

# UNM Dean's Trust

## A Legacy of Music

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The University of New Mexico recently has received much press attention and some criticism which often fails to recognize many excellent, lesser known activities. One such activity is the celebration and remembrance by UNM and the UNM Robb Musical Trust of the 20 years of the ongoing local, national and international living legacy of one of its distinguished "legendary" deans who continues to make a real difference in the music and culture of New Mexico through the university.

That man was John Donald Robb, dean of the UNM College of Fine Arts from 1942-1957. Last year was the 20th memorial year following his death and also the 20th year of the active enhancement of his legacy by the UNM Robb Musical Trust.

That legacy includes his role as a strongly committed educator of students, a prominent composer of symphonies, concertos, operas and songs (more than 40 performances nationally and world-wide by major symphony and chamber orchestras, including 11 by the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra and its predecessors), outstanding collector, author and preserver of Hispanic culture and folk music — the latter of which were in serious danger of irretrievable loss.

The Robb Musical Trust memorial year is particularly heartening at a time when arts are challenged in our community and the public schools — and in view of the recent financial difficulties of arts organizations such as the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra.

The dean and his wife, Harriet, engaged in a massive preservation effort by collecting, recording (utilizing a wire recorder connected to the car battery) and later writing comprehensive, authoritative books about these folk songs

which they discovered in small rural villages often during convivial Saturday afternoon community gatherings. A full 3,000 of his on-site field recordings are now safely preserved on CD recordings enabled by the Robb Trust, housed in the John Donald Robb Archives of the UNM Libraries' Center for Southwest Research and now available to the world through the Internet.

Robb's passion for the preservation of Hispanic culture through its folk songs is further reflected in his longtime friendships with many of the folksingers such as famous woodcarver, George Lopez of Cordova, and through many articles on the subject and his comprehensive, authoritative books, "Hispanic Folk Songs of New Mexico" and the "Hispanic Folk Music of New Mexico and the Southwest: A Self Portrait of a People." His folk opera, "Little Jo," based on the life of a young boy in a remote Hispanic village in northern New Mexico incorporates 18 of his collected folk songs which provide the musical heart of his musical score.

This celebration year has been replete with extraordinary performances and honors including Kelly Kowalski and Jason Skinner's KNME-TV-5's Emmy Award for the interactive Web site featuring the documentary, "The Adventures of John Donald Robb in New Mexico."... The year also inspired a number of concerts of Robb's compositions, including one all-Robb concert in Albuquerque... and presenting with UNM the annual trust-supported international John Donald Robb 38th UNM Composers' Symposium and the national and international John Donald Robb Composers' Competition.

In 2010, the Trust remains poised for collaboration with UNM and the community in embracing its mission to support Robb's musical legacy, and to further his inspiring commitment to education and the understanding of music of the Southwest.