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## Everett Lee and the Racial Politics of Orchestral Conducting

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While researching a book about the Broadway musical *On the Town*, I quickly realized that the show's initial production in 1944 was remarkable for its progressive deployment of a mixed-race cast.<sup>1</sup> *On the Town* marked the Broadway debut of Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jerome Robbins. Its star was the Japanese American dancer Sono Osato, and its cast included six African Americans out of a total of fifty-four. Today, those numbers would appear as tokenism. Within the context of World War II, however, with a contentiously segregated military, detainment of Japanese Americans as "alien enemies," and racial stereotypes of the minstrel show fully in practice, *On the Town* aimed to challenge the status quo. Black and white males in military uniforms stood side-by-side on stage, modeling a desegregated military, and black men held hands with white women in scenes of inter-racial dancing. The show's intentional desegregation made a statement.



Everett Lee with Reverend J. C. Olden, Civil Rights leader and father of Lee's first wife, Sylvia Olden Lee  
Courtesy of The Courier-Journal  
and [courier-journal.com](http://courier-journal.com)

An equally important racial landmark occurred nine months into the run of *On the Town*, when during the week of 9 September 1945 Everett Lee, an African American conductor, ascended to the podium of the show's otherwise all-white pit orchestra. Previously, Lee had been the orchestra's concertmaster. In an era of Jim Crow segregation in performance, Lee's appointment was downright remarkable, and it has been followed by an equally exceptional career. His first wife Sylvia Olden Lee (ca. 1918-2004) emerged professionally at the same time as her husband, and their development as musicians was deeply intertwined. She ultimately became a celebrated accompanist and vocal coach, working with African American divas such as Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle.

the New York City Opera in 1945 or Marian Anderson's debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 1955, which was the first time that the famed company featured an African American singer on stage. The Met took this step at a shockingly late date. Among black conductors struggling with racial limitations, Dean Dixon was best known among Lee's contemporaries. Both conductors faced a climate of "orchestrated discrimination," as the Civil Rights leader Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. once rued the stubbornly

While considerable attention has been directed to the racial desegregation of jazz, far less scholarship has focused on how the process unfolded in New York City's classical-music industry and in musical theater. Key moments stand out—such as Todd Duncan's debut with

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## Everett Lee and the Racial Politics of Orchestral Conducting (cont.)

slow desegregation of American symphonies, and they devised resourceful strategies to keep working.<sup>2</sup>

Here, I explore the central outline of Everett Lee's career, which offers an inside view of racial segregation's impact on gifted black performers. I was fortunate enough to have two extended telephone interviews with Lee at his home in Norrköping, Sweden, where he continues to thrive in his nineties. Added to that, the digitization of historically black newspapers has opened access to valuable information about the world in which he was launched.

Everett Lee (b. 1916) grew up in a middle-class family dedicated to his development as a musician. The wild card was race. Born in Wheeling, West Virginia, Lee moved with his parents to Cleveland in 1927 as part of the Great Migration.<sup>3</sup> His father, Everett Lee, Sr., climbed up through the civil service, achieving leadership roles in largely white contexts and providing a model for his talented son. During WWII, the elder Lee became Executive Secretary of Ration Board 11 in Cleveland and was credited with inaugurating "a system of making the rationing program fit the individual, [which] stamped out all discrimination involving race or riches."<sup>4</sup> As a teenager Everett had a job at a local hotel as an elevator operator and busboy. There, he met Artur Rodzinski, conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra. "And Rodzinski," Lee recalled in one of our interviews, "somebody told him that this kid is a very promising musician, and he just asked me 'who are you,' and I told him, and he said, 'well, come to my concerts.' Every Saturday I could go to the Cleveland Orchestra concerts."<sup>5</sup> Rodzinski became central to Lee's development. "My early conducting aspirations were nurtured by him," Lee told a reporter from the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1948. "Rodzinski helped me in many ways—he would go over scores with me and give me pointers."<sup>6</sup> During this period, Lee studied violin at the Cleveland Institute of Music, a historically white conservatory, where he was awarded a Ranney Scholarship and his primary teacher was the famed violin virtuoso Joseph Fuchs.<sup>7</sup>

Lee enlisted in the military in June of 1943, becoming an "aviation cadet at the Tuskegee Army Air Field."<sup>8</sup> He was released early because of an injury and recruited for the pit orchestra of the all-black show *Carmen Jones*, which included a new libretto by

Oscar Hammerstein II and a new arrangement of Bizet's score by Robert Russell Bennett. "To the right of renowned conductor, Joseph Littau," reported the *New York Amsterdam News* in late January 1944, nearly two months into the show's run, "sits the concertmeister, in this particular instance a young man of comely appearance, with a face that brightens and shines when you talk about music, and probably the only Negro ever to have held that title."<sup>9</sup> The rest of the orchestra was white, with the exception of the black jazz drummer William "Cozy" Cole, who also appeared on stage.<sup>10</sup> Very quickly, Lee's talent was recognized, and he substituted as a conductor of *Carmen Jones* even before his debut with *On the Town*; he also had a brief conducting opportunity with a revival of *Porgy and Bess* in the spring of 1944.<sup>11</sup>

Lee's appointment as music director of *On the Town* put him fully in charge of a Broadway pit orchestra for an extended period. In an interview with the *Daily Worker* in October 1945, Lee praised *On the Town*, saying it "has done some splendid pioneering work on Broadway." Beth McHenry, reporter for the *Worker*, expounded on Lee's statement:

What he referred to particularly, he said, was the integration of Negro artists with others in the cast of *On The Town*, not in the usual 'specialty number' category but in the regular assembly of dancers. Mr. Lee attributes this to the honest and democratic ideas and efforts of the musical's authors—Betty Comden and Adolph Green and to the cooperative efforts of the whole cast. He himself was urged to come to this show by Leonard Bernstein, the composer.<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1940s, even as *On the Town* was still in its run, Lee was also on the rise within top-flight, predominantly white institutions of classical music. He was one of the soloists in Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins, performed in late February 1945 by the New York City Symphony, conducted by Leopold Stokowski. Another violinist that evening was the renowned Roman Totenberg, which signals the level of Lee's virtuosity.<sup>13</sup> As segregation was challenged, interracial networks began to form. In Lee's case, Rodzinski

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probably recommended him to Stokowski. Based in part in their shared Polish heritage, Stokowski had been responsible for bringing Rodzinski to the United States as his assistant in 1925. Furthermore, when Rodzinski left Ohio in 1943 to become conductor of the New York Philharmonic, he hired Bernstein as his assistant conductor.<sup>14</sup>

Bernstein and Lee continued to work together after *On the Town* closed. In the summer of 1946, both Everett and Sylvia Lee attended Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the Berkshire Mountains. “Lenny talked to Koussevitzky and I got the Koussevitzky scholarship, and I was up at Tanglewood,” Lee recalls, “and boy that was a wonderful experience.”<sup>15</sup> There Lee not only studied conducting with Koussevitzky, but also worked with Boris Goldovsky in the opera department.<sup>16</sup> Just as importantly, he observed Bernstein prepare the American premiere of *Peter Grimes* by Benjamin Britten. The summer at Tanglewood was equally valuable for Sylvia Lee, who served as technical assistant to Goldovsky, which meant she helped coach singers and apprenticed with one of the great opera directors of the day.<sup>17</sup> From late September through October 1946—right after the Tanglewood experience—Everett Lee played first violin for the New York City Symphony, which Bernstein continued to conduct (through the 1947-48 season).<sup>18</sup> But his engagement with the orchestra was limited. “I wish I could be playing with you,” Lee wrote to Bernstein, “but . . . it would be impossible for you to release me when my promised show comes up. Of course you understand how important that is with jobs so scarce!”<sup>19</sup> At some point in the late 1940s, Lee was also a staff violinist with the CBS Orchestra.

Lee faced formidable obstacles. In an interview decades later with the *New York Amsterdam News*, he recalled asking Rodzinski for an audition with the New York Philharmonic. This occurred at some point between 1943 and 1947, when Rodzinski was the orchestra’s music director. “He was afraid to encourage me to try because he didn’t want me to be hurt,” Lee told the *Amsterdam News*. “He knew that I would not be accepted into the orchestra. This was one of the factors which helped me decide to try conducting.”<sup>20</sup> This episode offers a revealing glimpse of Lee’s resilience: when told that an opportunity was closed to

him, he turned around and aimed for a higher rung on the ladder.

Taking matters into his own hands, Lee formed the Cosmopolitan Symphony Society, an interracial orchestra, in New York in 1947. Other outsider conductors have implemented the same strategy, including Dean Dixon in the 1930s and Marin Alsop in the 1980s. Lee’s Cosmopolitan Symphony included “Americans of Chinese, Russian, Jewish, Negro, Italian and Slavic origin,” as well as several female players.<sup>21</sup> Women were also systematically excluded from American orchestras during this period. The resounding success of the Cosmopolitan Symphony demonstrated not only Lee’s musical gifts but also his organizational skill and flair for attracting an audience. The orchestra had a civil rights mission at its core, as the *Amsterdam News* reported:

The working together of various races for mutual sympathy and understanding has been successfully accomplished in churches, choral groups and other endeavors, and this effort to combine highly competent musicians in a grand orchestral ensemble as a cultural venture deserves the support and good will of every faithful adherent to the principles of our democracy.<sup>22</sup>

“My own group is coming along fairly well, but of course there is no money in it as yet,” Lee wrote to Bernstein. “I hope to make it grow into something good however, and it may be the beginning of breaking down a lot of foolish barriers.”<sup>23</sup> Musicians’ Local 802 assisted the Cosmopolitan Symphony by waiving its rates for rehearsals. Lee had to pay union scale for performances, however.<sup>24</sup> The orchestra rehearsed in the basement of Grace Congregational Church in Harlem through the aegis of its minister, Dr. Herbert King. Sylvia Olden Lee was organist at the same church, and her father James Clarence Olden was a Congregational minister in Washington, D.C. Everett recalls that James Olden provided a crucial link between Grace Congregational and the Cosmopolitan Symphony.<sup>25</sup>

The first concert of the Cosmopolitan Symphony Society took place at the Great Hall of City College in

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Harlem on 9 November 1947. “A capacity audience” that reacted with “enthusiasm and unstinted applause” to this “cultural effort which has such historic implications,” reported the *Amsterdam News*.<sup>26</sup> The concert blended standard European symphonic literature (Beethoven’s First Symphony) with an aria and recitative from *La Traviata* performed by the black soprano June McMechen. *Five Mosaics* by the African American composer Ulysses Kay received its premiere, and Sylvia Olden Lee was the featured soloist for Schumann’s Piano Concerto in A Minor (first movement).

The Cosmopolitan Orchestra gave a notable concert on May 21, 1948 at Town Hall, a midtown concert facility noted for its egalitarian policies. The *New York Times* covered the event, which was unusual for the time for any concert of classical music that involved black musicians, praising Lee as a conductor “who possesses decided talent” and the orchestra as a “gifted group.”<sup>27</sup> Like Lee’s first concert, this one blended European classics with a new work by Kay, *Brief Elegy*, and included black soloists. Concerts by the organization continued at Harlem churches, and another at the Great Hall of City College in 1952 yielded the orchestra’s “finest performance,” according to Nora Holt, classical music critic for the *Amsterdam News*. Described as “thrilling” by Holt, that event played to a “sold-out audience” of 2,100 “uptown music lovers.”<sup>28</sup> During this period, Lee conducted elsewhere as well, including for the Boston Pops in July 1949, albeit as part of its “traditional Colored American Night.”<sup>29</sup>

Navigating a career in the United States “was a struggle,” Lee told me in an interview. He recalled a sobering conversation with the famed lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II:

First as a violinist, that’s how I first made my name, made a splash. Made concertmaster of two orchestras, and then getting on staff at CBS. . . . And then I began to conduct, and naturally my name spread around like fire. And I remember when . . . Oscar Hammerstein had a big party, and I don’t know whether it was at his home or Richard Rodgers’s home. And so everybody in the musical world was

there, both from the Broadway world and classical world. And so Oscar said, ‘Everett, come in here, I want to talk to you.’ He said, ‘Everett, we’ve got to explain something to you.’ So we went into another room, and yeah it was at Rodgers’s home – apartment. He said, ‘You know, Dick and I.’ Dick, you know, Richard. ‘Dick and I have talked about you, and you know we have so many big shows going. We thought to bring you in on one, but you would be the boss. We were going to, we had talked about putting you on the road, sending you on the road with one of our big shows. But you’re too well known. If a colored boy is the conductor, and we go into the South, we would lose, we would not be—they would deny our coming in. But I want you to know, Everett, that we had thought about you, and we had planned one of our big shows.’<sup>30</sup>

In other words, Lee had achieved enough success so that his name would be recognized in Jim Crow territory, and according to the warped racial logic of the day that meant he was too accomplished and well-known to be hired.

More barriers appeared. Based on the success of his Town Hall concerts with the Cosmopolitan Symphony, Lee approached Arthur Judson, the foremost concert manager of the day, hoping to get work as a guest conductor with established orchestras. Judson managed the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra, as well as other major American concert organizations and virtuosi. Sylvia Lee recalled what Everett told her about the interview: “Judson turned and said, ‘Oh, come in, young man. I’m reading these reviews. They are out of this world. You really have something. But I might as well tell you, right now, I don’t believe in Negro symphony conductors. . . . No, you may play solo with our symphonies, all over this country. You can dance with them, sing with them. But a Negro, standing in front of a white symphony group? No. I’m sorry.’”<sup>31</sup> Everett reported to Sylvia that he was “stupefied,” adding that Judson concluded, “I’m sorry, young man. I told the same thing to Dean Dixon.” Everett responded by saying, “Yes, Dean

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Dixon had to *leave his country* to be a man and a musician.” Judson then suggested that Everett consider going abroad.

In 1952, Everett and Sylvia Lee did just that, receiving Fulbright fellowships to study in France, Germany, and Italy, and their departure marked the first stage in Everett’s career-in-exile. This strategy was chosen by many African-American performers after World War II. When the Lees left the country, the Cosmopolitan Symphony came to an end.<sup>32</sup> The couple returned to the United States one year later in what turned out to be a temporary step. In 1953, Everett was guest conductor with the Louisville Orchestra, in what the *New York Times* claimed to be “one of the first concerts in which a Negro has led an orchestra of white musicians.”<sup>33</sup> The concert was not part of the orchestra’s regular season but rather was billed as a “special” event, outside of the subscription series.<sup>34</sup>

Other major breakthroughs took place for both Everett and Sylvia Lee in the early 1950s. In 1953, Sylvia was hired by the Metropolitan Opera’s Kathryn Turney Long Department, and she was credited as the first African American on the Met’s staff.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Sylvia was in residence when Marian Anderson made her Metropolitan Opera debut. Both she and Everett developed a close working relationship with Max Rudolph, a conductor and central figure in the Met’s management. In 1955, another major development occurred when Everett conducted *La Traviata* at the New York City Opera, becoming “the first Negro conductor to be engaged by the company,” according to the *New York Times*.<sup>36</sup> He went on to conduct *La Bohème* with City Opera the following fall.<sup>37</sup> In 1956, he reportedly signed a contract with the National Artists Corporation, one of the most influential management companies for American musicians.<sup>38</sup>

Yet Lee still became an expatriate. Beginning in 1957, he and Sylvia moved to Munich, where he conducted the opera and founded the Amerika Haus Orchestra.<sup>39</sup> That same year, Leonard Bernstein was appointed conductor of the New York Philharmonic, yielding a sharp contrast in the trajectory of their careers. In 1963 Lee became music director of the symphony orchestra in Norrköping, Sweden, southwest of Stockholm.<sup>40</sup> Dean Dixon had conducted the Gothenburg Symphony in Sweden from 1953 to 1960,



*Everett Lee conducting the Louisville Orchestra in 1953 as published in Jet, October 1, 1953*

and Lee held his own Swedish post for over a decade, finding Sweden to be a place where he could make music without racial complications.

In 1965, Symphony of the New World was formed in New York City, and Lee became a central figure. An interracial orchestra, Symphony of the New World essentially picked up where the Cosmopolitan

Symphony had left off. Out of eighty-eight “top musicians,” it included thirty-six African Americans and thirty women.<sup>41</sup> Initially, Everett Lee, Henry Lewis, and James DePriest were the main conductors.<sup>42</sup> DePriest was the nephew of Marian Anderson, and Lewis was then married to mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne, with whom he collaborated professionally. Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson also became one of the organization’s principal conductors. When Lee returned to the U.S. to conduct the new orchestra in 1966, the *New York Times* reported that the engagement marked “his first appearances in this country since he conducted for the New York City Opera in 1956.”<sup>43</sup> Once again, a Harlem church provided an anchor for the orchestra—this time, the Metropolitan Community Church.

Lee made his debut with the New York Philharmonic as a guest conductor on 15 January 1976. He was then sixty years old, and the concert took place on the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. Similar to programming of the Cosmopolitan Symphony, the concert included Sibelius’s Violin Concerto, Rachmaninoff’s

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Third Symphony, and *Kosbro* by the African American composer David Baker. Harold Schonberg of the *New York Times* gave Lee a positive if somewhat patronizing review, stating that he “conducted a fine concert” and “made good music without bending over backward to impress.” While “a Philharmonic debut can be heady stuff,” Schonberg concluded sardonically, “Mr. Lee . . . refus[ed] to be drawn into the temptation to give the audience cheap thrills.”<sup>44</sup> This breakthrough for Lee occurred during the U.S. Bicentennial, when awareness of supporting African-American performers and composers was at an all-time high.<sup>45</sup> Bernstein was then the orchestra’s Laureate Conductor.

In the ensuing years, Lee has continued to have a successful career working with orchestras around the world. During the 1940s and 1950s, when he built his reputation as a conductor and stepped onto major stages in Europe, American conductors were absent from podiums in the United States, no matter what their race. For a conductor of color, however, barriers defined the game. No prominent African American conductor of classical music from the generation born before 1925—not Dean Dixon, not Everett Lee—was permitted a sustained position on the playing field. Yet Lee resiliently created opportunities for himself, essentially establishing his own league.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This article is drawn from my forthcoming book, *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* (Oxford University Press, to be published in 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., “Orchestrated Discrimination,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 December 1974.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the biographical information in this paragraph comes from Joseph M. Goldwasser, “Where There’s A Will, There’s Everett Lee and Family,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, 10 November 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Everett Lee, interview with the author, 25 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> “Everett Lee to Conduct Symphony: Town Hall Concert on May 21 Awaited,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 May 1948.

<sup>7</sup> Lee’s scholarship is mentioned in many newspaper articles, including “Give Reception for Newlyweds,” *Chicago Defender*, 26 February 1944.

<sup>8</sup> “Pilot’s Wings are Sought by Violinist,” *Chicago Defender*, 19 June 1943.

<sup>9</sup> Nora Holt, “Everett Lee, First Negro Concert Meister, Soloist in ‘Carmen Jones,’” *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 January 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Lee interview, 25 March 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding Lee and *Carmen Jones*: “Violinist in ‘Carmen’ Hits for Another,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 May 1944; and “Everett Lee Youngest Conductor on Broadway,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 June 1944. Lee’s work with *Carmen Jones* is discussed in Annegret Fauser, “‘Dixie Carmen’: War, Race, and Identity in Oscar Hammerstein’s *Carmen Jones* (1943),” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4/2 (2010): 164. Regarding Lee and *Porgy*: Lee was reported as conducting the orchestra of *Porgy* “last week,” in Constance Curtis, “New Yorker’s Album,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 April 1944.

<sup>12</sup> Beth McHenry, “Everett Lee, First Negro Musician To Lead Orchestra in Bway Play,” *Daily Worker*, 13 October 1945.

<sup>13</sup> “Stokowski Offers Concert Novelties,” *New York Times*, 27 February 1945.

<sup>14</sup> The *New York Times* stated that Bernstein heard Lee conducting *Carmen Jones* “and engaged him to conduct his musical, ‘On the Town’” (Ross Parmenter, “The World of Music: Season’s Start,” *New York Times*, 31 August 1947). Also, an article in the *Pittsburgh Courier* (8 May 1948), “Everett Lee to Conduct Symphony: Town Hall Concert on May 21 Awaited,” credited Rodzinski with having “helped him [Lee] make useful contacts in the musical world.”

<sup>15</sup> Lee interview, 25 March 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace McClain Cheatham and Sylvia Lee, “Lady Sylvia Speaks,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16/1 (Spring 1996): 201–202. This interview was also published in *Dialogues on Opera and the African-American Experience*, ed. Wallace McClain Cheatham (The Scarecrow Press, 1997), 42–67. That same volume includes a terrific interview with Everett Lee (pp. 24–42).

<sup>17</sup> “Violinist, Wife in Joint Recital,” *Chicago Defender*, 22 June 1946.

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<sup>18</sup> Lee is listed as first violin in programs from the week of 30 September through the week of 28 October 1946 (*The Program-Magazine of the New York City Center* 4/4-4/9, Bernstein Collection, Library of Congress, Box 335/Folder 3).

<sup>19</sup> Lee, letter to Bernstein (perhaps in 1947), Bernstein Collection, Box 35/Folder 15.

<sup>20</sup> Raoul Abdul, "Reading the Score: Conversation with Everett Lee," *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 October 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding races and nationalities represented: "Everett Lee to Present Mixed Symphony Group," *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 October 1947. Regarding women: N.S. [Noel Straus], "Symphony Group in Formal Debut," *New York Times*, 22 May 1948.

<sup>22</sup> "Everett Lee to Present Mixed Symphony Group."

<sup>23</sup> Lee, letter to Bernstein, undated; Bernstein Collection, Box 35/Folder 15.

<sup>24</sup> The "cooperation" of Local 802 is noted in: "Everett Lee Organizes Interracial Symphony," *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 August 1947. Also Lee explained his arrangement with the union in an interview with me: "I asked the musician's union if I could just get a bunch of musicians together. The union gave me permission to rehearse these people. And of course with stipulations, there was no recordings, and if I were to have a concert, then I would have to, naturally they would have to be paid (28 March 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Everett Lee, interview with the author, 28 March 2009.

<sup>26</sup> "Cosmopolitan First Concert Wins Acclaim," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 November, 1947.

<sup>27</sup> N.S. [Noel Straus], "Symphony Group in Formal Debut."

<sup>28</sup> Nora Holt, "Cosmopolitan Symphony in its Finest Performance: Sold-Out Audience of 2,100 Acclaims Lee's Production," *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 March 1952.

<sup>29</sup> "Guest Conductor for Boston Concert," *Chicago Defender*, 2 July 1949.

<sup>30</sup> Lee interview, 28 March 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Everett Lee, as paraphrased by Sylvia Olden Lee, in "Dialogue

with Sylvia Olden Lee," *Fidelio Magazine*, 7/1 (Spring 1998), [http://www.schillerinstitute.org/fid\\_97-01/fid\\_981\\_lee\\_interview.html](http://www.schillerinstitute.org/fid_97-01/fid_981_lee_interview.html), accessed 18 January 2013. The remaining quotations in this paragraph come from the same interview.

<sup>32</sup> "Plan 'Bon Voyage' Affair for Everett Lee and Wife," *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 September 1952.

<sup>33</sup> "Negro to Direct in South: Everett Lee Will Conduct White Musicians in Louisville Concert," *New York Times*, 19 September 1953.

<sup>34</sup> This information comes from the program for the Louisville concert, as conveyed by Addie Peyronnin, Operations Assistant, Louisville Orchestra (email to the author, 18 March 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Sylvia Lee recalled that the Kathryn Turney Long Department did not allow women to work there during the main opera season, so Lee was employed for six weeks before the season and six weeks afterwards (Cheatham and Lee, 202).

<sup>36</sup> "City Opera Engages Two Conductors," *New York Times*, 10 February 1955.

<sup>37</sup> "New York City Opera Chores," *New York Times*, 22 September 1955.

<sup>38</sup> "Conductor," *New York Times*, 29 April 1956.

<sup>39</sup> "To Conduct UN Concert at Philharmonic Hall," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 October 1966.

<sup>40</sup> Ross Parmenter, "The World of Music," *New York Times*, 8 July 1962.

<sup>41</sup> Sara Slack, "Symphony of the New World A Truly Integrated Group," *New York Amsterdam News*, 5 March 1966.

<sup>42</sup> "New World Symphony Will Play," *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 April 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Ericson, "Two Elek(c)tras Come to Town," *New York Times*, 23 October 1966. In 1974, Lee became head conductor of the orchestra (Donal Henahan, "'New and Newer Music' Begins its Fourth Season," *New York Times*, 29 January 1974).

<sup>44</sup> Harold C. Schonberg, "Everett Lee Leads Philharmonic in Debut," *New York Times*, 16 January 1976.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Columbia Records issued its important "Black Composers Series" between 1974 and 1979.

## Institute News

Jeffrey Taylor, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

Fall 2013 represents our third electronic issue of *American Music Review*. I'm happy to report that the response to our move into cyberspace has generally been positive, and we have been delighted by the possibilities for multimedia use that have been opening up. Of course, we always welcome comments and suggestions (email or snail mail!). And I remind all our readers that hard copies are available on request, though these versions of course lack the Internet functionality of our online issues.

Along with this mainstay of HISAM's presence, we continue to offer a full slate of live events here at Brooklyn College. On 23 October, our Advisory Board member **Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr.** introduced his new book *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (California, 2013) with a discussion of jazz, Afro-modernism, and mental health, topics closely linked to Powell's life and career. On 5 November, **Arturo O'Farrell**, who is currently leading the Brooklyn College Jazz Ensembles, offered a presentation on Latin jazz that included a typically exhilarating piano performance. And on the same day, producer, journalist and scholar **Pat Thomas** gave a look at the subjects of his recent volume *Listen, Whitey!: The Sounds of Black Power 1965-1975* (Fantagraphics, 2012), a lavishly-illustrated treatment of a complex and turbulent period in African American history. The book, incidentally, is accompanied by a CD of rare music and spoken-word recordings, many unearthed by Thomas himself. Finally, on 13 November playwright and composer **Dan Shore**, Assistant Professor at Xavier University of Louisiana and CUNY Graduate Center alumnus, spoke on his opera *Freedom Ride: Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights Movement*. He discussed the complex process of composing an opera for an all-black cast from his vantage point as a white professor at a historically black college, and the reception to his opera thus far.

To paraphrase Garrison Keillor, it has been anything but a quiet term for the staff of the Institute. In November Senior Research Associate **Ray Allen** delivered a paper on Woody Guthrie's Jewish/Coney Island songs at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association. Research Associate **Stephanie Jensen-Moulton** had a busy fall of guest lectures and recitals. In September she gave the opening talk at Boston University's Musicology/Ethnomusicology series on the topic "Bodily Difference in

Cirque du Soleil." In October she performed a lecture-recital on songs of Blind Tom Wiggins at Hollins University in Virginia, and in November she gave a paper titled "Music and Disability in the TV Series *Glee*" at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society. October also saw (hurray!) the publication of her A-R edition of Miriam Gideon's 1958 opera *Fortunato* in the *Recent Researches in American Music* series. In October our Graduate Assistant **Whitney George** presented a composition recital "Vignettes" at the CUNY Graduate Center, featuring electro-acoustic and chamber works performed by The Curiosity Cabinet (with Whitney at the podium). In addition she wrote original music for a theatrical production titled *A Hand in My Heart*, which in December enjoyed a five-day run at the Standard Toykraft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. This fall season also marked Whitney's fourth year as artistic director and conductor of the Graduate Center's Contemporary Music Ensemble. Recently the group presented a concert titled *Music of the American Theater* that included Copland's "Music for the Theater," Seymour Shifrin's "Satires of Circumstance" and a new work by Graduate Center composer Sarah Curzi. Finally, in November Director **Jeff Taylor** was invited to join a panel on Theresa Bernstein, an unjustly neglected visual artist whose long life (she died in 2002, just two weeks shy of her 112th birthday!) was filled with imaginative work that cast a fascinating eye on New York's social and cultural scene. She was, for example, a lifelong fan of jazz and featured New York-based jazz musicians in many of her most important pieces. Her drawings and paintings are currently on view at the Graduate Center in an exhibit, curated by Distinguished Professor of Art History Gail Levin, that will tour a number of other US cities.

If an unfamiliar voice answers when you call the Institute, it is **Evan Moskowitz**, our new College Assistant. Evan, a student at the CUNY Graduate Center, joined the HISAM staff this fall, and his interests include history of the avant-garde, mysticism in the 20th century, musical and literary modernism, and the music of Giacinto Scelsi. Finally, we would like to welcome **Susan Tyler Hitchcock**, Wiley's daughter, as the newest member of our Advisory Board. I have already been in touch with Susan about future plans for the Institute, and I look forward to her continued support and enthusiasm!

# Don't Shoot the Piano Player: The State of *Vallenato* in New York City<sup>1</sup>

Jorge Arévalo Mateus, Hunter College, CUNY & the Center for Traditional Music and Dance

*Vallenato* is Colombia's lively, accordion-driven popular dance music with roots in the country's *costeño* (Atlantic coastal) rural communities. Traditional vallenato ensembles consisted of the diatonic button *acordeón* (accordion), *guacharaca* (stick scraper), and *caja* (small, single headed drum), while more commercial, urban *vallenato tropical* groups have added electric bass, keyboards, horns, and Afro-Cuban percussion (congas, timbales, and bongos) to their instrumentation.<sup>2</sup> The music has a strong tradition of family practitioners, with the Celedons, Oñates, and Zuletas standing out among vallenato's musical dynasties. Since the 1980s, vallenato has become increasingly popular, so much so that presently, along with Colombian salsa, it is the most commercially successful and global Colombian popular music, overshadowing *cumbia*, *champeta*, and even Afro-Colombian rap.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of increased immigration since the early 1970s, vallenato tropical has become popular in New York City's Colombian neighborhoods located in Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst, Corona, and Astoria as well as sections of Brooklyn and neighboring New Jersey. Nonetheless, there is mounting evidence that in addition to commercial forms of vallenato, new experimental styles are emerging in Colombian diasporic communities.

In his popular *son vallenata* "Con la Misma Fuerza," Emiliano Zuleta Baquero (1912-2005), the renowned patriarch of the Zuleta family dynasty, presents the perspective of a man whose persistent and powerful love for a woman is not only redoubtable but also a brash expression of his cockiness.<sup>4</sup> In the song's third verse, an "old man" of fifty-nine years emphatically declaims his still robust health, affirming his ability to compete on *acordeón*, throw down brilliant verses, and sexually satisfy his woman. His refusal to yield to time, his greatest adversary, and his unquenchable love for "Carmen Diaz" that drives his life, are evident in the song's *machismo* lyric—arguably vallenato's signature feature. The elder Zuleta's powerful sense of determination, pride, and passion are also apparent in the work of his great-grandnephew, Alejandro Zuleta. The young pianist, composer, and arranger continues the family's legacy and commitment to vallenato in New York. His strategic identification with the Zuleta lineage, in fact, seeks to maintain vallenato's *parranda* aesthetics and

its poetic foundation as symbols of Colombian identity.<sup>5</sup> Zuleta's band, the Vallenato Collective, performs regularly throughout the city in venues such as Barbés in Brooklyn, La Terraza in Queens, and The Shrine in Manhattan. Despite his advocacy for vallenato's preservation, Zuleta's substitution of the genre's traditionally central instrument—the diatonic button *acordeón*—with electronic piano, provides a glimpse of the changes and challenges young vallenato artists face in New York today. In breaking with vallenato's standard ensemble configuration, Zuleta's approach raises questions that perpetuate ongoing debates about authenticity, innovation, and the preservation of tradition. As a result, the Vallenato Collective is somewhat controversial, and although his vision seeks to expand upon standard musical trademarks of traditional vallenato as exelimpified by the Zuletas, his methods are indicative of the genre's musical, social, and cultural malleability.

Another young bandleader from Bogotá who relocated in New York, accordionist Gregorio Uribe, also conducts experiments with vallenato, but with an entirely different orientation. Uribe adapts the tropical school of vallenato to a big band dance format. While he adheres to musical practices aligned more with the Colombian *costeño* dance bands of the 1940s and 1950s that specialized in *cumbia*, his formal musical education at the Berklee School of Music clearly influences the dynamic, modern direction that his big band project is undertaking.<sup>6</sup> As with Zuleta, Uribe reconfigures vallenato tradition, leaning toward experimentation and innovation, particularly with respect to the band's orchestrations and arrangements. And yet, with or without the diatonic button accordion, tradition and modernity are inextricably linked. Uribe and Zuleta are part of a recent wave of *Nueva Música Colombiana* (NMC) or "Colombia Nova,"<sup>7</sup> the transnational movement of young Colombian musicians entering global centers with proposals for new music which draw from the rich cultural heritage of Colombian music.

In order to understand these recent trends in New York's vallenato scene, it is useful to consider the music's development over the past thirty years. With vallenato's increasing fame and notoriety during the 1980s and 1990s, due in part to the music's association with Colombia's booming drug trade, the incipient commercial vallenato music industry moved beyond national

## The State of *Vallenato* in New York City (cont.)

borders into the diaspora. In New York the music was well received by growing numbers of new Colombian arrivals. On the one hand, there were highly regarded professional *vallenateros*, such as Lisandro Meza, who migrated to New York in an attempt to establish a career, only to return to Colombia. On the other hand, semi-professional musicians such as Eugenio Ortega y Los Macondos, a group from Long Island, were presented as authentic carriers of traditional vallenato folklore by cultural organizations such as the Center for Traditional Music and Dance.

Los Macondos, which included two of Ortega's sons, had a somewhat amateur style of vallenato performance, but for Colombian and non-Colombian audiences alike, the group seemed to have a sufficient modicum of vallenato roots authenticity. In any case, Los Macondos certainly stood outside of the commercial sphere.<sup>8</sup> Vallenato in New York City, in fact, has always had multiple and parallel trajectories, one *auténtico* (authentic) and one *comercial* (commercial), each with varying degrees of either folkloric and/or modern attributes.

By the 1990s, vallenato was well ensconced in the city, with several groups including Kadenas, J and V Mix (*Jíbaros y Vallenatos*), Esencia Vallenato, La Fuerza Vallenata, and Impacto Vallenato playing regularly at clubs including S.O.B.s, Chibcha, and Satalla, the so-called "Temple of World Music." Local *acordeonistas* Dr. Ben Gary Harvey (of Kadenas) and Harold Rodriguez (of J and V Mix) even provided moments of virtuosic brilliance. In fact, vallenato proliferated to such an extent that during the 1990s, a local but short-lived vallenato competition was started in Queens.

Presently, the stalwart Foncho Castellar y sus Alegres remains the longest running active vallenato band in New York, playing cumbia and vallenato in the older *Baranquillero* style. Other older groups led by Jorge Meza, Yumbel Donado Jr. and Pedrito Rogers continue to perform regularly in similar fashion. Younger

groups however, such as Union de Oro, with singer Jhon Morales and 'El Papi' Rodriguez on accordion, and La Compañía Vallenata, with Roberto Camacho on vocals and Juan Carlos Castellar's accordion, prefer to follow the mainstream vallenato model. Interestingly, singer-accordion pairings seem to thrive particularly in the Paterson, New Jersey area, where Roberto Carlo Toncel and Jesualdo Borrego, for example, emulate popular vallenato artists such as Felipe Peláez and Manuel Julián, Peter Manjarres, and Silvestre Dagon—the current romantic pop stars. The artistic focus, then, for many of these young artists lies in the shift to the centrality of the voice; that is, singing has become the prominent marker of what is regarded traditional, at least in the urban space.



*Gregorio Uribe Big Band performs at BRIC House, Brooklyn, New York, 12 October 2013*  
Courtesy of Lilihouse Agency

There have also been significant changes with respect to clubs and venues where vallenato is performed in New York. WKCR radio host Sadys Espitia notes: "with the sale of Chibcha Night Club and [the] closure of Melao [and Satalla] ... [today] most groups tend to play in smaller venues in Queens like Tantra Lounge or Terraza 7 ... bigger clubs like LaBoom seem to just bring in recognized vallenato and salsa groups from Colombia."<sup>9</sup> Whereas in the 1990s several small clubs and bars along Roosevelt Avenue provided opportunities for local amateurs to play, these are rather uncommon today. A few restaurants, such as El Fogon Costeño, in Queens, continue to have "Vallenato Sundays," however these too are rare. And yet, in spite of diminishing local spots, Espitia's remarks nonetheless provide evidence of the constant transnational flow of vallenato music and musicians between New York and Colombia.

This history reveals that vallenato in New York is not a new phenomenon. The recent emergence of artists such as Gregorio Uribe and Alejo Zuleta signal transformations taking place within the genre in terms of local performance content, context, and production. Uribe stakes a claim for dance floor *cumbiambas* while Zuleta emphasizes the melodic narratives of the *parrandas*.

## The State of *Vallenato* in New York City (cont.)

Yet both artists blend traditional practices and older conventions with cosmopolitan and urban sensibilities. For example, the percussion instruments that supply vallenato's rhythmic underpinning and drive—*caja* and *guacharaca*—remain front and center in Zuleta's Vallenato Collective. Yet the band's harmonic range is wider, with expanded chord voicings that differ from those of vallenato's standard harmonic I – V patterns. Zuleta's insertion of electric piano in a manner that uses methods of jazz improvisation is particularly original, although problematic for some listeners who prefer the traditional diatonic button accordion. Afro-Colombian bassist Diego Obregón, a talented multi-instrumentalist hailing from Colombia's Pacific coast, contributes syncopated, swinging bass lines that differ from the contrapuntal, staccato bass lines heard typically in vallenato tropical. Meanwhile guitarists Sebastián Cruz and Alejandro Florez further compliment the Vallenato Collective by playing extended melodic lines that are interwoven through the piano's harmonic progressions.

Objections from traditionalists often seem to be more about the absence of accordion in Zuleta's group rather than his inclusion of piano. Speaking about the way he uses piano, Zuleta explains: "The piano offers more melodic and harmonic possibilities ... it is less limited than accordion, even though accordionists are always altering their instruments ... piano adds chromaticism, its pitch range is much wider and the kind of chords I can play are more varied ... a certain technical facility allows me to play more rapidly, giving [the music] a different kind of expressiveness."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Zuleta indicates that jazz feels "natural" to him, which he attributes to being raised around vallenato. Though this follows a different logic, he also believes that vallenato and jazz are somehow related. Similar to jazz, vallenato has a standard repertoire that provides melodic and structural form that enable individual interpretation and improvisation. Vallenato tradition, therefore, lies in the preservation of improvisation, or what Zuleta considers

the "spirit of creating music in the moment." Jazz is not indigenous to Colombia, at least not like the vallenato Zuleta grew up with, but in New York he has been able to make intercultural connections between the two musical forms. When he arrived and began to play with local jazz musicians, he often listened to them talk about improvisation, eventually realizing that he had heard similar things from his father. As a result, "Jazz was like vallenato for me: traditional"—that is, a creative process developed from a deep relationship and connection to tradition. His mission is to demonstrate respect for that tradition while preserving its structural and cultural elements: poetry, *parranda*, and the *ritmos* (rhythms). To that end, Zuleta collaborates with New York experimentalists as well as Colombian masters such as Hugo Carlos Granados, another accordion superstar and current "King of Kings."<sup>11</sup>

Gregorio Uribe's project (GUBB) is even less traditional, demonstrating how modern arrangements and performance techniques are deployed to emphasize vallenato's popular entertainment value, while, at the same time, employed costeño music's dynamic rhythms. Uribe's presentation—"dancing to the beat while rocking out on his accordion"<sup>12</sup>—is reminiscent of popular Latin big bandleaders of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Tito Puente, Frank "Machito" Grillo, and the telegenic Desiderio Alberto Arnaz (Desi Arnaz).<sup>13</sup> Moreover the GUBB reflects the current trend of ensembles such as



*Eugenio Ortega y Los Macondos,  
Riverside Accordion Festival, 2009  
Courtesy of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance*

Arturo O'Farrill's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Pablo Mayor's Folklore Urbano, Pablo Aslan's Avantango, and Pedro Giraud's Expansions Big Band, all of whom fuse the traditional and popular styles of their respective nations with big band jazz. A trained drummer and percussionist, Uribe is especially aware of vallenato's gritty rhythms and their multi-sited placement: "[I am] trying to showcase the innate "funkiness" that many of these grooves have." For example, he explains

that rhythms used in an original composition entitled "Caribe Contigo" are "*tambora-tambora* and *puya*, also known as *jalao* or *son corrido* or *berroche*, depending [on] where in the costa you are [from]."<sup>14</sup>

## The State of *Vallenato* in New York City (cont.)

How then does Uribe achieve the modern “funkiness” that he strives for? One method is by highlighting harmonic modes (lydian, mixolydian, dorian), which as he notes, “are found on some traditional tunes.” In addition, Uribe’s arrangements generally borrow from big band jazz scoring methods—that is, with section writing using intervals of fourths, widely spread harmonies, and orchestral tensions and releases created through carefully applied timbres and dynamics. Charismatically fronting his big band on both vocals and vallenato accordion, Uribe highlights bombastic big band arrangements of compositions based on earlier iterations of Colombian *música costeña*.<sup>15</sup> He recasts vallenato through smooth pop vocals, swinging modern big band scoring, jazz soloing, use of traditional and modern percussion instruments, and the ever-present, ornamental accordion flourishes, which, in this case, link vallenato tradition with its experimental modern variants.

Over the past three decades vallenato has increasingly become woven into New York’s contemporary global soundscape. Along with Mexican *corrido* singers, Chinese *erhu* fiddlers, West Indian steel-pan drummers, and Senegalese *kora* players, you might find yourself listening to the Tapiero brothers playing classic vallenatos of Rafael Escalona, Alejo Duran, or the Zuletas, as they busk their way through NYC subways. Or, in a Lower East Side club you might encounter Alejandro Zuleta’s most recent project, Gate 4, which presses the outer limits of vallenato experimentation even further. Traditional genres provide new avenues for individual creativity. Vallenato’s varied pathways are evident in New York and highlight the genre’s pivoting gateway as artists enter and engage in transcultural and intercultural musical exchanges that continue the transformation of tradition and modern vallenato performance practice.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The title of this essay refers to Francois Truffaut’s *nouvelle vague* gangster film *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), described as part thriller, part comedy, part tragedy. The film relates the adventures of mild-mannered piano player Charlie (Charles Aznavour) as he stumbles into a criminal underworld and a whirlwind love affair (<http://www.criterion.com/films/764-shoot-the-piano-player>, accessed 15 September 2013). This essay is excerpted from a work in progress by the author.



*Alejandro Zuleta's Vallenato Collective performs at The Shrine, NYC, 2013*

*Courtesy of Alejandro Zuleta*

<sup>2</sup> Vallenato can be grouped into three main stylistic categories, each associated with a distinct area: *vallenato-negroid* (black vallenato, or Afro-Caribbean), *vallenato-ribereño* (river valleys vallenato, or sabaneros/savannahs) and *vallenato-vallenato* (central vallenato) from the towns and valleys located near Valle de Upar (or Valledupar), the so-called birthplace of the style. See Tomás Darío Gutierrez Hinojosa, *Cultura vallenata: Origen, teoría y pruebas* (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Plaza & Janes, 1992), for data about the “origins” of vallenato, including

interviews of musicians and songwriters from important vallenato families.

<sup>3</sup> Former *telenovela* actor and musician Carlos Vives is often credited for vallenato’s popularization. Vives’ brand of vallenato, while still popular, is generally aligned with rock and pop. More recently it has been bypassed in favor of *vallenato tropical*, currently the mainstream favorite associated with singers like Jorge Celedón.

<sup>4</sup> The object of Zuleta’s affection is Carmen Diaz from Villanueva, a small *costeño* town near Valledupar. Emiliano Zuleta is renowned for writing vallenatos, including the classic “La gota fría,” “Carmen Díaz,” “El indio Manuel María,” “El regreso de Carmen,” “Mis hijos,” “La enfermedad de Emiliano,” and “Villanueva.”

<sup>5</sup> In the vallenato universe, the Zuletas are renowned for their songwriting, lyrical invention, powerful vocals, intensely emotional performances, and close adherence to vallenato’s stylistic musical features. In addition to the elder Emiliano Zuleta, Poncho, Ivan, and Emiro Zuleta (Alejandro’s father) perpetuate

## The State of *Vallenato* in New York City (cont.)

traditional vallenato song texts and poetics as well as the general forms and structures that define the genre. See Jorge Arévalo Mateus, "The Colombian Costeño Musicians of the New York Metropolitan Region: A Manifestation of Urban Vallenato" (M.A. Thesis, Hunter College, CUNY, 1998). *Parrandas* are informal socio-musical gatherings where sung and improvised verses, including *coplas*/couplets and *décimas*, are performed in a kind of duel or competition known as *piquerías*. *Parrandas* can also refer to the festive atmosphere of the gatherings.

<sup>6</sup> Both Zuleta and Uribe are trained musicians from Bogotá, with formal music education backgrounds. Uribe majored in percussion and jazz arranging at Berklee College of Music in Boston. Zuleta holds an M.M. from New York University where he studied jazz with Ralph Alessi, composition with Gil Goldstein, and film scoring with Mark Suozzo. He holds a B.A. in music composition from Universidad Javeriana. (<http://www.alejandrozuletamusic.com/bio/>, accessed 19 October 2013).

<sup>7</sup> The term "Colombia Nova" was coined by Sadys Rodrigo Espitia, the host of WKCR's *Sonidos Colombianos* weekly radio broadcast (89.9 FM, Columbia University) and an amateur vallenato acordeonista.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Los Macondos and vallenato's introduction to New York in the late 1970s-early 1980s, see Arévalo Mateus (1998).

<sup>9</sup> Sadys Espitia, Jr., interview with author, 13 October 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Alejandro Zuleta, interview with author, 2 October 2013.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to yearly winners of the crown, every ten years a King of Kings is chosen from among the winners of the preceding decade. The selected artist is awarded with La Pilonera Mayor prize, the highest possible award for a vallenato musician (<http://www.colombia.travel>, accessed 26 October 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Uribe's Facebook events promotion page (<https://www.facebook.com/events/653285164702434/>, accessed 5 November 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Desi Arnaz's television orchestra was in residence at the fictitious yet aptly named Tropicana Club of the *I Love Lucy* show.

<sup>14</sup> Gregorio Uribe, interview with author, 5 November 2013.

<sup>15</sup> *Música costeña* is also known as "música tropical." See Peter Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation, Música Tropical in Colombia*. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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# New York Improviser-Composers and the Politics of Multiplicity

Amanda L. Scherbenske, Wesleyan University

Lower Manhattan and more recently Brooklyn have hosted manifold artistic movements.<sup>1</sup> They have served as a stage for the literary Bohemians of the late nineteenth century; the Tin Pan Alley musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the Dada artists of the 1910s and 1920s; the Abstract Expressionists of the 1940s; the Beat writers and beboppers of the post-war period; the free jazz musicians, Fluxus artists and neo-Dadaists of the 1960s; the new wave, punk, “Downtown,” and hip hop scenes of the 1970s and 1980s; and the Radical Jewish Culture movement of the 1990s. A younger generation of improviser-composers began their careers in Lower East Side venues including Tonic and the Knitting Factory around the early 2000s; nowadays, they perform throughout New York, its surrounding areas, and beyond. It is this generation of improviser-composers with whom I am primarily concerned here.

Contextualizing these young musicians and their music requires reflecting on artistic movements that unfolded inside and outside of New York half a century ago. Starting in the late 1950s African-American collectives and individuals active in experimental musics regularly contested musical essentialism according to race. Midwestern and Western collectives such as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), Union of God’s Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA) and Black Artists Group (BAG), along with individuals including Sun Ra, Wadada Leo Smith, and Anthony Braxton, sought to move beyond genre circumscription and challenge racial stereotypes. They did so, in part, by favoring an egalitarian aesthetic that made use of varied musical resources. Many members of these collectives and individuals eventually found their way to New York. Over the next several decades musicians active in the M-Base collective, the “Downtown” scene, the Vision Festival, and the Radical Jewish Culture movement, invested in similar ideals of musical inclusion.<sup>2</sup>

The generation of improviser-composers active in New York since the early 2000s has taken up ranks in this tradition of boundary erosion, with varying relationships to its original political motivations. They regularly traverse myriad art and cultural scenes and to engage complex entanglements of sounds in their musical practices.<sup>3</sup> Mark Slobin suggests the term “musical multiplicity” to cope with, “the overwhelming interest in . . . multiple-source, multiple-leveled music-making.”<sup>4</sup> He observes that while today’s situation resembles that of the past, “the action is more ramified, multidimensional, and volatile than ever.”<sup>5</sup> In the case studies that follow, I use multiplicity to encompass the musical, personal, and political investments of this generation of improviser-composers.



Judith Berkson  
Courtesy of Judith Berkson

Throughout her life Judith Berkson has engaged musical multiplicity. At an early age, her father taught her the intricacies of Jewish prayers and blessings, and she studied Western classical piano and music theory. Later, her teacher Joe Maneri at the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC) encouraged her to pursue all musics that piqued her interest, including jazz: “[Maneri] just said [that] you could do it all. I mean why can’t you be well versed in a variety of musics, if you wanted to; you should.”<sup>6</sup> The principles she learned from Maneri guided her formative years in New York. She developed an eclectic solo show at her neighborhood Brooklyn haunt, Barbès. These performances culminated in the 2010 ECM release, *Oylam*.

*Oylam* gives expression to Berkson’s meticulous study of Jewish music, German Lieder, Second Viennese School atonality, and jazz. She insists that while the album contents are eclectic, they are unified by a personal sensibility: “It’s not just like a variety show . . . [it has] a certain avant-garde edge to it . . . [it’s an] economy of playing in kind of space and mood.”<sup>7</sup> She illustrates her aesthetic in the way she introduces and arranges material: she precedes the Yiddish song with a brief microtonal improvisation and adapts

## New York Improviser-Composers (cont.)

Schubert's classical standard "Der Leiermann" to an instrumentation more common to jazz or rhythm and blues.

Berkson's compositions "Ahavas Oylam" and "Inside Good Times" give voice to a range of techniques, styles and contexts. Whereas "Ahavas Oylam" is largely tonal and sung in Hebrew, "Inside Good Times" is largely pantonal and sung in English. They differ in performance practice, too: Berkson performs "Ahavas Oylam" with lots of vibrato and ornamentation, while she sings "Inside Good Times" without vibrato. She sings with melisma and largely moves stepwise in "Ahavas Oylam"; in contrast, she frequently employs great leaps in pitch in "Inside Good Times." Her rare combination of skills and blend of esoteric materials make her one-of-a-kind even within the vast expanse of New York art worlds.

If we assess multiplicity based on the performance of eclectic styles, we may say facetiously that Berkson performs Jewish music, Western classical music, and jazz. If, however, we resituate the discussion vis-à-vis her relationship to those styles, the conversation conjures personal and political implications. Berkson relayed to me that upon moving to New York she did not tell people that she performed Jewish music because she did not want to be relegated exclusively to it.<sup>8</sup> Her desire to be understood on her own terms resembles the political ambitions of the AACM, UGMAA and BAG, among others. The motivations espoused by elder African American improviser-composers, however, differ considerably from that of a white Jewish woman from Boston.

On one hand, Berkson's experience mirrors the AACM's desire to, "move beyond ethnic particularism toward the recognition of a multicultural, multi-ethnic base, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions, and methods."<sup>9</sup> On the other, she seems motivated more by her upbringing and leadership experience than by greater social and political currents. Music was a compulsory part of her formative years:

[Music] was just something that I did ... I could never quit piano: that conversation would never exist. I couldn't quit my family band: that doesn't exist. I can't not sing in the temple: that choice doesn't exist. It was just something that we did.<sup>10</sup>

Berkson talks about music in general terms, but the reality of her early experience was that she performed exclusively Jewish-identified and Western classical music. Her studies at NEC marked the first time in her life that she explored music on her own terms, a direction she would continue to pursue in New York.

Berkson initially began to develop a solo show in part because she struggled to run her own band. Shortly after moving to New York she formed a quartet to perform her compositions. She later dissolved the ensemble because, "I think I was trying to reconcile this idea of being a jazz musician, and wanting to be that, but really not being that."<sup>11</sup> Although she had training in jazz at NEC, she had more practice-based experience in Western classical and Jewish music. Slobin proposes that belonging is a "complex act" dependent upon degree of commitment to a particular expressive cultural affiliation and, "a choice to follow up an affinity."<sup>12</sup> Berkson's pursuit of her solo project *Oylam* was initially motivated by a sense of disbelonging among jazz communities. I speak of *disbelonging* because although Berkson made inroads into the jazz community, she ultimately felt that she did not fit in with her jazz peers.

It is out of just such a discussion of belonging, and disbelonging, that I turn to the practices of drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey. Sorey was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. As a toddler he and his father fashioned toy drum sets out of pots, pans and discarded boxes. When he was around four years old he plunked out church hymns on a keyboard in four-part harmony by ear. He learned trombone, and later, drum set through his public school music program. As a high school student Sorey delved into recordings of Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton, and Wayne Shorter and soon began to write music in the style of these composers. He studied classical trombone and jazz drum performance at William Paterson University from 1999 to 2004. While a college student he started a professional career as a drummer, performing throughout New York and Europe. He immersed himself in compositions by Anton Webern, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Christian Wolff, and Milton Babbitt. At Anthony Braxton's encouragement he began to write music inclusive of all his interests.

## New York Improviser-Composers (cont.)

Sorey currently works across art worlds and performs multiple idioms, particularly when viewed diachronically. As a teenager he played organ jazz nearly every Tuesday at the Peppermint Lounge near his hometown of Newark. Throughout his twenties he toured the European jazz festival circuit with Steve Coleman, Dave Douglas, Butch Morris, and Michele Rosewoman. He has recently added klezmer to his performance palette. He plays the traditional klezmer drumming iterations he learned from canonical recordings and from improvising extended percussive passages with Frank London's Shekhi-nah Big Band. Sorey has never performed at any of the Jazz at Lincoln Center events, but his association with the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) as an ICElab "collaborator" has led him to the stage of this midtown concert bastion. In the summer of 2013 he performed his composition, *New York/Copenhagen*, with ICE for Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival.

Sorey brings together a host of interests and ideas in *New York/Copenhagen*.<sup>13</sup> He repeatedly listened to recordings of the Ethiopian saxophonist Gé-tatchèw Mèkurya and cantors Josef (Yossele) Rosenblatt (1882–1933) and Leib Glantz (1898–1964) as compositional preparation, taking harmonic inspiration from the Ethiopian mode *anchihoy* and the Jewish modes *mi sheberakh* and *freygish*, and rhythmic inspiration from the performers' distinctive styles.<sup>14</sup> J.S. Bach's Violin Sonatas and Partitas (BWV 1001–1006) are brought to bear in the violin bowings and phrasing. Finally, Sorey demonstrates his long-time fascination with rhythmic perception. He loosely bases the meter of the third movement on a *terkisher* (a klezmer genre in duple meter), reconceiving it as 15/16 (realized as 7 + 8/16). This gives the feeling of a duple meter with a slight hiccup effect. By emphasizing beat eight of each measure he produces a modified back beat (common to jazz and related styles) over every two

measures. In addition, he provides an alternate way to feel the time—in this case as triple meter—by activating a high hat jingle every five beats.

*New York/Copenhagen* embraces multiplicity. Yet for Sorey, an African American man, the "putative jazz label" lingers.<sup>15</sup> From 2009–2011 he attended graduate school in composition at Wesleyan University. He subsequently applied to doctoral programs in composition at two prestigious American universities. He was accepted and matriculated to Columbia University; the other school rejected him. A tenured professor at the latter institution wrote in a personal email to Sorey that he had expected him to submit more "jazz" compositions, and that had he done so he would have been a stronger candidate. The pieces that Sorey submitted, however, were ones he had written for the ensembles Fieldwork, Paradoxical Frog, Sorey-Neufeld-Morgan and ICE; all but ICE have had greater visibility within the jazz worlds than classical or new music ones. The works he selected all demonstrated his diverse, boundary-crossing musical interests that include improvisation as well as concepts of time that explore rhythmic cognition, tuplets, layered cycles, and rhythmic synchronicity.<sup>16</sup>



Tyshawn Sorey  
Courtesy of Amanda Scherbenske

Today Sorey faces obstacles similar to those encountered by the founders of AACM forty-eight years ago. Although he crosses genres and traverses new music and jazz art worlds, he was quite literally rejected by one of America's preeminent institutions of higher education for not meeting racially essentialist expectations. I am reminded here of Appadurai's "certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics."<sup>17</sup> A discussion of boundary erosion and multiplicity is not about artistic and cultural flows for Sorey; it is, rather, about artistic and cultural networks disjointed by personal prejudice at the micro level, and, disciplined structures of inequality at the macro level.

## New York Improviser-Composers (cont.)

Multiplicity, then, is expressed through diversity of musical materials, as well as undergirded by individual histories, markers of identity, and expressions of belonging. In spite of Berkson's ostensible Jewish lineage, heritage alone explains neither musical expression nor motivation. Instead, multiplicity evolves over a lifetime's worth of experiences and aesthetics. Affinity groups, too, do not fully speak to multiplicity; among improviser-composers' networks, genre is more significant for its residual presence within institutional structures than in ground-level music-making and creative exploration. Sorey's performance of jazz, new music, and klezmer, and his appearance at venues connected to both jazz and new music, however, do not erase broader distinctions upheld by America's bifurcated and, ultimately, racialized depiction of its musics and musicians.

Still, Slobin's work provides a starting point for the sort of willed affiliations present among improviser-composers' networks. His recognition that "[a] choice to follow up an affinity leads to belonging," involves a "complex act" dependent upon the level of commitment to a particular expressive cultural affiliation.<sup>18</sup> This generation of improviser-composers forges unique relationships to an African American musical history that embraces musical inclusion. Their performance of multiplicity is ultimately shaped by their relationship and sense of connectedness to the music cultures and histories from which their varied resources stem. Multiplicity among New York improviser-composers, then, forces us to reevaluate any proffers that it is, in fact, benign. Rather, when we speak of multiplicity, we must really speak of a politics of multiplicity that takes into account America's racialized and gendered history of musics and musicians.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> For my purposes Lower Manhattan is defined as below 28th Street. The majority of improviser-composers with whom I have worked live in Brooklyn, which now represents an important site for the performance of experimental musics.

<sup>2</sup> This version of the "Downtown" scene largely centered on the Knitting Factory's 47 East Houston Street and 74 Leonard Street locations. See Michael Dessen, "Decolonizing Art Music: Scenes from the Late Twentieth Century United States." (PhD disserta-

tion, University of California, San Diego, 2003) and George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), for a critique of "Downtown."

<sup>3</sup> See my forthcoming "Multiplicity and Belonging among New York City Improviser-Composers, 2000-2011" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wesleyan University, 2014) for a thorough discussion of this generation of improviser-composers.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Slobin, "Musical Multiplicity: Emerging Thoughts," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 39 (2007): 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Berkson, interview with author, 14 December 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Berkson, interview with author, 7 November 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Field notes, 29 March 2009.

<sup>9</sup> George Lewis, "Experimental Music in Black and White: The AACM in New York, 1970-1985," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, edited by Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin (Columbia University Press, 2004), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Berkson, interview, 7 November 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Berkson, interview, 14 December 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 56.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://iceorg.org/digitice/detail/tyshawn-sorey-new-york-copenhagen-2013#.Um2bY7S9VUQ>

<sup>14</sup> Tyshawn Sorey, personal communication with author, 28 October 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, "Experimental Music in Black and White," 67.

<sup>16</sup> Tyshawn Sorey, personal communication with author, 23 September 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 221.

<sup>18</sup> Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 56.

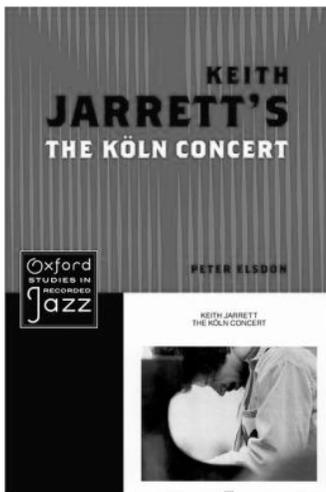
## Reading Jazz Recordings

Matthew K. Carter, CUNY Graduate Center

The series *Oxford Studies in Recorded Jazz* currently consists of four volumes: *Keith Jarrett's The Köln Concert* by Peter Elsdon, *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965-68* by Keith Waters, *Benny Goodman's Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert* by Catherine Tackley, and *Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings* by Brian Harker.\* In the preface to the series, editor Jeremy Barham writes that the collection “offers fresh perspectives on both well-known and neglected jazz repertoire,” and aims to “develop the subtle critical languages and vocabularies necessary to do full justice to the complex expressive, structural, and cultural dimensions of recorded jazz performance.”

One of the central issues permeating jazz scholarship, and indeed this series, is how to properly scrutinize recordings of a music that is prized for its ephemeral, spontaneous performance aesthetic, especially those recordings that are widely recognized as canonical texts. Moreover, the efficacy of transcriptions and the merit of their analyses is a hotly debated topic. The authors in this series are sensitive to these issues, and all provide a nuanced close reading of transcribed jazz performances within the larger social and historical contexts in which these recordings were created, mediated, and received.

In *Keith Jarrett's The Köln Concert* (Oxford, 2013), Peter Elsdon explores the mediation of Jarrett's live performance through the lens of the personal listening experience. He notes that a recording of a live jazz performance often carries with it the cachet of being an authentic, immediate representation of the moment-to-moment improvisational process, unencumbered by the revisions and editions of record producers and engineers. Elsdon rightly points out that recordings of live performances are subject to the same studio processes, but that this



idealization of live recordings was especially common within the cultural milieu in which *The Köln Concert* was widely consumed and acclaimed. The ECM label—and producer Manfred Eicher in particular—aimed to capitalize on this idealization, and to “imbue [the record] with qualities of liveness” (Elsdon, 10).

Jarrett's seemingly mystical improvisational aesthetic was a selling point to his fans in the 1970s, and garnered him crossover fandom from other genres. To further create a sense of immediacy and liveness on the album, mediating factors including the album cover (a photograph of Jarrett seated contemplatively at the piano bench, head down into his chest, seemingly in prayer), track listing (organized into two “Parts” rather than song titles), and Jarrett's ubiquitous vocalizations throughout the performance are all contributing factors to the listener's ability to engage with the recording on a personal, immediate level. It is in this way, Elsdon proposes, that the recorded product functions as artifice, somewhat disguising the fact that it has been subjected to these mediated processes.

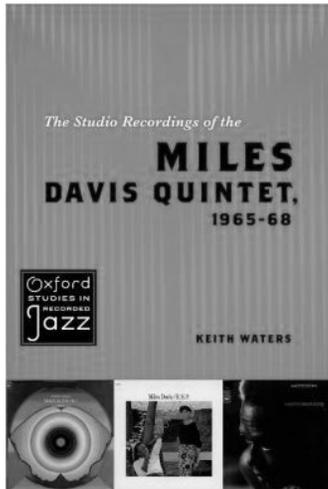
Elsdon's analyses illustrate the ways in which Jarrett's solo piano style evolved in the years preceding the Cologne recording, and highlight underlying formal structures that ground much of Jarrett's performative decisions, as well as his proclivity for diatonic harmony and his extensive use of “groove” passages to navigate in and out of improvisatory sections. It is in his discussions of Jarrett's groove passages that Elsdon's analyses really shine. He critically traces the path of groove through its general musical qualities, its use in boogie-woogie piano styles, and Jarrett's earlier adaptations of the technique. Finally, he demonstrates how Jarrett employs groove in *The Köln Concert*, for which he offers a number of possible expressive interpretations.

In terms of analytical artistry, Keith Waters's *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965-68* (Oxford, 2011) is the most exhaustive, instructive, and impressive in the series, and a new seminal work in Davis scholarship. Considering the complexity of this group's compositions, improvisations, group interactions, treatments of form, meter (and hypermeter), and harmony, Waters's analytical prose is surprisingly cogent. He abstains from a single analytical

## Reading Jazz Recordings (cont.)

methodology, and instead adopts a malleable approach that draws on both familiar and novel analytical models, all tethered to the equally pliable musical aesthetic of the band.

Waters is also well-versed in the relevant literature on the band and its individual members. He eschews

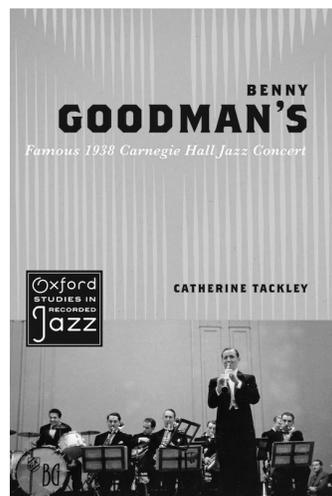


the uninformed historical narrative that presupposes Davis's autonomy in forging musical direction, and clears up the misconception that this band worked similarly to Davis's previous quintet, which privileged first takes in the studio. The availability of alternate takes, in-studio dialogue, and first-hand accounts by the musicians themselves offer valuable insight into the

quintet's experimental studio processes. By revising and rearranging tempos, feels, harmonic progressions, rhythms, and melodic statements, this quintet treated the studio space and the recording process as dynamic supplements to compositional, formal, and improvisational processes.

Catherine Tackley's *Benny Goodman's Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert* (Oxford, 2012)

offers an insightful unpacking of the historical events and people behind the organization, recording, performance, and dissemination of one of Benny Goodman's landmark recordings. Tackley arduously parses through all of the contemporaneous literature—newspaper reviews and articles, program notes, first-hand accounts of musicians and audience members—pertaining to the 1938 Carnegie performance, as well as the subsequent literature concerning the 1950 LP



and 1999 CD releases. In doing so, she excavates an intricate reception history of the music, considering the inter-generational audiences at whom the concert and its subsequent releases on record were aimed, as well as the shifting historiographic modalities within which critics were writing. Her literature review is coupled with an examination of the recording's mediation through production design, cover/sleeve packaging, original and modified program notes, inclusion and exclusion of audience noise and responses. All are succinctly summarized in provocative but easily digestible prose.

Tackley's musical analysis in "Part II" (which accounts for the bulk of the book), however, is a lackluster component in her study. Every track on the recording is studied to some degree, and much of these analyses draw from Tackley's personal transcriptions—an assiduous undertaking on her part to be sure. Yet much of what the reader evinces from these conclusions is disproportionate to the time, work, and space devoted to their presentation. At times, Tackley misses opportunities to tease out a more fruitful analysis that would be germane to, and thus enrich, the wonderfully astute work she offers in Parts I and III of her study. Her comparison of Benny Goodman's and Harry James's respective solos on "Life Goes to a Party" seems to miss the mark completely, making interpretive claims that are unsubstantiated by the music's auditory import.

Underwhelming musical analysis aside, Tackley's historical realizations here are fresh and elucidating. Her findings from investigating the critical receptions of the performance and its different disseminations on record are well-nuanced and effectively deployed throughout her study.

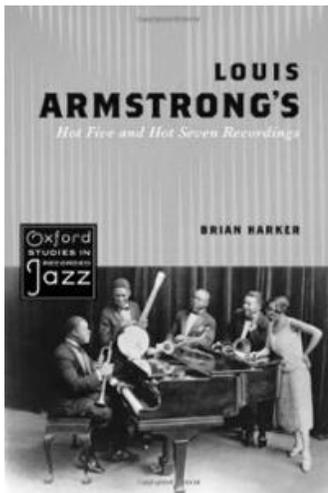
In *Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings* (Oxford, 2011), Brian Harker highlights Armstrong's evolving trumpet style during the years of these beloved recordings. Chapters are laid out chronologically, each chapter devoted to one of Armstrong's celebrated pieces: "Cornet Chop Suey," "Big Butter and Egg Man," "Potato Head Blues," "S.O.L. Blues/Gully Low Blues," "Savoy Blues," and "West End Blues." The analyses of these recordings are made especially instructive by Harker's situating

## Reading Jazz Recordings (cont.)

Armstrong's performative choices within an overarching narrative that traces Armstrong's ambivalent view of his own socio-cultural status.

This ambivalence was culturally informed by his own personal history, relationships, and views on the ideas espoused by writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Dave Peyton. Musically, Harker demonstrates this ambivalence through Armstrong's coupling of novelty and polish in his performances. His affinity for vaudeville, classical trumpet etudes, the novelty and precision implicit in a trumpet replicating the jagged arpeggiated figures of a clarinet, and the echoing of popular dance rhythms contemporary with these records' release, were all cultural codes that are subsumed in Armstrong's trumpet work in these recordings.

Armstrong's stop-time solo on "Potato Head Blues" is representative of this reading. This solo is widely considered a turning point toward a more



vertical, harmonically-based approach to improvisation—a marked shift in the paradigm of jazz solo improvisation. While this realization is not altogether inaccurate, it does not tell the whole story. Harker enriches and expands our conception of this performance's historical import by considering it not as a necessary, artistic expression of a new aesthetic of jazz

“improvisation”—a term Harker also problematizes provocatively—but rather as a calculated, polished solo on which Armstrong had clearly been working for some time. Armstrong had no aspirations of re-writing the lexicon of jazz soloing style with “Potato Head Blues,” but instead aimed to imbue the performance with certain cultural codes. His analysis presents an enlightening examination of Armstrong's famous 1928 recording of “West End Blues.” Here, Harker points to numerous instances where Armstrong draws on “hot,” “sweet,” “classical,” and “gutbucket” styles within this single performance.

Despite the challenges recorded jazz performances present to critical study, the volumes in the *Oxford Studies in Recorded Jazz* series prove these mediated artifacts are worthy of close examination. Recordings “offer data points that can be charted in retrospect, and compared with relevant contemporaneous events, to perceive historical patterns of which [the performer] might have been unaware” (171). Brian Harker's words concerning Louis Armstrong speak on behalf of all of those for whom analysis of jazz recordings is an ambivalent undertaking: “If we are chastened by a recognition of all that records leave out, we may nevertheless appreciate the powerful reflection they give of Armstrong's waking world in the 1920s.” (171)

*\*Editor's Note: As of the printing of this review, a fifth volume, Gabriel Solis's The Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall (Oxford, 2013), has appeared.*

# “Strike Up the Band”: First-Ever Critical Edition of the Works of George and Ira Gershwin Announced

Mark Clague, University of Michigan

Editor-In-Chief, *George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition*

Serving as Executive Editor of the series *Music of the United States of America* from 1997 to 2003, I was charged with the task of exploring the feasibility of a critical edition of George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*. Among the signature works that define the soundscape of American music, the *Rhapsody* was deserving of more scholarly attention. Nevertheless, and despite repeated efforts, a decade later the edition remained just a dream. You can imagine my astonishment then, when I received word from our dean’s office that a Todd Gershwin had phoned the University of Michigan’s School of Music, Theatre & Dance to inquire if we might be interested in facilitating a critical edition of Gershwin works. It turned out that Todd was a 1997 graduate of the University of Michigan and that his family had become interested in making certain that George and Ira’s legacy of musical imprints received a depth of scholarly attention that matched its impact on American culture. They had been hearing repeated complaints from musicians that the performance parts in circulation, even for a masterwork such as *Porgy and Bess*, were in dire need of editorial attention.

For example, the only edition of George Gershwin’s *Cuban Overture* published during his lifetime is a version for piano four hands. It differs from the later published orchestral score and parts in one especially important detail—the ending. The piano version has two extra bars, such that the penultimate measure is heard three times before a climactic sonic shout brings the piece to a close. The orchestral score and parts—those currently available to ensembles for performance—lack the repeating bars. Why the discrepancy? A review of George Gershwin’s personal copy of the manuscript score, one from which he himself conducted the work, matches the commercially available imprint. Closer inspection,

however, reveals that written in pencil above the second to last bar in George’s hand is the notation “3 Times.” It seems clear then that at some point between the overture’s 1932 premiere and the 1933 publication of the piano score, Gershwin revised the ending, extending the cadential gesture to add drama, intensity, and impact to the percussive close. He wrote this change by hand into his personal copy of the score and transferred it to the publication of the piano version. Presumably the composer would have done the same when he oversaw the publication of the full score—but tragically he never had the chance. George died precipitously of an untreatable brain tumor on 11 July 1937. He was only thirty-eight years old.



George and Ira Gershwin,  
New York, 1928  
Courtesy of the Ira and Leonore  
Gershwin Trusts

George Gershwin’s early death is one reason that current publications of his music are checkered with mistakes and omissions. Performance parts for his iconic *Rhapsody in Blue* offer a characteristic example in which multiple sets of parts, each with different editorial cuts, create a situation in which no authoritative version exists. Emblematic works of the American soundscape—the *Second Rhapsody*, the *Variations on “I Got Rhythm,”* *An American in Paris*—articulate sonic crossroads of styles and cultures forged in Gershwin’s musical imagination but are distorted by errors. Lines of dialogue written by

Ira for the folk opera *Porgy and Bess* are missing from the its performance materials and full score, much of which is in such poor physical condition as to be all but a cipher for the conductor.

*The George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* promises to resolve these editorial discrepancies and provide freshly engraved performance materials for all of the brothers’ works. The edition will save rehearsal time and frustration, improve the quality of performances, and lead to a deeper understanding of these works by scholars, musicians, students, and audiences

## “Strike Up the Band” (cont.)

alike. The editorial challenge results from the Gershwins’ pioneering aesthetic, a creative approach that transgressed boundaries of style, genre, and especially cultures. Ira’s lyrics offered keen insight into the changes of modern life, while George’s ear embraced sounds from the street and the club to the stage and the



Ira and George Gershwin,  
Beverly Hills, 1937

Courtesy of the Ira and Leonore Gershwin Trusts

concert hall. Such aesthetic diversity presents unusual editorial demands, including the recognition of African American idioms and Broadway scoring shorthand. A prevailing goal of the *Edition* will be to celebrate this broad aesthetic range, presenting not a single *Rhapsody in Blue*, for example, but multiple versions that capture the life of the Gershwins’ music on different stages. For *Rhapsody in Blue* this will include at minimum the 1924 jazz version, the 1926 orchestral version, and George’s own two-piano score for the work. The *Edition* will also include first-ever publications of the Gershwins’ film music, including scores for *Delicious* (1931) and *Shall We Dance* (1936), in full score.

The families of George and Ira Gershwin, especially their nephews Marc George Gershwin and Michael Strunsky, inspired the project, working with the University of Michigan and drawing upon the expertise of its American Music Institute. The project likewise has deep connections to the Hitchcock Institute. Once a Michigan faculty member, H. Wiley Hitchcock served as a founding board member of the AMS Committee on the Publication of American Music. This group continues to oversee Michigan’s NEH-funded collaborative publishing project—*Music of the United States*

*of America* (MUSA), a series of scholarly editions of American music, administered by the American Musicological Society and published by A-R Editions under the editorial aegis of Richard Crawford, a Hitchcock student. The new *Edition* is modeled on MUSA and will be published through European American Music in New York.

Expected to be a three- or four-decade effort, the *George and Ira Gershwin Critical Edition* will be part of a larger educational initiative to include courses, performances, and symposia on the University of Michigan campus. The new edition of *Porgy and Bess*, edited by former Library of Congress music division staff member Wayne D. Shirley, is already in draft. The editorial board includes Ryan Bañagale, James Kendrick, Michael Owen, Loras Schissel, Karen Schnackenberg, and Wayne Shirley. Project advisors include members of the Gershwin family, plus William Bolcom, Richard Crawford, Michael Feinstein, Walter Frisch, Thomas Hampson, Joseph Horowitz, Laura Jackson, Andrew Litton, Alan Menken, Joan Morris, Robert Nederlander, Sr., Jessye Norman, and Michael Tilson Thomas. Further details about the project can be found at <http://www.music.umich.edu/ami/gershwin/>.



Draft of *Rhapsody in Blue* by George Gershwin  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress