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8/9/01

Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee
Stamp Development

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is an official recommendation for a stamp. I make this recommendation not only as a musician and scholar, but as a happy philatelist (my family and I have been collecting stamps actively for years).

We are now in the centenary of Ruth Crawford Seeger, one of the most important musicians of the 20th century in the United States, and certainly one of the two or three most important woman composers we have ever had. The stepmother of Pete Seeger, the mother of the great folk musicians Mike and Peggy Seeger, and the husband of Charles Seeger (composer and scholar who is largely responsible for the field of ethnomusicology in the United States), Ruth Crawford Seeger had at least two major musical careers — one as composer, one as folk song scholar. In both of them she left an enormous impact on American music history.

First, as a young composer in the 1920s and 1930s she was one of the central figures of the American modernist movement (along with Henry Cowell, Carl Ruggles, Charles Ives, and a few others). The first woman to ever receive a Guggenheim Fellowship in music, her works are considered important classics of American 20th century music. Her *String Quartet*, *Piano Study in Mixed Accents*, *Piano Preludes* and other works are greatly studied, performed, and recorded (a beautiful new recording by pianist Sarah Cahill of the *Piano Preludes*, on New Albion Records, highlights this, as does the amazing *Portrait* CD by English composer/conductor Oliver Knussen, of many of her works). Her works are frequently performed, recorded, and taught in schools, and she is widely regarded as not only the most important American *woman* composer of the century, but to many of us, one of the most important *composers* of the century.

Second, in the mid-1930s, she and her husband Charles devoted themselves to American folk music, moving to Washington, D.C., and working in the Library of Congress, with the Lomaxes, and in a wide variety of contexts. Ruth Crawford Seeger's work is of inestimable importance in the rediscovery of America's folk music by Americans. For some 20 years, she was one of the first great transcribers of field recordings, wrote scholarly (and wonderful) studies of American music, and was a leading figure in the use of folk music for children's

education. Three of her books (*American Folk Songs for Children*, *American Folk Songs for Christmas*, and *Animal Folk Songs for Children*) are still in wide use in early music education, and these collections (and their extraordinary introduction) are revered by teachers and folk singers. Her work is considered by many to be a major factor in the folk revival of the 50s and 60s.

She died at a young age, in 1953, just as she was returning to composition (her *Wind Quintet* was written at around this time). In the last twenty years there has been a new explosion of interest in and activity around her work, both as a folk song scholar and a composer. A major award-winning biography (by Judith Tick, published by Oxford University Press), new editions and recordings of her work, and several centenary conferences (including one at the Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College in October) highlight her tremendous importance.

She *should* be on a stamp. As far as I know, there is not one stamp of a woman American "classical" composer, much less one who was so multifaceted and impactful on our musical history. Ruth Crawford Seeger would be the logical choice for a first woman composer stamp.

I would be happy to discuss this further with anyone, and I'm sure many others would be happy to join in support of this.

Sincerely,

Larry Polansky



August 17, 2001

Mr. Larry Polansky
Chair
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6187 Hopkins Center
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Dear Mr. Polansky:

Thank you for your recent letter suggesting the issuance of a stamp honoring Ruth Crawford Seeger.

Each year, the Postal Service receives thousands of suggestions for new postage stamps. As the number of stamps we issue is limited, the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee was established in 1957 to review all suggestions and make recommendations for new stamps to the Postmaster General. The Committee members base their recommendations on national interest, historical perspective, and other criteria.

The Committee decides on new stamp subjects far in advance of the issue date in order to provide lead-time for planning, designing, production, and distribution. Currently, stamps for 2004 and subsequent years are being considered. Although many of the subjects for upcoming new stamps have been identified, no public announcement of individual new stamps is made until the entire stamp program for that year has been approved. This normally occurs in the fall preceding the year of issuance.

Again, thank you for your interest in our stamp program. Your expression of support for this subject is being included in the Committee's files.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Terrence W. McCaffrey".

Terrence W. McCaffrey
Manager
Stamp Development