

Sheet Music's an 'Amazing Gift'

Chapman University Gets Collection

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BOB GRIESEER / Los Angeles Times

Woodwinds virtuoso George Waln, 90, with clarinet, treasured sheet music at his Laguna Hills home.

LAGUNA HILLS—Giving away 500 pieces of sheet music written for clarinet, oboe, bassoon, French horn and flute wasn't exactly George Waln's idea. It was, he said, Father Time's.

"When you get to be 90, you have to think about the future," said the woodwinds virtuoso, who has taught, performed and composed for more than 50 years. As Waln and his wife of 36 years, Elsa, prepared to move from Leisure World in Laguna Hills to a smaller retirement home, Elsa realized they had to take inventory and give up some possessions to save space.

So two weeks ago, Waln donated his sheet music collection, worth about \$15,000, to Chapman University in Orange. The George Waln Woodwind Library—a room in the school's music library where Waln's sheet music is displayed—may be one of the country's most extensive single collections of solo and ensemble pieces covering that instrumental category, Chapman officials said.

"It's an amazing gift," said John Koshak, Chapman's

orchestra conductor. "There are 107 woodwind quintets. . . . There are solos, duets, trios, quartets and choirs.

"Other schools were after it. We're real privileged."

Waln said it was difficult to give up the essence of a career that spanned decades.

"That's putting it mildly," he said. "Such great nostalgia, but I knew I had to give it up."

Several universities, including Oberlin's Conservatory of Music and the University of Maryland, sent hopeful letters of request for Waln's collection.

Waln said he chose Chapman because he has a strong friendship with Koshak, noting that it was also more practical to have the music picked up and taken to the nearby campus than to box it up and ship it away.

Waln taught music at Oberlin College's Conservatory of Music from 1929 until 1969, spending summers teaching in Idaho, Arizona, California, Oregon, Iowa and New York, among others.

He retired to California, but

taught part time at USC until 1972 before retiring again and moving from Glendale to Laguna Hills.

Koshak, who said he knew of Waln as "one of the major figures in music," since his own student days in the 1950s, asked him to teach part time at Chapman. Waln's third teaching stint lasted from 1973 to 1980.

"People would ask me why I worked so hard," Waln said. "Every place is a new experience, a new environment. It wasn't work. It was great."

Arnold Morrison, who majored in music education at Chapman from 1973-79 and became a soloist with the college orchestra under Waln's tutelage, said that Waln had a special rapport with students. He invited them to his home and played group pieces with them.

Waln visited Morrison in Delano, where his former student now teaches woodwinds to elementary schoolchildren.

Waln "can still play a whole page in one breath," Morrison said. "I still can't do that."

At his Laguna Hills home, Waln flipped through a stack of photos of former students, remembering

their names and where they went. "This fellow," he said, pointing to one photo, "conducts a symphony orchestra in Akron."

He also pointed out his 1935 Oberlin student quintet, which performed at a musical convention at New York's Metropolitan Opera House, and a treasured copy of a huge anthology dedicated to him by Instrumentalist magazine, for which he wrote 66 articles.

Waln said he doesn't perform much anymore, though playbills of two performances for community groups in the past two months lay on his desk.

He proudly displayed a large B-flat clarinet resting in its case. His career began more than 80 years ago, he said, when he took his father's clarinet from the closet while his father was out farming corn in the Iowa fields. Waln eventually took up all the woodwinds but still favors the clarinet most.

"You always have to keep practicing," he said, "though, at my age, learning new things is harder."