

## Rose Mary Betts Locke Collection Biography

Rose Mary Betts Locke was a musician and businesswoman who made a significant contribution to the musical arts in the Toledo area. She tried her hand at many aspects of music and performance, including conducting, accompanying and composing, all while raising a family and running her own business.

Rose Mary, known as "Patsy" for many years, was born in 1925 in Maumee, Ohio, to Dr. Charles and Mary Betts, joining older half-brothers Paul and Elston Ervin and sister Bonnie. Dr. Betts was a well-known dentist who, in addition to his Toledo practice, campaigned against the use of aluminum cookware and the fluoridation of water, believing their use caused cancer. Rose Mary was a talented and accomplished pianist from a very early age, and was a student of Lina Keith.

Rose Mary was always a romantic – she fell in love with a handsome soldier during World War II, William Locke, and after a long courtship by overseas mail, she married him in July of 1945. She had completed two and a half years of college at the University of Toledo by that time, but did not return to college until her late fifties. She and Bill moved to a new house on the Betts farm in Monclova in 1953 and for many years she raised their children full time – six of them in all.

In 1957 she took a bow tie apart, decided she could make one as well or better, and made up a sample father-son bow tie set. While Bill was skeptical of this new business idea, Rose Mary drove herself to several department stores and, in one day, got orders for twelve dozen. Thus "Ties by Rose Mary" was born, and the business became so successful that Bill quit his other sales job in 1960 and devoted himself to selling ties. Nearly the entire house was a manufacturing plant for the marking, sewing, and assembly of bow ties.

Rose Mary had continued her piano practicing over the years, and the house was full of music of some sort most of the time. She wrote in her journal in 1960, "Oh, the music! That is really all there is in the world!" Later in that year she wrote, "I long ago decided that housework is for those who don't have a cat or a book or a record to beguile." Around 1961 she became involved as an accompanist for the musical "Fiorello" at the Waterville Playshop. "Once Upon a Mattress" followed at the Toledo Repertoire Theatre, then back to Waterville for "Pajama Game." Other accompanying jobs ensued, including work for the Suburban Singers, the Kerwin Theatre Ballet Company, the Toledo Choral Society, the O-I Theatre Guild, the Maumee Civic Theatre, the University of Toledo, Lynro Productions, the Bedford Singers, Music Under the Stars, and many area high schools.

Inevitably, Rose Mary looked for new challenges in the area of music, and joined the Toledo Choral Society as a singer. In 1965 her journal states, "I think I would like to conduct. And boy would I raise hell!" And so she did, going on to conduct musicals (sometimes accompanying and making costumes as well) and to produce two Gilbert and Sullivan operettas at the First Congregational Church. Her next challenge was in the field of church music, and she was organist and/or choir director for Covenant Presbyterian, First Baptist, and Maumee Presbyterian Churches (though not all at the same time). She even found a second-hand church organ, complete with foot pedals, and installed it at the end of her kitchen for practicing!

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In 1973, Rose Mary wanted to sing more challenging and unusual choral pieces, so she gathered a group of people at a friend's house to sight-read some she had bought. This little group became the Benjamin Locke Chorale (later the Masterworks Chorale) when she turned over the conducting reins to her son Ben while she accompanied. After Ben left Toledo to pursue his graduate studies, Rose Mary started her own chorale and performed numerous concerts at the First Baptist Church. Health problems forced her to discontinue church work, but she and Bill found enjoyment and income in the antique and flea market business. She was also a collector - she had a complete collection of Glenn Miller recordings on 78 rpm, hundreds of pieces of Blue Willow china, gorgeous costume jewelry, sheet music and thousands of books. Her lifelong interest in secondhand stores and garage sales became yet another business.

Perhaps the accomplishment Rose Mary was most proud of was writing her own musical, "If the Shoe Fits," based on the story of Cinderella. She began writing songs for it in 1966, and produced it herself at a Toledo church in 1970. A teacher she met at a choral workshop in 1988 expressed interest in producing the show, and this inspired her to rework the music again. She became interested in the wonders of synthesizers and electronic recording, and wrote new arrangements of the show's songs with the help of her daughter Jessica. By October of that year she had recorded all of them in a local studio, using friends and other family members as singers. Her personal goal was to "make music with the best people," and she felt she was doing just that, writing "I know what I want and I think it shows."

A real high point in her life was going to the Blossom Music Center to see Leonard Bernstein in person conducting the New York Philharmonic. He had always been an inspiration to her, and she wrote of the experience: "Oh, the wonder of it, the absolute magic! All I know is that in a lifetime of listening I have nothing to compare it to...it was for me the impossible dream come true."

Rose Mary only occasionally referred to her many accomplishments in her journal. "I guess I have done so many wonderful things that (going to chamber music concerts) pales in comparison—remember playing the Nutcracker? Carmina Burana? Bach for the Swingle Singers? The Shostakovich dances? Or the ballad from Threepenny Opera? West Side Story? Singing with (Robert) Fountain-Directing all those wonderful things with my chorale - why did none of it last? I've really made a lot of music and I should have no regrets now but there is this sadness... and then I'm running out of time!"

Rose Mary was never bored. She loved to read—she wrote in her journal "How I love my books— my Colette, Wolfe, Cary and every one, these are my treasures—these and this blessed farm." Her children's reading was never censored and they were encouraged to make decisions for themselves. Rose Mary loved to laugh, to give parties and to have witty conversations with actors, artists, and musicians. She was strongly influenced by her dentist father, inheriting his distrust of the medical profession and joined the Christian Science Church so that her children wouldn't have to be immunized to attend public school. She had strong religious beliefs, and often used the Bible for guidance in making decisions. One friend reminisced about her giving him a

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mustard seed (for faith) when he needed a job. He found a job, still has it, and never forgot her gesture.

Rose Mary wrote many clever compositions for church pageants, with lines like the ones sung by the three wise men:

Brave shepherds we, we follow yonder star  
On this the night that changed our cal-en-dar.

One of her favorites, "A Child's Carol," which is still performed by churches all over the country at Christmas, has the following words:

Look at the baby lying there; look at the light upon his hair  
I wonder why he does not cry, a bed made of straw must be scratchy.  
Look at the kings and wise men too, what does a king and wise man do?  
A crown of gold is hard to hold, when riding on a camel.  
Why is the sky so bright? May I stay up tonight? What is that light up above him?  
Why should a baby be born in a stable? Was nobody able to love him?  
Why did they bring him frankincense? What can he do with frankincense?  
A little boy should have a toy—I think I will give him mine, then.

Rose Mary gave her children the love of movies, especially foreign ones – she loved Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy movies and "Amahl and the Night Visitors" on television. Her children gave her a VCR so she could enjoy newer movies at home.

She influenced many people she met through the years. Three of her children went into music as a career, and many other acquaintances have continued to make music part of their lives via church choirs, orchestras and amateur musicals. People who knew her spoke often of her musical inspiration, her challenging and beautiful choices in music, and her great sense of humor. She gave people confidence and faith in their abilities, with a non-judgmental attitude that made them feel comfortable and welcome. Many people mentioned feeling that she treated them like part of the family.

Of course she had her negative points —she was a perfectionist about absolutely everything, was nearly impossible to please, worried to excess about details, and had a lifelong (losing) battle with ice cream. She wrote in her journal, "I see the world in exactly my own way—and I can't bear for others not to see it my way, but they never do." Her criticism of others was also turned inward—she was more talented and capable than she thought she was—but some days she would write self-confidently, "I can't mess with my gift, I've discovered. I have to trust and accept it and not let it be picked apart—I can't write to please."

During the last two years of her life, Rose Mary suffered from worsening vision problems, and just before Christmas, 1988, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She died January 9, 1989, at her home in Monclova.

Rose Mary remained a romantic to the end, and believed that there would be a happily-ever-after for her and her music —that she would regain her health and be a famous published composer. She may be gone, but "If the Shoe Fits" lives on— her daughter Jessica produced it in Boston, and is marketing the show with prerecorded accompaniment.

(Written by Becky Locke-Gagnon)

## Rose Mary Betts Locke Collection Inventory

Box 1

Folder 1

Poetry

1. "Storm" 1941
2. "Song to the Night" December 1943
3. "Flight" January 17, 1944
4. "Starlight" January 19, 1944
5. Untitled January 28, 1944
6. "Sorrow" January 29, 1944
7. Untitled February 9, 1944
8. "Friendship" January, December 1944
9. "Study in Blue" January 1, 1945
10. "The Jewel" March 25, 1945
11. Untitled March 29, 1945
12. Untitled April 1, 1945
13. "Elegy" April 3, 1945
14. "Portrait of Night" April 10, 1945
15. "Blow Wind, Blow" April 16, 1945
16. Untitled May 13, 1946
17. "Treasury" January 24, 1947 (2 copies, typed and manuscript)
18. "Nocturne" September 30, 1950
19. "Lines on a Concert by Gerard Souzay" January 16, 1952
20. Untitled March 7, 1952
21. Untitled March 10, 1952
22. "October" October 23, 1952, June 9, 1953
23. "For Only One" March 24, 1953
24. "The Trojan Beetle" n.d.
25. "Johnny's Adventures in Bunny Land" n.d.
26. "Rhapsody" n.d.
27. "Restraint" n.d.
28. "To a violinist – my husband" n.d.
29. Untitled, n.d. (3 poems)

Folder 2

Stories

1. "Impressions of a Thursday Afternoon" 1941
2. "Ben and the Runaway Rollercoaster" n.d.
3. "Decision" n.d.
4. "The Lucky Hat" ca. 1953
5. Untitled n.d.

Folder 3

Periodical Articles by Rose Mary Locke

1. "'Quick Mix' Babies", *The American Baby*, September 1954, p. 14
2. "The Lucky Hat", *The Canadian Red Cross Junior*, October 1954, pp. 22-23

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### Box 1 (cont.)

- Folder 3 Periodical Articles by Rose Mary Locke (cont.)
3. "I Was Overjoyed by Natural Childbirth", *My Baby Magazine*, October 1953, p. 21+
  4. "The More the Merrier", *My Baby Magazine*, August 1954, p. 15+
- Folder 4 Correspondence
1. To Dr. Charles T. Betts, Toledo, Ohio, From Patsy, Williams, Arizona, July 31, 1945
- Folder 5 Rose Mary Locke Chorale Newsletter
1. [April 1984?]
  2. May 30, 1984
  3. July 1984
  4. September 1984
  5. September 10, 1985 (2 copies)
- Folder 6 Programs, 1972-1988
1. Ruddigore, First Congregational Church, July 21-22, 28-29, 1972
  2. Jesus Christ, Superstar, Toledo Masonic Auditorium, October 4-5, 1974 (2 copies)
  3. Benjamin Locke Chorale, November 30, 1974
  4. Benjamin Locke Chorale, November 23, 1975
  5. Benjamin Locke Chorale, 1980-81 Season
  6. Benjamin Locke Chorale, March 22, 1981
  7. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, May 21, 1983
  8. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, August 28, 1983
  9. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, November 27, 1983
  10. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, December 30, 1983
  11. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, May 12, 1984
  12. Rose Mary Locke Chorale, August 11, 1984
  13. If the Shoe Fits, an original musical comedy by Rose Mary Locke, May 20-21, 1988, n.d.
- Folder 7 Roster, Benjamin Locke Chorale, April 1, 1980
- Folder 8 Photographs (color photocopies)  
(Original photographs are in the Picture File)
- Folder 9 Newspaper articles, 1971-1991, n.d. (photocopies)