



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

John Duke



In 1920 he debuted as a concert pianist. In 1922 he entered into a long and satisfying marriage with Dorothy Macon of Virginia, who sometimes wrote libretti for him, and in 1923 he accepted a professorship at Smith College in Northhampton, MA, where he taught piano until his retirement forty-four years later. 1923 also marked G. Schirmer's publication of his first songs, I'VE DREAMED OF SUNSETS and LULLABY, as well as a piano work, THE FAIRY GLEN. Duke settled into college life, availing himself of his first sabbatical in 1929-30 to study abroad with Boulanger and Schnabel, whose influences could be felt in the works he composed in

the 1930's. Throughout his quiet academic career at Smith and at the Seagle Colony summer vocal camp, Duke continued to concertize and to compose over 265 songs, as well as a few chamber operas, choral and orchestral works. As a pianist, he made American composers a special programming interest, premiering works by Sessions, Piston, and Wagenaar, among them Sessions' PIANO SONATA # 1 at one of the Sessions-Copland historic concerts of contemporary music. As a composer, he was fascinated by the "strange and marvelous chemistry of words and music," and in his master classes and writings he devoted a great deal of thought to the art of song and singing.

He believed that in a good song the words became assimilated by the music, and he wrote lovingly and knowledgeably for the voice, as well as for the piano. In his choice of texts, he frequently gravitated to American poets, among them Frost, Teasdale, cummings, Van Doren, Millay, and [E. A. Robinson](#), and his range of mood runs the gamut from sprightly wit (HIST...WIST) to biting irony (RICHARD CORY) to unabashed Romanticism (LUKE HAVERGAL) or meditative reflection (BE STILL AS YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL).

Asked why, as a pianist, his compositions included so few piano works and so many songs, Duke replied: "I think it is because of my belief that vocal utterance is the basis of music's mystery."