which have no pitch (P, T, K, F, CH, SH, S, and H).
- Information regarding initial and final consonants (Before, after beats)

13. October 23, 1962 1 page

- From Robert Shaw
- Vowels!

14. October 24, 1962 2 pages

- From Robert Shaw
- “Art by the many, perhaps like government by the many, is at its best when it not only allows but inspires the greatest possible individual participation, self-discipline and self-expression.”
- Note (I assume from Robert Shaw) quoted at the end of the second page

15. November 21, 1962 1 page

- From Robert Shaw
- Letter about using the voice – not using full voice until performance

16. Text Changes for *El Pessebre*

17. Guide to Pronunciation – Britten’s A Ceremony of Carols

18. November 27, 1962 2 pages

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- From Robert Shaw
- Punctuation, phrasing in music
- 19. January 9, 1963 4 pages
  - By Robert Shaw and Julius Herford
  - Paul Hindemith: a Requiem "For those we love" – notes written by Julius Herford and Robert Shaw
- 20. January 22, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Notes about performance – blend, balance, volume, reading, etc.
- 21. Washington Post review – January 28, 1963
- 22. January 31, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Older letter about the Hindemith requiem (?) – to collegiate chorale
- 23. February 6, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Letter with excerpt from Hindemith writings
  - Joke about sight-reading/choral singers
- 24. February 27, 1963 2 pages
  - Literal translation of Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms
- 25. February 14, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Talks about Hindemith's "Lilacs" – doesn't want the opportunity to slip past him to make this performance really spectacular
- 26. March 14, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Includes schedule for the Festival Casals trip
- 27. April 4, 1963 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - "I find myself saying to people on the West or East Coasts, when trying to explain the uniqueness of this chorus, that while ours is not an extraordinary level of vocal ability, there is a very rapid intellectual response to those things which can be learned: enunciation, rhythm, sensitivity to pitch etc."
  - "Fan letter" from R.S. to the chorus
  - "We could append an endless cud of coda here: the greater your success in your personal occupations the greater your contribution to the chorus and the greater therefore your own satisfaction! – for one sickening example."
  - "Suffice it to advise that when you are bullied hence for non-sense, you've had its retraction before the fact – in writing."

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28. April 21, 1963 1 page
- From Edna-Lea Burress
  - E.B. quotes from letter from the previous year about auditions for the Casals trip
29. April 23, 1963 2 pages
- From Edna-Lea Burress
  - E.B. letter – updates on Casals trip, upcoming performances, George Silfies goodbye gift.
  - Includes list of people going on Casals trip
30. May 10, 1963 1 page
- From Edna-Lea Burress
  - Letter from E.B. about Casals trip – vaccinations, roommates and such
31. May 17, 1963 2 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Robert Shaw letter about Casals trip – necessity of personal practice of repertoire
  - Six performances
32. May 21, 1963 1 page
- From Edna-Lea Burress
  - Information (practical) about trip
33. May 28, 1963 1 page
- Letter from Edna-Lea Burress

### Series IV. 1963-1964 Season

34. October 3, 1963 3 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Excerpt from a Haydn commentary by H.C. Robbins Landon
  - Rehearsal schedule info
35. October 10, 1963 5 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Includes texts of Litanies a la vierge noire by Poulenc
  - “Phony” but helpful phonetic transliteration
36. October 22, 1963 2 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Stressed the importance of practicing on one’s own, and added another rehearsal – sectional
37. November 8, 1963 2 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Letter after performance of Haydn Mass
38. November 27, 1963 1 page

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- Letter from Edna-Lea Burress about Missa Solemnis – need for another rehearsal
- 39. December 5, 1963 1 page
  - R.S. about Missa Solemnis
- 40. January 21, 1964 1 page
  - Letter from Mr. Buchdale? – manager
- 41. February 4, 1964 3 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - R.S. about rhythm, speech – Honegger's King David and Verdi's Requiem?
  - Concluded with two pages about consonants
- 42. February 11, 1964 1 page
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Taken from a letter from R.S. to Collegiate Chorale (?) Feb. 24, 1944
  - "Breathe according to sense, not whimsy"
- 43. February 18, 1964 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Rhythm – music has time
  - "Any great artist phrases within the rhythm; he does not distort rhythm to fit his phrase. He lets music live its own life."
  - C.C. 10/3/44
- 44. February 25, 1964 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Rhythm
  - "Rests are real and rhythmic. They are not unspecified timeless vacuums. They too have time-ness. They are as much a part of music as the singing. They are recoil and momentum and drama. They are to be felt intensely and observed meticulously."
  - Guidelines about releases, attacks
- 45. March 4, 1964 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - "I believe, then, that spirit in music is not the wholesale emotional orgasm that weeps appropriately in public, but rather with marshaling of one's keenest, most critical intellectual and moral forces to the point of complete consciousness – 'til one hears in terms of values and the movements of values, until the most pedestrian minutiae of pitch and rhythm are heard inwardly in relation to adjacent minutiae; and finally in relation to wholes of form, tonality and intent."
  - "I believe that we are only at the beginning. I believe we can scale and direct every rehearsal to this end, and that in those hours will lie the "life we have lost in living – the wisdom we have lost in knowledge – the knowledge we have lost in information."
- 46. March 10, 1964 5 pages

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- From Robert Shaw
  - Enunciation – vowels, diphthongs, consonants, explosive consonants, hummed consonants/secondary vowels
  - “I’ve heard people quote Mozart something like this: “What is music? Music is first of all Rhythm; in the second place – Rhythm; and finally – Rhythm.”
  - Sixteenth note joke
47. King David Text 12 pages
48. April 15, 1964 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Note about the San Juan Festival
49. June 18, 1964 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Dear All – Including Eddie – So far – so hot – Panama is not for top – over or under coats. Beautiful Verdi’s – Thanks – And Puerto richer and richer”
  - From a postcard from R.S.

### Series V. 1964-1965 Season

50. August 15, 1964 1 page
- From Edna-Lea Burress
  - Repertory for the 1964-65 season: Bach Christmas Oratorio, Mozart Requiem, Beethoven Ninth, Britten War Requiem, Christmas Twilight
51. Undated 1 page
- Letter to Martha from Louis Lane, Conductor of the Pops Concerts, thanking her for her support
52. September 23, 1964 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Letter about new members (seating rotations), greeting new members
53. October 1, 1964 2 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - All about R.S.’s tour to South America
54. October 6, 1964 3 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Rhythm
  - “The basic problem of rhythmic cohesion in large musical groups is not one engendered by the disparity in sight-reading abilities, but one traceable to the basic inabilities of most people to divide an appreciable moment of time by two or by three. The blessed assurance is that, unlike some prospects of salvation, this can be learned and, more importantly, self-taught.”

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55. October 13, 1964 6 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Language, text, rhythm, phrasing
  - Language meanings: dictionary or literal meaning, tradition/association, language of language (onomatopoeia), the composer's intent and meaning
56. October 22, 1964 5 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Phrasing
  - The choral craft has three major divisions: time, tone, text
  - Time: tempo, duration, stress
  - Text: syllable stress, punctuation, style of enunciation
  - Tone: intonation, color, vibrato, dynamics
57. October 29, 1964 3 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Logistics about Oberlin/Severance Hall/Lakewood concerts
  - The COC-ODDS will sing the Oberlin performance. This was the chorus at the west end of last Monday's rehearsal and set-up... this enormous decision hung on a series of almost unbelievable coincidences, to-wit: almost all our Oberlin (and vicinity) personnel are ODD."
  - "Best wishes for a tragic Requiem"- performing Mozart's Requiem
58. December 3, 1964 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Letter about logistics for concert in Warren, Ohio
59. December 17, 1964 2 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Martha/Martie Eckleberry Pryor writes at the top: "This one is a silly letter"
  - "This letter Banned in Boston!"
  - First paragraph - !
  - "In the name of the father, the son and jimmy brown"
60. December 29, 1964 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - 8-line poem – Robert Shaw and Edna-Lea Burress
61. Undated 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Invitation to reception, thank you note (?)
62. January 14, 1965 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Text written in the shape of a dagger

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- “We might as well get right down to the nitty-gritty of it. Last Monday night’s rehearsal was a debacle, completely unworthy of the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus... This chorus is not a social club. Such satisfactions as we gain because of musical excellence are achieved through self discipline and undivided responsibility. The fact that we enjoy our collaborator’s company is a splendid bonus, but even this would disappear did we not address ourselves firstly, secondly, and throughout to the music... Monday night should be an occasion for pooling our skills and knowledge, not our ignorances.”
- 63. February 19, 1965 1 page
  - From Edna-Lea Burress
  - “Be thee of good cheer and come out singing”
- 64. February 25, 1965 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Extended analysis of Britten’s War Requiem, with Wilfred Owen’s text
- 65. March 3, 1965 9 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - “What’s the difference between St. Paul and N.V. Peale? Give up? St. Paul’s appealing”
  - Another in-depth analysis of the War Requiem text
- 66. War Requiem translation 7 pages
- 67. March 11, 1965 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - More on the War Requiem
- 68. June 16, 1965 1 page
  - From Robert Shaw
  - From “K the Bookie”
  - Letter about greeting the traveling orchestra at the airport with a hymn (new words to Freude)

### Series VI. 1965-1966 Season

- 69. August 30, 1965 1 page
  - Letter from Edna-Lea Burress about the coming season, auditions for the chamber chorus, announced the pieces for the year, etc.
- 70. September 30, 1965 1 page
  - From Robert Shaw
  - “Phellopolylinguists – phascinating season this, word-wise (and the phormer to the latter should be suphicient).”
  - Slavonic, English, German, Hebrew, Romanized Latin, Middle English, etc. – lots of languages!
- 71. October 7, 1965 1 page

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- Letter concerning the Chamber Chorus successful auditions, followed by the three inserts about the Slavonic Mass and Britten
  - Janáček – M'sa Glagolskaja 1 page
  - Slavonic Mass transliteration 3 pages
  - Britten pronunciation 2 pages
72. October 20, 1965 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - "More rehearsals back to back like Sunday's rehearsal and Monday's vivisectional certainly should qualify us as contenders for the crown of World's Best Losers."
73. Slavonic Mass 2 pages
74. October 28, 1965 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - "The sweetest music of the spheres is a chorus saying, "Shshsh\_\_\_\_\_." To itself "We're working." It begins to feel like my old blanket again. – Linus"
  - Includes performance week schedule
75. Undated 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - "Hey Troops: Miss you terribly. Wish you were here Monday night. Love, R"
76. November 23, 1965 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - "To put it vulgarly – I want this chorus to be the fastest-reading chorus in the world. By exposure to contemporary writing (of which we've faced not nearly enough), by occasional recourse to baby-bugging sight-singing exercises, and by a solid back-up store of second-nature techniques – rhythm, enunciation, dynamics, style – I think it can be done. – And in our time. (Which could be short.)"
  - "This chorus must be the most individually self-critical group in existence. I wish we would see hands flying in the air all over the room before the conductor even has a chance – or ears enough – to hear the mistakes. "I goofed!" is not the same as "mea culpa!" All of us can goof, and the more of these we recognize the greater are our own technical sensibilities."
77. Undated 3 pages
- From Robert Shaw
  - Information about Leos Janacek from International Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians
  - "Fellopolylinguists – thank you for the sustained concentration of last Monday night. Never has so little been accomplished by so many in so much time with such great effort. There must have been a madnius in St. Cyril's Methodius."
78. Translation Slavonic Mass 2 pages
79. November 9, 1965 19 pages

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- Translation of The Seasons by Alice Parker and Thomas Pyle
- 80. December 2, 1965 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - “That grandest of “Hallelujahs” (which – horrors! I once conducted with five thousand voices in one of our country’s leading live-stock arenas) “is become” a joyous, iridescent madrigal of men and angels. (If anyone stands up during its performance at these concerts out of deference to the tradition instituted by a remote monarch who mistook it for the national anthem, or who did not realize that an intermission followed directly, he can have his head back.)”
- 81. Busoni translation 1 pages
- 82. Bloch translation 5 pages
- 83. February 11, 1966 5 pages
  - Program notes were written by Ernest Bloch about his Sacred Service
  - Cleveland Orchestra Chorus Itinerary – Carnegie Hall Concerts
- 84. March 2, 1966 1 page
  - Unknown – Letter from Edna-Lea Burress?
  - “Having just looked over my left shoulder at our schedule I find, horror of horrors, we have just two more weeks left to our season. It is a sad thing to contemplate for me – and so early, too!”

### Series VII. 1966-1967 Season

- 85. August 23, 1966 1 page
  - Letter from Edna-Lea Burress
  - “It seems that it will be just about the most exciting of Mr. Shaw’s eleven seasons in Cleveland.”
- 86. September 14, 1966 1 page
  - Robert Shaw letter about Bell Telephone Hour (television in Cleveland?)
  - “Since we will not have finished our new-member auditions, all former and returning members are urged to attend in phull photogenical and phocal phinery. What we are denied in quantity we shall unhesitatingly vouchsafe in quality. (How about that vouchsafe? ‘Never figured it would cross our typewriter, did you? Still – I’d vouchsafe not too many of use have been on candid camera before.)”
- 87. September 22, 1966 2 pages
  - From Robert Shaw
  - Fact No. 1: “This chorus is an enormously responsive and responsible musical instrument. Techniques of rhythmic and enunciative articulation, which in other choruses have to be re-taught with each new score, in the main here are part of a dependable and habitual musical ensemble. These exist, we all must admit, in spite of an average vocal



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- Letter from Edna-Lea Burress about Christmas concert, about Robert Shaw's gift
94. December 15, 1966 2 pages
- Letter from Robert Shaw
  - "I do hope that this Sunday's concert may bring you some of the glimmers and glows of Christmas – as certainly your rehearsal of last Monday was the handsomest possible gift to your conductor. I'm staggered every time I reflect how much rehearsal and production time would be demanded by the commercial professionals on either coast to match what you achieve so happily and quickly. Thanks for a whole mother-and-sonning decade of Ho-ho-ho and Hark hark hark!
95. January 5, 1966 [1967?] 1 page
- Letter to Martha Eckelberry from Ron Davis about taking a leave from teaching (Euclid Public Schools) in order to sing with the chorus at Carnegie Hall
96. January 5, 1967 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - "I see my responsibilities as two: first, teaching the work to you in the most felicitous, facile and perdurable fashion – which means to me "back to fundamentals". (Wasn't Tuesday's rehearsal a pride of rudiments? Is anything in music – or aught else – so satisfying as a little bit of all-right?) My second responsibility, obviously, is to deliver to Mr. Szell, certainly in Cleveland but very specially in New York – where the work has four major performances this season under four major conductors with four major orchestras – a choral instrument without flaw or compromise."
  - "Your responsibility, beyond absolutely unqualified rehearsal attendance and attention, is to spend some part of every day in intense private study. The more you know, the more you will learn. The very best of us – the most accomplished – will learn the most."
97. January 10, 1967 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - Letter about Missa Solemnis in New York City (Carnegie Hall performance)
  - Everyone is needed
98. 1967? 1 page
- From Robert Shaw
  - About the Missa Solemnis rehearsals with Mr. Szell
99. February 14, 1967 1 page
- Letter from Edna-Lea Burress
  - "It just goes to prove that there is more spirit and backbone in the COC than in any other chorus in the world. Combine these with an enormous sense of responsibility, a boundless pride in our COC family and a whole-hearted sense of cooperation and respect for one another and the music to be sung and you find us. Happiness is the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus."

**Martha Pryor Collection of Robert Shaw Letters, 1961-1967**

**Robert Shaw letters:**

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19 (plus Julius Herford)
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68 – from “K the bookie”
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79 (translation of the Seasons by Alice Parker and Thomas Pyle)
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**Edna-Lea Burress letters:**

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**Translations:**

24 (Stravinsky's <i>Symphony of Psalms</i> )
66 (War Requiem)
78 (Slavonic Mass)
81 (Busoni)
82 (Bloch)
91 (Stravinsky <i>Symphony of Psalms</i> )

**Texts:**

16 (Text for <i>El Pessebre</i> )
17 (Pronunciation for Britten's <i>A Ceremony of Carols</i> )
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**Other:**

21 (Washington Post review)
40 (letter from Mr. Buchdale? Name unreadable)
51 (Undated, letter from Louis Lane about the Pops Concerts at Public Auditorium, which Martha Eckelberry supported)
73 (Slavonic Mass by Leos Janacek information)
83 (Program notes by Ernest Bloch about his Sacred Service)
95 (Ron Davis - note to Martha Eckelberry about absence from school during choir tour)

**Unknown:**

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