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Opera archive honoring famed Italian tenor donated to library

A recent archival donation to the Performing Arts Collection at UC Santa Barbara Library opens a new door for researchers, historians and opera fans with the establishment of the Enrico Caruso Jr. Collection, named for the son of legendary Italian tenor Enrico Caruso (1873–1921), a pioneer in the history of sound recording. The trove of rare recordings, manuscripts, photographs and related ephemera was gifted by Andrew Farkas, a distinguished librarian and scholar of the genre.

Caruso's early embrace of the recording medium helped popularize his celebrated voice, and his recordings set new standards for operatic artistry and played a crucial role in demonstrating the commercial potential of the emerging industry.

"UCSB was the natural choice for this collection because of its commitment to supporting research in the performing arts," said Farkas, who was a personal friend of Caruso Jr. "Ultimately, I wanted to ensure that future generations of scholars and opera enthusiasts would have access to these invaluable materials."

Over the years, Farkas became the custodian of a substantial collection of Caruso family memorabilia. Highlights of the collection include rare 78 rpm recordings from 1939, lacquer recordings of radio interviews with Caruso Jr. and his wife, and scripts and photos from Warner Bros films "La Buenaventura" (1934) and "El Cantante de Napoles" (1935).

The donation also included 29 handwritten letters from the elder Caruso's estranged common-law wife, Ada Giachetti, to their son Caruso Jr. Written from Brazil in between 1938 and her death in 1946, the letters — each translated into English by Caruso Jr. — offer intimate family insight.

"This donation perfectly complements our current holdings of Enrico Caruso recordings with one-of-a-kind primary source materials," said Performing Arts Curator David Seubert. "The rarity and breadth of this collection will provide support to scholars and enthusiasts worldwide to explore the rich legacy of the Caruso family."

Born in Budapest, Farkas developed a passion for opera during his youth, frequently attending performances at the local opera company and fostering a lifelong dedication to the art form. After immigrating to the US, Farkas earned an advanced degree in library science and served as the founding library director at the University of North Florida from 1970 until his retirement in 2003. As an opera aficionado, Farkas authored numerous articles, book chapters, encyclopedia entries and five books on notable opera personalities, including the definitive biography, "Enrico Caruso: My Father and My Family," coauthored with Caruso Jr.

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