



- ✓ Home
- ✓ Research
- ✓ Library
- ✓ Publications
- ✓ Events

UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

Robert Murrell Stevenson: Preeminent Scholar and Artist (1916-2012)

By Steven Loza

Professor of Ethnomusicology, UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music

Robert Murrell Stevenson, one of the leading music scholars of the twentieth century and a preeminent figure in Latin American and Iberian research, died of natural causes on December 22, 2012, in Santa Monica. A longtime professor of musicology at UCLA, he was an extraordinarily prolific author of books, articles, editions, reference entries, and reviews, as well as the founder/editor of the groundbreaking journal *Inter-American Music Review*. His scholarly investigations ranged over an impressively wide array of subjects, particularly Spain and Latin America before 1800 but also traditional, indigenous, and popular musics of the Americas and the contributions of women composers and performers. Over the course of his career, Dr. Stevenson played a crucial role in moving the Americas to a position of central importance in music scholarship.

Born on July 3, 1916, in Melrose, New Mexico, Stevenson grew up in El Paso, Texas, earning his bachelor's degree at UTEP. His subsequent training included degrees from Julliard, Yale, Eastman, Harvard, Princeton, and Oxford, and studies in composition, piano, and musicology with Stravinsky, Schnabel, Schrade, and Hanson, among others. During World War II he served as Army Captain and Chaplain for a unit of African American armed forces, and received an Army commendation. He began teaching at UCLA in 1949 and soon established his scholarly reputation with seminal books such as *Music in Mexico* (1952) and *Music in Peru* (1959; 1960), *Spanish Music in the Age of Columbus* (1960), *Spanish Cathedral Music of the Golden Age* (1961), and *Music in Aztec and Inca Territory* (1968). In all, he authored twenty-nine books and hundreds of scholarly journal, dictionary and encyclopedia articles. In 1978 he launched his own journal, *Inter-American Music Review*. Unique in conception as well as execution, it became a major venue for leading research on music of all the Americas.

An accomplished composer and pianist, Stevenson wrote a wide range of pieces for piano, chamber groups, choir, and symphony orchestra, e.g., his "Fronteras Symphony." He presented major concerts in 1942 and 1947 at Town Hall in New York City, including his own compositions, and concertized in London in 1953 at Wigmore Hall, performing a Carlos Chávez sonata. In 1961 Leopold Stokowski conducted two of his orchestral pieces based on indigenous Quechua themes.

Dr. Stevenson was the recipient of Guggenheim, Fulbright, NEH, and Ford Foundation fellowships and grants, and he was an honorary member of several scholarly societies, including the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) and the American Musicological Society (AMS). For SEM he established the Robert Stevenson Prize awarded to composers who are ethnomusicologists, and for AMS he also established an award for scholars of Iberia or Latin America. He also founded the annual Robert Stevenson Lectures in the UCLA Department of Musicology. In 1985 he was awarded the OAS Gabriela Mistral Prize and in 2004 he received the Constantin Pununcio Award for scholars who maintain high levels of research after retirement from the system-wide University of California. His research archive is maintained at the Conservatorio Real de Madrid.

An exceptional mentor as well as researcher, Dr. Stevenson guided twenty-five dissertations. Those fortunate enough to do graduate research under his direction felt deeply inspired not only by his erudition and productivity, by the scope and depth of his investigations, but also by his passionate commitment to preserving and promoting a vast heritage of great music. In my dissertation, completed in 1985, I inscribed the following dedication:

There is a man on the UCLA campus who is a living legend. He walks, talks, performs, investigates, writes, and teaches ... in effect, he is a metamorphosis of continuity, change, and inspiration to all of us for the future. He is also a genius. He will never tell you so, but we all know so. He has created my course of study at this university. He imparted his faith to me years ago and his influence has been ever present in not only my academic career, but in my personal life.

These words ring true now more than ever. Dr. Stevenson supported my endeavors at every opportunity I had, and at every adversity that faced me. He not only studied and wrote on the musical history and life of Latin America, but he chronicled the human dignity and spirit of its people, especially those, who like me, are the descendants of that heritage in this country.

Authored on January 18, 2013

