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H. Lawrence Freeman and the Harlem Renaissance

David Gutkin and Marti Newland, Columbia University

On 26 and 27 June 2015, the life and work of composer H. Lawrence Freeman gained an audience and context. Columbia University hosted a performance of Freeman's 1914 opera *Voodoo*, the first production since its 1928 debut, and an interdisciplinary conference, "Restaging the Harlem Renaissance: New Views on Performing Arts in Black Manhattan." The events took place one week after the Charleston Church Massacre, where nine members of Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church were shot and killed during prayer service by a self-

proclaimed white supremacist. This act of anti-black terror—too similar to those enacted during the early twentieth century—lent the reviving and reconsideration of Freeman's work a weighty sense of timeliness. The engagement with Freeman's life and music that weekend offered original insight into black expressive culture during and before the Harlem Renaissance. We hope it may also have served to ignite scholarly interest in the composer and lead to more performances of his operas. This edition of the *American Music Review* offers context for Freeman's contributions by featuring selected papers from the conference's "Harlem Renaissance Opera" panel.



H. Lawrence Freeman at the piano
RBML Archive c. 1921
Courtesy of Edward Elcha

Born in Cleveland, Harry Lawrence Freeman (1869-1954) studied piano as a child and began performing as a church organist around the age of twelve.¹ He was said to have been spurred to compose after encountering Wagner's *Tannhäuser* as a young man. By 1891 Freeman had moved to Denver, where he formed an all-black amateur opera company to put on his first works, the libretti of which he also wrote. *The Martyr* (subtitled "a sacred opera"), which Freeman would later count as his first "grand opera," was performed in Denver and then again in Chicago during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, although it was not part of the fair itself. Set in ancient Egypt in the

early days of Judaism, the opera's exotic subject matter, lofty, faux-antique libretto, and Romantic score would set the mold for many of the approximately twenty operas Freeman composed over the next half-century.

Indeed, the plan for his life's work—to compose a monumental corpus of "grand operas" and "music-dramas" based on the legends and histories of what he called the "darker races of the world"—began to crystallize by the close of the nineteenth century.² An 1898 article in *The Cleveland Press* labeling Freeman "the colored Wagner" reads: "Freeman's plans are to go to Europe in about two years and after a thorough course at the big conservatories to go to Africa. He wants to meet the Zulus, the Kaffirs, the Abyssinians and other

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H. Lawrence Freeman (cont.)

nationalities and study their legends, mythology, and native music. He believes he can construct truly grand and noble operas on these foundations.”³ Freeman never made it to Africa, nor did he study in Europe. He did, however, receive lessons in the 1890s, after returning to Cleveland, from conductor and composer Johann Heinrich Beck, and in 1903 incorporated African students at Ohio’s Wilberforce University (where he taught from 1902 to 1904) into performances of his opera *An African Kraal*. After leaving Wilberforce, Freeman worked as music director for a number of musical comedies and theatrical organizations including Ernest Hogan’s *Rufus Rastus* in New York (1906), the Pekin Stock Company in Chicago (ca. 1907), Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson’s *Red Moon* tour (1909-1910), and John Larkins’ *Royal Sam* tour (1911-1912).⁴ Around 1912 Freeman moved to Harlem with his wife, actress-singer-director Carlotta Freeman, where he lived and worked as a composer, private music instructor, and occasional music critic for the rest of his life.

While Freeman’s ambition to weld the European operatic tradition with African sources was evident from the very beginning of his career, according to the composer’s own telling, he initially rejected the influence of African

American folk music entirely. In his unpublished study, *The Negro in Music and Drama*, Freeman recounts a tense exchange with famed poet Paul Laurence Dunbar on the subject of African American folk culture. Dunbar, Freeman writes, had attended the 1893 Chicago performance of *The Martyr*. Passing through Cleveland two years later, and staying with the Freemans, Dunbar admitted his bafflement that the composer ignored “Negro themes . . . the folk, work or camp-meeting songs of the South,” and in fact all black American music. He states “There is nothing Negroid in any of your compositions.” Freeman records his reply:

“I didn’t intend that there should be. What do I know about those things?” (I was insulted – outraged – exasperated) “Let somebody else do it; for it

is all totally foreign to me. But let me understand you, thoroughly. You mean for me to copy and utilize, for operatic purposes, those funny-sounding noises – groanings moanings and wailings... You expect me to say ‘Dis’ and ‘Dat’ in music, do you?... Well,” I concluded; “You suit yourself: I’ll suit myself: Do all the ‘South Before The War’ stuff you wish. None of it for me!”⁴

After relating this story, however, Freeman writes that he had “long since learned to love and revere these selfsme [sic] aboroginal [sic] Negro themes and melodies more than any music within the ken of mortal man.” Indeed, not only did the “South Before The War” become a recurring setting in Freeman’s operas, he also began incorporating African American

folksongs and spirituals into his compositional language and Southern black dialect—or his imagination thereof—into his otherwise high-flown libretti (a slave in the “American Music-Drama” *Athalia* sings: “Sojers is crossin’ de fiel’ out dere, ‘Pears lak to me deys a heedin’ heah!”). With the ad-



1947 performance of Freeman’s opera *The Martyr* at Carnegie Hall
H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VI, Box 51

dition of African American subject matter and music to his expansive operatic vision, by the 1910s Freeman had constructed the conceptual basis for what he called “Negro Grand opera.” “By this,” he writes in one essay, “I mean works conceived by Negro composers, based upon typical Negro life and interpreted by Negro artists.”⁵

For Freeman, “Negro Grand Opera,” although conceived as distinctly American, should build on the global mytho-historic project he had already embarked upon. “We also claim the right,” Freeman writes, “to depict certain episodes of the other dark skinned races, such as the [American] Indian, Mexican, Mongolian and other oriental peoples, especially those who have made their abode in Africa from time immemorial, such as the Egyptian and the Arab.”⁶ Among Freeman’s

H. Lawrence Freeman (cont.)

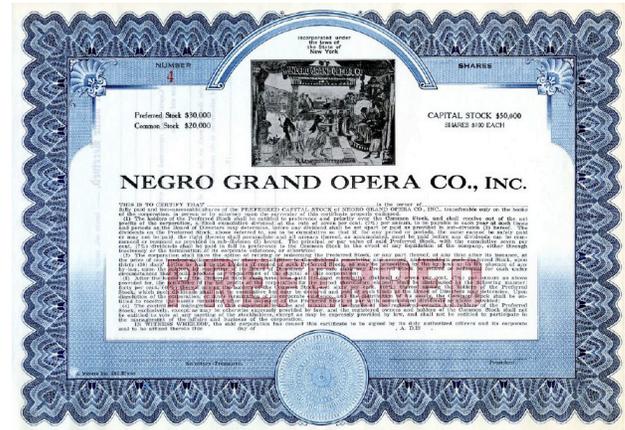
operas were: *Valdo* (1895), a “Romantic Opera,” about a nineteenth century Mexican caballero (Freeman later named his son after the title character); *The Octoroon* (1904), a romance about “miscegenation” in the antebellum South based on Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s serialized novel of 1861-62; *An African Kraal* (1903), set in Kaffirland; *The Tryst* (1911) and *The Prophecy* (1911), both about American Indians; *Athalia* (1916), set in the South during the Civil War; *Vendetta* (1923), set in Mexico; and the Zululand “African Music Drama” tetralogy (ca. 1917-43) based on the novel *Nada the Lily* by H. Rider Haggard.

To produce his operas, which he continued composing even as they mostly went unperformed, Freeman began to work out plans as early as 1913 for a black opera company. Originally to be called the Colored Grand Opera Company of New York, the organization was eventually incorporated as the Negro Grand Opera Company in 1920. Seeking to sell stock in the Company at \$100 a share, Freeman and his son Valdo printed flyers appealing to racial pride: “The Negro composer has not had this same opportunity for public presentation, the Caucasian not deeming it within his province to accept the Negro’s creative ability in the realms of higher art seriously . . . Hence the successful presentation of these works by a superb organization . . . who will forthwith establish irrefutable proof of the creative achievement of the great Races of the World.”⁷⁷ Selling stock did not prove successful, and the Negro Grand Opera Company only managed to put on a few performances over the next decade, including *Vendetta* in 1923 at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, and *Voodoo* in 1928 at the Palm Garden on 52nd street in the Broadway district.

Cut short owing to poor ticket sales, the 1928 run of *Voodoo* at the Palm Garden nevertheless received a significant amount of attention in both New York’s white and black presses. This may have been partially owing to advertisements that designated the work with the intriguing, au courant label: “Negro Grand Jazz Opera.” In fact, Freeman had completed *Voodoo* in 1913 or 1914, before the word “jazz” had entered mainstream use, and in his own writings he generally referred to the work simply as “grand opera.”⁷⁸ Reviews were notably mixed. The predominant criticism leveled at *Voodoo* in the white press when it was premiered was that it exemplified an anxiety-ridden and

even perverse attachment to a rapidly receding nineteenth-century European Romanticism. One reviewer complained, “The work is supposed to be a jazz-opera, so a jazz orchestra was selected. But ‘Voodoo’ is not jazz. It is attempt to produce under the guise of negro forms the old Italian form of opera. There are arias that ape Verdi and Donizetti. There is a plot that reaks [sic] of the tragic school.”⁷⁹

The stakes and criteria for considering Freeman as modern were obviously different for Harlem society



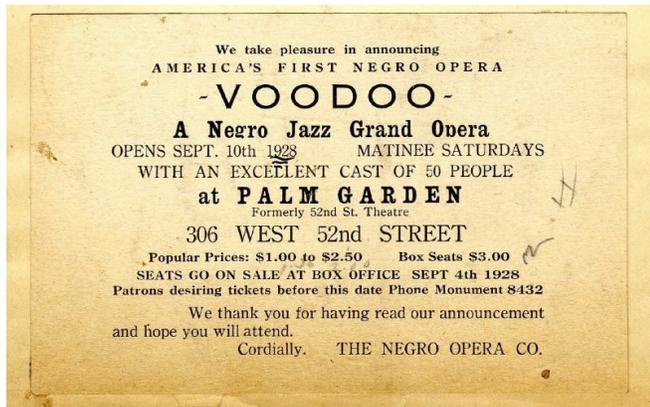
Negro Grand Opera Co. Stock. Preferred Stock \$30,000; Common Stock \$20,000; Capital Stock \$50,000; Shares \$100 each (1920)
H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VI, Box 51

and the black press, for whom artistic innovation was almost inevitably bound up with questions of socio-economic progress and philosophies of racial uplift. Writing for the *New York Amsterdam News*, theater critic Obie McCollum incisively commented on a dialectic of conservatism and innovation in Freeman’s life and work. Upon stumbling into Freeman’s studio, the reviewer conceded, one might be forgiven for exclaiming: “‘Here is an old school music teacher who lives in the past.’” “Certainly,” McCollum continues, “the Elizabethan period paintings, the wall masks recalling the glory which was the Moor’s, the alabaster bust of Shakespeare, bard of Avon; the mullions and furniture in Doric, Louis IV and Ionic, and the paneled walls and ceiling in ebony, red, gold and pale green would suggest a leaning toward yesterday.” But to dwell on appearances, the author suggests, would be to entirely miss the deep strain of innovation in the work of this “pioneer composer.”¹⁰ Similar rhetoric could be found in reviews of *Voodoo* published in black newspapers. A headline subtitle in the *Baltimore Afro-American*,

H. Lawrence Freeman (cont.)

for example, reads “‘Voodoo,’ Race Opera Opens Up New Field—Lawrence Freeman’s Play Takes Pioneer Step in New Race Culture,” while an advance publicity blurb in the *New York Amsterdam News* was given the martial title, “The Negro Invades the Grand Opera Field.”¹¹

In 1933 Freeman convinced Alfredo Salmaggi to produce and conduct *Voodoo* at the Hippodrome Theater, with the excellent house orchestra, provided that Freeman himself raise \$2,000 for scenery and costumes. Hoping to entice Salmaggi into staging his father’s work, Valdo Freeman bombastically estimated that a production of *Voodoo* would “attract most of the 350,000 Negroes in greater New York.” Despite a letter-writing campaign in support of Freeman carried out in the *New York Amsterdam News*, the necessary funds were never raised and the Hippodrome production never took place. But the 1930s also contained some notable successes for Freeman. In 1930 he was



Postcard-sized advertisement for *Voodoo* (1928)
H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59

awarded the Harmon Prize. On 25 January 1934, three one-act operas by Freeman were presented at Salem M. E. Church in Harlem to a capacity audience of 2,500 people. Later that year, Freeman’s work reached an even larger audience when he was chosen to participate in “O, Sing a New Song,” a “musical extravaganza” presented at Chicago’s Soldier Field that was “conceived to display Negro Music in an Historical way.”¹²

Despite a dearth of performances in his later years, Freeman seems never to have stopped imagining that his contributions to American opera would eventually achieve critical and popular acclaim. During the late

1940s he began to draw up plans for an organization to be called the Aframerican Opera Foundation, a kind of Bayreuth-in-America that would provide a platform for the performance of his works. The plan included the construction of an opera house to be built “on the outskirts of New York City, with a seating capacity of seven thousand people, and parking lot for two thousand automobiles.” Perhaps we are not quite there yet, but the conference and two sold-out performances of *Voodoo* at Columbia University’s Miller Theater in the summer of 2015—almost ninety years since it was last heard—is a pretty good start.

Opening the “Restaging the Harlem Renaissance” conference, La Vinia Jennings read from Freeman’s study *The Negro in Music and Drama*, and discussed Freeman’s life in Cleveland and Harlem.¹³ She mentioned that he personally knew many of the musicians, actors, and cultural luminaries whom he wrote about, including Scott Joplin. Jennings stressed Freeman’s self-assurance about his work and noted that he referred to his operas as “masterpieces.” The conference went on to interrogate how culture shaped artistic production during the Harlem Renaissance.¹⁴

The following articles are edited from the proceedings of the “Harlem Renaissance Opera” panel. In “Immigration and the Great Migration: *Porgy and Bess* in the Harlem Renaissance,” Naomi André enriches scholarship about race and *Porgy and Bess*, addressing expressions of migration and whiteness in the opera. She contends that the Gershwins wrote not only about African American experiences, but Jewish experiences as well. Carolyn Guzski, in “Harlem Renaissance Man: Frank Wilson at the Metropolitan Opera,” refines our knowledge about the desegregation of the Metropolitan Opera, discussing the inclusion of an all-black chorus, led by Wilson, during a 1926 production of John Alden Carpenter’s ballet *Skyscrapers*. In “Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (1924), and the New Negro Renaissance in and Beyond Harlem,” Stephanie Doktor highlights the city of Charleston. Addressing the New Negro politics of Charlestonian composer and jazz clarinetist Edmund Thornton Jenkins, Doktor interprets Jenkins’ opera *Afram* as an expression of black modern subjectivity. The panel was a testament

H. Lawrence Freeman (cont.)

to the enduring significance of the city of Charleston for African American culture, and a fitting reminder that Harlem Renaissance composers like Freeman may have grounded their work in Harlem, but forged it with a global African diasporic awareness. We hope that these pieces will spur more scholarship on Freeman, blackness, and opera.

Notes

¹The sketch of Freeman's life and information about the reception of *Voodoo* that follows is drawn from David Gutkin, "American Opera, Jazz, and Historical Consciousness, 1924-1994," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015). This work is reliant on the H. Lawrence Freeman Papers held at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

²"The Artistic Status," (circa 1920) in H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VI, Box 49, Folder 11.

³"[Word missing] African Operas," *Cleveland Press*, 25 March 1898. This article does not bestow the title "the colored Wagner" on Freeman but rather observes that it is "the appellation given to Harry L. Freeman by the musicians of Cleveland." In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 59.

⁴From 1908-1909 Freeman served as an organist at the Cory Methodist Episcopal Church in Cleveland. Dates and professional positions are found in H. Lawrence Freeman, *The Negro in Music and Drama* (unpublished typescript). In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series V, Box 50, Folder 3.

⁵H. Lawrence Freeman, *The Negro in Music and Drama* (unpublished typescript), 342-43. In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series V, Box 50, Folder 3.

⁶H. Lawrence Freeman, "The Negro in Grand Opera" (unidentified music trade magazine, ca. 1922). In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 55.

⁷"The Negro in Grand Opera." In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 55.

⁸"The Artistic Status." In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VI, Box 49, Folder 11.

⁹Between 1924 and 1929 Freeman composed *American Romance*, a work that did in fact officially bear the subtitle "Jazz

Opera." Curiously, this was also his only opera that solely featured white, Anglo-American characters—but that is another story.

¹⁰Harold Strickland, "A New Opera," *The Brooklyn Daily Times*, 11 September 1928.

¹¹Obie McCollum, "The Trailblazer: H. Lawrence Freeman—Opera Composer for Four Decades," *New York Amsterdam News*, 20 October 1934, 9.

¹²"'Voodoo' Race Opera Closes After Short N. Y. Run: 'Voodoo,' Race Opera Opens Up New Field—Lawrence Freeman's Play Takes Pioneer Step in New Race Culture—SINGING EXCELLENT—Large Chorus and Orchestra of 21 Pieces," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 29 September 1928, 9. "The Negro Invades the Grand Opera Field," *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 August 1928, 6.

¹³Charles C. Dawson, "The Artist's Conception of the Pageant," in the official booklet *National Auditions Annual, A Century of Progress, Souvenir Edition of Afro-American Pageant, Inc., Soldier Field August 25, 1934*. In H. Lawrence Freeman Papers, Series VIII, Box 53, Folder 1.

¹⁴The conference was organized by Annie Holt and sponsored by the Heyman Center Public Humanities Initiative, as well as the Columbia Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, The Department of Music, The Institute for Research in African American Studies and the IRAAS Alumni Council, The School of the Arts Community Outreach and Education, The Columbia Ph.D. Program in Theater, and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The conference planning committee members were Annie Holt, Christina Dawkins, David Gutkin, Emily Hainze, Jennifer B. Lee, Marti Newland, Matthew Sandler, Rosa Schneider, and Marcia Sells. The performances of *Voodoo* took place in Miller Theater through the collaboration of Morningside Opera, Harlem Opera Theater, and the Harlem Chamber Players. The opera was conducted by Gregory Hopkins and directed by Melissa Crespo. The score, used in manuscript form, was reproduced from the Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library, where it is included in the papers that the Freeman family donated. By appointment, the 2015 performances of *Voodoo* can be seen and/or heard at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library. For a full list of conference participants and their paper titles see: heymancenter.org/events/harlemrenaissance/

Institute News

Jeffrey Taylor, Director

In 1971, over four decades ago, H. Wiley Hitchcock and then-Brooklyn College Provost Sherman Van Solkema issued an ambitious list of projects for the new Institute for Studies in American Music. I'm delighted that many of these plans have been realized, though others have since lost their relevance or have manifested in ways unforeseen by the Institute's founders. One project specifically mentioned in that document was the production of a TV series devoted to American music, and this, thanks largely to the efforts of our new special advisor **Randall Horton**, has now taken shape. Though the project has been in the works for some years, HISAM is now taking an active collaborative role. With the help of Brooklyn College's Dept. of Television and Radio (Stuart MacLellan, Chair) Horton has shepherded through several thirty-minute episodes featuring choral director Pastor Chantel Wright, klezmer and bluegrass musician Margot Leverett, composer and pianist Sunny Knable, and several others. The programs have appeared on CUNY TV and on PBS at Channel KRBC (North Bay Public Media, Santa Rosa, CA) with hopes of wider distribution in the future.

We will keep you updated on the series's progress; see the HISAM website or the series site at www.americanmusictv.org for additional information.

Congratulations are due once again to HISAM Research Associate **Arturo O'Farrill**. After winning a Grammy in 2015 for his ensemble's release *The Offense of the Drum*, he has been nominated again for *Cuba—The Conversation Continues*, with one nomination each for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album and Best Instrumental Composition (for *The Afro Latin Jazz Suite* that appears on the same album). O'Farrill, Senior Research Associate **Ray Allen** and Institute Director **Jeffrey Taylor** have been shaping some new curriculum initiatives at Brooklyn College related to global and contemporary jazz. These exciting new directions for our Conservatory of Music will be announced concurrently with the College's inauguration of the new Tow Center for the Performing Arts.

This fall brought another slate of thought-provoking topics to our students and community as part of our Music in Polycultural America series. On 11 November we celebrated the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folksong with guest



*Marti Newland and
Magdalena Stern-Baczewska
performing at Brooklyn College*

Photo by Jeffrey Taylor

John Cohen, who was joined by The Downhill Strugglers in a tribute to the southern folk music championed by Cohen's legendary group, The New Lost City Ramblers. A detailed exhibit about the Archive was hosted by the Brooklyn College Library. On 23 November ethnomusicologist and multi-instrumentalist **Samuel Torjman Thomas**, with two gifted fellow musicians, showed how the music of Moroccan Jews in New York had joined improvisational practices from traditional Maghrebian music and jazz. And finally, on 7 December soprano **Marti Newland** (who also co-edited this issue of *AMR*) and pianist **Magdalena Stern-Baczewska** presented a moving performance of African-American spiritual arrangements, with special emphasis on women composers such as Eva Jessye, Margaret Bonds, and Undine Smith Moore.

Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (1924), and the New Negro Renaissance in and Beyond Harlem

Stephanie Doktor, University of Virginia

In the early twentieth century, there was a vigorous debate about what role, if any, black folk music would play in defining U.S. concert music. This question galvanized leaders and artists of the New Negro Renaissance, especially around the issue of jazz.¹ To optimize political change, many black intellectuals and artists wanted to emphasize jazz's positive association with folk authenticity, so-called primitive vigor, and black originality, while, at the same time shedding minstrel stereotypes. W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, for example, encouraged the serious treatment of black folk music.² If incorporated into Western European traditions of art music, the spirituals (and for Locke, even jazz and blues) had the potential to showcase the cultural achievements of black Americans. Other black intellectuals pushed against this Eurocentricism and criticized the assignment of race progress solely to elites. Langston Hughes poignantly identified this "urge within the race toward whiteness" as the great racial mountain "standing in the way of any true Negro art in America."³ Hughes commanded black Americans to embrace jazz—what he called "the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world."⁴ Even Locke argued that "the cloister-walls of the conservatory and the taboos of musical respectability" were strangling the potential of powerful black folk traditions. For these leaders and artists, locating strategies to advance the race through art was shaped by apprehension about being too black or becoming too white.⁵ Black artistry was steeped in respectability politics wrought with anxieties about class.

Central to the Harlem Renaissance was the development of artistic expressions that championed the black freedom movement. But, as recent scholarship demonstrates, other urban centers both within and outside of the United States also contributed to these vibrant conversations. In *Escape from New York*, Davarian Baldwin draws attention to black Americans who traipsed the globe, mapping topographies of racial solidarity within new cultural contexts, to contribute to a broader black international movement of racial awakening.⁶ The cosmopolitan career of composer and jazz clarinetist Edmund Thornton Jenkins (1894-1926) exemplified the political and artistic aspirations of the international American New Negro. Jenkins traveled

through and briefly lived in Atlanta, London, Belgium, Paris, Harlem, and Baltimore.⁷ He wrote classical music by day and led dance orchestras by night, all while devising strategies to "uplift the race" through black music.⁸ Nowhere were his international New Negro politics more evident than in his unfinished operetta *Afram*, written in 1924 after leaving the United States for the last time, disillusioned by prejudice, to return to Paris.⁹ *Afram*'s mixture of classical vocal forms and black popular music, along with its African diasporic plot, articulate the experiences of the 1920s black American expatriate, the New Negro abroad. In its negotiation of these disparate styles, the operetta engages with black intellectual discourse about music's ability to express the black modern subject.

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Jenkins played clarinet in his father's famous Jenkins Orphanage Band, a bastion of early jazz. He became proficient on the violin and in composition at the Avery Institute—the city's first free secondary school for African Americans—and he subsequently studied composition with Kemper Harrelld at HBCU Morehouse College in Atlanta. In 1914, he traveled to England to lead one of his father's orphanage bands, The Famous Piccaninnys, at the Anglo-American Exposition. In the wake of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's success, Jenkins traded in his minstrelsy-laden job to study classical composition at the Royal Academy of Music. But he never abandoned his interests in jazz. In London, he directed the Queen's Hall Orchestra, featuring Jack Hylton, and recorded their mixture of sweet and hot styles to mark one of the earliest examples of a racially mixed band. In 1921, he was invited to Paris to direct one of the Art Hickman orchestras. Jenkins became an important connection for other black musicians traveling through



Edmund Thornton Jenkins
Courtesy of the Charleston Jazz Initiative,
Avery Research Center for African American
History and Culture, College of Charleston,
Charleston, SC

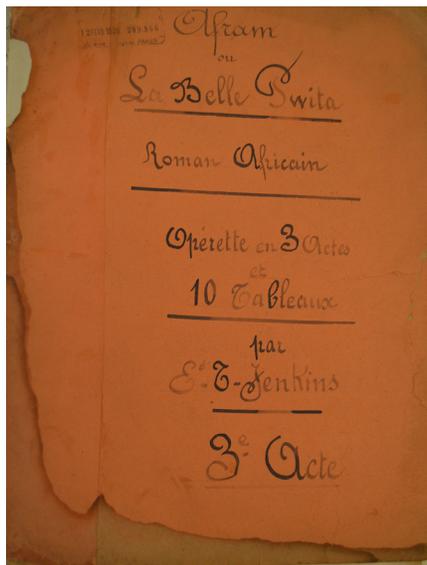
Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (cont.)

Europe, including Will Marion Cook and his Southern Syncopated Orchestra, James P. Johnson, Will Vodery, and Sydney Bechet.

While jazz offered Jenkins steady employment, he believed, like Locke and Du Bois, black classical music had important political implications. He had spurts of success in this arena. He premiered his first *Folk Rhapsody*, an orchestral piece embellished with spirituals and ragtime rhythms, in London in 1919 and Ostende, Belgium in 1925. He won *Opportunity's* Holstein prize in 1926 for both his *African War Dance* and *Sonata in A minor* for cello. For Jenkins, these compositions, rooted in black folk music and musical representations of blackness, had the potential to edify black male listeners and mobilize them as activists. After serving as a committee member of the African Progress Union, a London-based association dedicated to the “welfare of African and Afro-peoples,” he formed his own fraternal organization. The Coterie of Friends educated its members about “people of colour” and organized social gatherings centered on black classical music. Jenkins also helped W.E.B. Du Bois arrange musical programming for the 1921 and 1923 Pan-African Congresses. As an exemplary member of the “Talented Tenth,” Jenkins believed high art could guide the race toward the promise of equality. He pursued this work relentlessly, and, in addition to composing, he tried to create an all-black orchestra and a publishing firm for black music. He struggled to find patronage for these projects during his brief life, which was cut short by complications following an appendectomy in Paris at the age of thirty-two.

At the time Jenkins began writing *Afram* in 1924 he had taken a break from composition the year prior to lead dancebands in Paris and London. Will Marion Cook had been playing in Paris and, after encountering Jenkins in 1923, believed he was “the best musician in the colored race” and “the very best instrumentalist in any race.”¹⁰ He asked him to return to the U.S. and conduct what would become Cook’s

Negro Nuances revue. He did, but the show was off to a bad start, so Jenkins withdrew before opening night. Determined to succeed in his native country, Jenkins moved in with Will Vodery in Harlem (and later Robert Young in Baltimore) while looking for work and financial support, but several months later he returned to Europe, discouraged by the lack of opportunities for black composers and entrepreneurs in the U.S.. Gwendolyn B. Bennett, writing in *Opportunity*, said Jenkins came to America “filled with enthusiasm about some sort of musical plan,” but he left utterly discouraged after being reminded of “the frightful prejudice that hounds the American Negro’s every thought and action.”¹¹ Yet, his nine-month stint in Harlem and Baltimore left an indelible impression on his music; the political possibilities of black American entertainment infused *Afram*.



Cover, *Afram*, 1924
Courtesy of the Center
for Black Music Research.

The nearly complete piano and vocal manuscript indicates a three-act work which tells the story of an unnamed African Prince and Princess Bella Twita, who are in love with each other but separated by the Atlantic ocean. The Prince has won a war for the King of Dahomey, but has traveled to the United States (for unspecified reasons) and asks the Princess to come to him: “Do not let yourself be discouraged, put off by the seas and the mountains.” While waiting, the Prince attends a cabaret performance, which concludes with an eight-number revue called “The Charleston Revue.” It serves as the scenic and sonic backdrop for the couple’s reunion in the final act. Jenkins exploits the division between high art and popular music to carve out two distinct subjects: African nobility, who use traditional operatic forms and sing in French, and black American working-class entertainers, who perform ragtime-infused Tin Pan Alley tunes and sing blues numbers in English. Though *Afram* begins by separating popular and classical music in the first two acts, it concludes, in the third act, with the African couple uniting then joining the performance troupe to dance to a “Foxtrot for Jazz Orchestra,” based on the rhythm of the Prince’s aria. Popular music brings the

Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (cont.)

lovers together, and the operatic music assigned to African nobility is absorbed and rearticulated by black American entertainers.

Jenkins's pan-Africanism is ensconced in the plot's narrative. When the Prince sings about the Princess, he always mentions her country, making it hard not to hear a subtext of love for the homeland of the African diaspora: "On the African earth / ardent and so far away / My hopeful love / My arms take your waste and I am at your knees." In *Afram*, the Princess is Africa: the hope of equality through solidarity of black citizens living in hostile nations across the globe. Du Bois captured this philosophy better than anyone. When Jenkins was writing the operetta, Du Bois, with whom Jenkins frequently corresponded, had just conducted his third Pan-African Congress and often wrote about the continent in *The Crisis*. He argued for its decolonization and raised awareness about the shared struggle of the "darker races." He also shaped the continent into a cultural symbol for black heritage and distinctiveness: "Africa is the Spiritual Frontier of human kind," he proclaimed.¹² These sentiments are echoed in *Afram*'s final chorus: "Long live the African country of which the lovers have come to this American land

where they found each other." Behind *Afram*'s love story lies an operetta fundamentally about diasporic struggle and reverence.

Much like the highbrow musicals of Jenkins's colleague, Will Marion Cook, *Afram* depicts adoration for Africa but sometimes through a reductive cultural lens that makes problematic assumptions about what it means to be and sound African. The operetta is comprised of an assemblage of references to divergent parts of the continent's vast region. The title "*Afram*" refers perhaps to a setting, maybe the Ghanian river. The subtitle describes "*La Belle Twita*" as "Roman African," calling forth an ancient North African past. And the "*Danse de Guerre*" (which celebrates the King of Dahomey's victory) is a Zulu war-song, sung by the Prince's soldiers and replete with plodding bass lines, clamorous dynamics, and harmonic dissonance. It comes from *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent* (1921) by ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis, and it was intended to be used to ramp soldiers up before a battle. Jenkins's cocktail of African symbols yields a less-than-favorable, if not confusing, representation of the continent's diverse inhabitants, and his treatment of Africans as soldiers performing loud and percussive music relies heavily on the primitivist stereotypes gaining traction in the 1910s. However, this simplistic characterization of Africa is complicated by the Zulu war-song's context, which Jenkins would have encountered in the text. Its transcriber, Madikane Čele wrote:

The white man is apt to think of the black man as a yoked and subject being. But when first encountered by the British, the Zulus were a strong and proudly militant people whose highly trained armies were the pride and glory of their kings... It cannot be forgotten how, with only the [short javelin and shield], the naked hosts kept at bay the firearms of the English.¹³

The historical legacy of songs such as these was a point of racial pride for New Negroes. Within a pan-Africanist framework, depictions of black Africans with warlike fortitude—like those in Countee Cullen's poem, "Heritage," for example—symbolized resistance to

Chorus of *Afram*
Final
Chanté par tous les amoureux

C'est nous rap-pelle Sans deux ja-bis yeux, La fleur d'or-nella,
ren-dant deux yeux a-mou-reux, Née ce pays d'ici que, / a-mou-reux sont Ye - nus Sur cette terre d'ici que

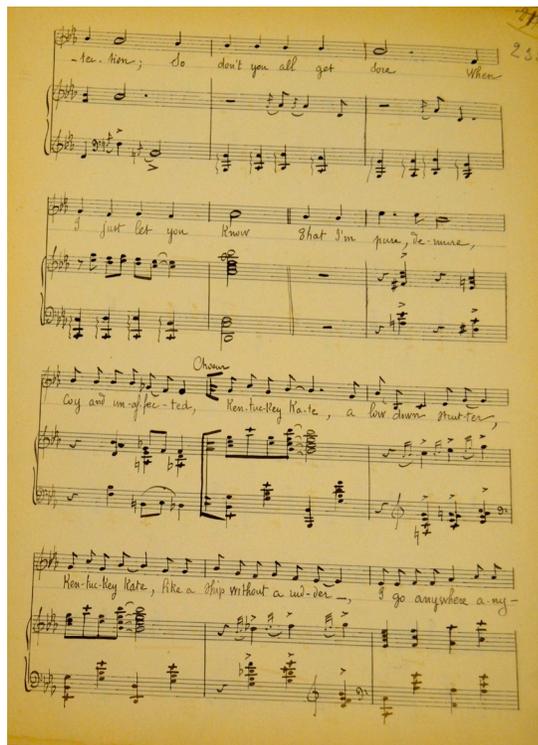
"Final," *Afram*, 1924

Courtesy of the Center for Black Music Research

Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (cont.)

violent formations of white supremacy.

If anything in this operetta deserves a bit more scrutiny it is Jenkins's treatment of black American folk culture, which entertains African nobility. "The Charleston Revue" sequence is a mixture of instrumental dances, vaudeville choruses, and blues numbers performed by, according to Jenkins's annotations, an authentic Charleston-based dance troupe and a vaudeville performer in the style of Florence Mills. The songs establish the performers' American identities through geographical references: "The Carolina Strut" and "The Charleston Crawl" are two of the dances, and "Kentucky Kate" tells us she's not from Caroline but there for the good weather.



"Kentucky Kate," *Afram*, 1924
Courtesy of the Center
for Black Music Research

Two of the blues songs depict, if not caricature, southern working-class blackness. In the "slow blues tempo" of "The Levee Lounge Lizard," the singer, using black dialect, tells us he is "Mister Rastus / Lord of Levee fame / Ain't nobody going to make me change my name / I've lived for years in this self same spot / And I'll live another two scores 'fore I'm prepared to drop." The piano accompaniment imitates

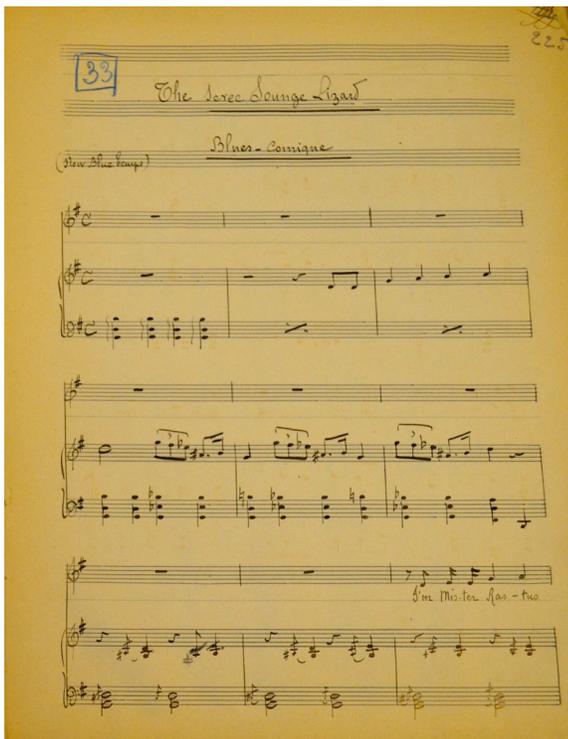
guitar strumming, a walking bass, and a repetitive ornamental gesture emphasizing the blues scale. Called a pejorative minstrel name, this character is content in his rural obstinacy and lackluster blues career. To compensate for his lack of fame and wealth ("I ain't no movie star / I ain't no desert shah), he asserts his heterosexual prowess ("But when I get behind the women folks / I shows them where they are").

Kentucky Kate, another stock character, is a "low down strutter." Over a walking bass, she lures the audience in with her mysterious identity: "Perhaps you'd like to know who I am?" In keeping with a blues phrase structure, her melodies are, at first, syllabic and syncopated, but each phrase ends on a sustained note, letting its confident sentiment linger. She is both itinerant and feisty, not subjected to the mores of middle-class femininity and sexuality. Her identity is her invention, she proclaims, as she plays "high-brow" and "pure" but also "poh" and angry. The stereotype of the aggressive southern working-class black woman culminates in the final verse: "Nobody bet not flurry me / Cause I ain't go tell in no high falutin words / In my powest language / I generally gives the bird."

In these and other numbers of the full cabaret, Jenkins relies on negative black stereotypes through classed and gendered markers, which establishes a difference between the cabaret's performers and its wealthy audience members. In this way, the operetta highlights the division between working-class blacks and black aristocracy. This distinction was central to the ideology of racial uplift. For Du Bois, it was the responsibility of "best of this race" to "guide the mass away from the contamination and death by the worst."¹⁴ As scholars have noted, these elite black leaders distinguished themselves from the other ninety percent for self-advancement in a white supremacist world.¹⁵ Kentucky Kate and the Levee Lounge Lizard were the mass to be led by the educated and professional minority. This racial hierarchy—riddled with class anxieties—materializes poignantly when the Princess first enters the Charleston nightclub with her black servant, Liza. At the same time, the Prince, angry he is alone, interrupts the show, calling it an "empty spectacle."

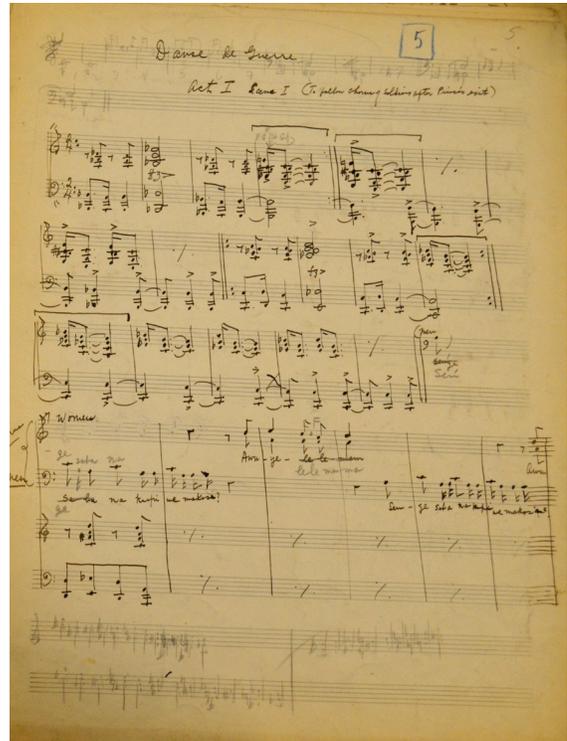
Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (cont.)

Though *Afram*'s depictions of blackness refracted class inequalities of the United States, Jenkins paints African Americans in a much more multifaceted way than he does his African characters. The Prince and Princess are assigned the same, static sentiment and they repeat it, with the same melodies, over the course of multiple duets and arias. The sheer number of black American characters and diversity of their expression delineate more nuanced identities. The most dynamic character is Tom, a young black man, who welcomes and seats guests at the Charleston nightclub. In the skit, Tom abruptly stops to demand a fair wage for his labor from his white manager. He brazenly asks the manager for ten percent of the evening's receipts. Though interrupted by the start of the revue, the dialogue provides a window into Jenkins's commitment to black equality through representation, even for the other ninety percent.



"The Levee Lounge Lizard," Afram, 1924
Courtesy of the Center for Black Music Research

Afram is an imprint of the diasporic experiences of an African American expatriate in Europe. To probe at competing notions of ethnicity, national identification, and race, Jenkins used the hard and fast distinction between jazz and classical music that occupied the early twentieth century. His hybridized music not only reflected his ever-shifting identity, as he traversed what Paul Gilroy dubs the Black Atlantic, but also en-



"Danse de Guerre," Afram, 1924
Courtesy of the Center for Black Music Research

gaged with Harlem Renaissance discourse on musical representations of blackness. *Afram* signals a step away from Du Bois's and Locke's somewhat paternalistic view of black folk music and towards Hughes's youthful and rebellious embrace of jazz. Such a shift coincides with Jeffrey Jackson's and Tyler Stovall's accounts of American expats living among Parisian négritude.¹⁶ Yet, *Afram* challenged these Euro-American visions of the modern world with its dependence on Africa as a symbol of strength and unity, as an imaginary nation whose citizens revel in choice and mobility, pleasure and freedom.

Notes

¹ For a brilliant discussion of this complex New Negro conversation, which undergirded my introductory paragraph, see Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903 (reprint, Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1994), 155-164; Alain Locke, "The Negro Spirituals," in *The New Negro*, 1925 (reprint, NY: Simon

Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram* (cont.)

and Schuster, 1992), 199-200. For an analysis of these perspectives, see Anderson, *Deep River*, 16 and 113.

³ Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, 23 June 1926, 692.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 694.

⁵ Alain Locke, "Toward a Critique of Negro Music," in *The Works of Alain Locke*, Charles Molesworth, ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 137.

⁶ Davarian L. Baldwin, "Introduction: New Negroes Forging a New World," in Minkah Makalani and Davarian L. Baldwin, eds., *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1-27.

⁷ Jeffrey P. Green, *Edmund Thornton Jenkins: The Life and Times of an American Black Composer, 1894-1926* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1982). Green's thorough biography and his procurement of Jenkins's archives made this research possible.

⁸ My reference to racial uplift is influenced by: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁹ The manuscript is housed at the Center for Black Music Research, whose collection and support facilitated this research: Edmund T. Jenkins, *Afram*, manuscript, Box 1, Folder 1-3, Edmund Thornton Jenkins Scores and Other Material, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

¹⁰ Will Marion Cook to Rev. Daniel Joseph Jenkins, 7 March 1923, Box 1, Folder 2, Edmund T. Jenkins Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

¹¹ Gwendolyn B. Bennett, "Edmund T. Jenkins: Musician," *Opportunity* 3 (November 1925): 339.

¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, "Little Portraits of Africa," *The Crisis* 27 (April 1924): 273.

¹³ Natalie Curtis, *Songs and Tales from the Dark Continent: Recorded from the Singing and the Sayings of C. Kamba Simango (Ndau Tribe, Portuguese East Africa) and Madikane Čele (Zulu Tribe, Natal, Zululand, South Africa)* (NY: G. Schirmer, 1921), 63.

¹⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," *The Negro Problem: a series of articles by representative American Negroes of today* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1903), 33.

¹⁵ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Jeffrey Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston and N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).

Harlem Renaissance Man: Frank Wilson at the Metropolitan Opera

Carolyn Guzski, SUNY—College at Buffalo

The bracing sounds of Machine Age modernism juxtaposed with the gestures of symphonic jazz reached the stage of the Metropolitan Opera at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, when John Alden Carpenter's ballet *Skyscrapers* was given its world premiere by the theater's resident dance company and orchestra on 19 February 1926. An unusual number of debuts were made on the highly anticipated evening: Carpenter (1876-1951), already well known in the genre for his scores to *The Birthday of the Infanta* and *Krazy Kat*; Robert Edmond Jones (1887-1954) as designer and co-creator of the abstract staging; corps member Roger Pryor Dodge (1898-1974), later an exponent of jazz dance, in a principal role; and musical theater choreographer Sammy Lee [Samuel Levy] (1890-1968) as director. The Metropolitan departed most significantly from tradition, however, by including an unprecedented program credit for a special all-black chorus employed in the ballet's central "Negro Scene" and identifying its leader, Frank Wilson, by name.¹

New York's leading African American newspaper, the *New York Amsterdam News*, congratulated the performers on the putatively historic occasion: "This will be the first time, to our knowledge, that our people ever had the opportunity of appearing at the Metropolitan and it is natural that we should wish all hands luck in this new undertaking." The uncertainty was well founded, for Pitts Sanborn of the *New York Globe* had been the city's sole daily arts critic to call attention to an earlier cohort of dancers of color who appeared as supernumeraries in the 1918 Metropolitan premiere of Henry F. Gilbert's *The Dance in Place Congo*, noting: "The few real Negroes on the stage were worth many times all the host of disguised whites."² Wilson's achievement was buried as well across succeeding decades—race is not promoted in a World War II-era house publication, *Metropolitan Opera Milestones*, and Wilson himself is absent from the theater's inaugural annals, only to resurface in an exhaustively revised edition without the

debut attribution accorded his colleagues on the *Skyscrapers* production team.³ He receives cryptic mention in a profile of the theater's historical archives and a scholarly biography of Carpenter. But not until Carol Oja's *Making Music Modern* connected the dots with James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* was the performer identified as the actor-singer Frank H. Wilson (c. 1885-1956), creator of the title role in the 1927 dramatization of DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, as well as a featured role (developed for him by Heyward) opposite Paul Robeson in the film adaptation of *The Emperor Jones* (1933).⁴ While Wilson's papers are regrettably not extant, newly available resources offer an expanded perspective on the circumstances surrounding a stage debut that preceded by nearly three decades that of Marian Anderson, complicating the received narrative of the theater's official desegregation in 1955.⁵



Frank H. Wilson

Courtesy South Carolina Historical Society,
DuBose Heyward Collection

It was Otto H. Kahn (1867-1934), the progressive-minded chair of the Metropolitan production company from 1908, who issued a call to arms for American contemporary realism at the opera in 1924 with the startling suggestion that Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and George Gershwin write for the Met's stage.⁶ Kahn had charged assistant general manager Edward Ziegler with seeking fresh talent for an American repertoire program initiated under his aegis in 1910, and the former music critic placed Carpenter on his roster of composers to pursue. Kahn attempted to interest Carpenter in rising playwright Zoë Akins as librettist, but without success. The composer instead sought

European production of his *Infanta* score with the famed Ballets Russes, using a connection with Sergey Prokofiev (Carpenter helped push *The Love for Three Oranges* to production in his native Chicago) to have the composer advocate for his music with company director Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929) in Paris.⁷ Notably cool to American work for its purported lack of sophistication, the impresario declined *Infanta* but unexpectedly advanced an unrealized concept—attributed to his former dancer-cho-

Harlem Renaissance Man (cont.)

reographer Leonid Massine (1896-1979)—on the theme of the chaotically energetic American metropolis. Artistic representation of contemporary life through the dance had emerged as a hallmark of the newly formed Ballets Suédois, and Diaghilev viewed the competitive threat posed by the company's performances at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with increasing concern.⁸

Carpenter responded with an adroit twenty-five-minute dance score. Its single act was structured as a chiasmic arch in five sections that even an envious Prokofiev admitted was “[M]odernistic and admirably orchestrated,” albeit “empty, with snatches of *Petrushka* and of the French composers,” an opinion he rendered after hearing the Metropolitan dress rehearsal.⁹ *Skyscrapers: A Ballet of Modern American Life* portrayed a reinvigorated interwar generation against the dramatic backdrop of a second Industrial Age, drawing in part on a contemporary aesthetic vision that explored interrelationships among African and African American influences on the modernist scene. The idea had already found expression in the Ballets Suédois repertoire (the troupe gave the 1923 world premiere of Milhaud's *La création du monde*), perhaps inspiring Carpenter's pursuit of similar creative elements as the *Skyscrapers* project coalesced. His own strategy was distinctly reactionary, however, possibly in response to the tepid reception of the Milhaud work in America (blamed on its ultramodernist idiom) and the Met's conservative reputation.¹⁰

Carpenter's “Negro Scene” is set as a sonic oasis amid the sweeping vitality of “Work” and “Play,” components of American life depicted with Stravinskian rhythmic propulsion, neoprimitivist melodies, bitonal harmonic collisions, and a striking orchestration featuring multiple pianos (a legacy of *Les Noces*), prominent brass and woodwind groups, and a colorful percussion battery. It is in the ballet's central section, where the Negro Scene follows the departure of revelers from a Coney Island landscape, that Carpenter most decisively positions his music as an entry in the symphonic jazz genre by augmenting allusions to ragtime and popular song, and the novelty timbres of banjo and a saxophone trio, heard earlier.¹¹ The “Negro Scene” itself originates as a dream sequence for an African American character (portrayed at the Met by Dodge) costumed in the regulation street-cleaning uniform of New York's municipal White Wings brigade. Carpenter's orchestration shifts to richly textured

string writing to introduce a gentle blues-inflected melody that is subsequently set to vocables (sung at the Met by Wilson and his chorus). The composer overtly sought a “throw-back to negro plantation life” through the evocation of the African American spiritual, which transitions in the scene's second half to a fervent jubilee-inspired idiom both sung and danced by the chorus as they symbolically join White Wings in the modern age.¹²

While the sequence's patronizing images and romanticized view of a halcyon antebellum South are certainly problematic for modern audiences, Carpenter evidently believed its vocal forces were vital, for he was extremely reluctant to omit them at Diaghilev's request.¹³ In the event, the impresario lost interest in the work after a projected Met-sponsored American tour by his company was abandoned, and Metropolitan general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza subsequently acquired the piece, assuring Kahn that the 1925-26 season would “have a varied and interesting repertoire and in a greater part of a modern character [*sic*].” Gatti recognized that Carpenter “wrote [*Skyscrapers*] without having a real libretto and I must frankly admit that it will not be easy to find a plot or a series of scenic impressions to fit it. However, we shall do our utmost so that the Ballet may be presented in an interesting manner.”¹⁴ The laborious task was accomplished by the composer in collaboration with Robert Edmond Jones, whose distinguished New Stagecraft work with Eugene O'Neill, as well as his design and direction of Ridgely Torrence's landmark *Three Plays for a Negro Theater* (1917), were well known to Kahn. On retreat in rural Vermont, the pair devised a principal dance trio comprised of a Broadway entertainer (the “Strutter”) and an “American Girl” ingenue (played by prima ballerina Rita De Leporte as “Herself”)—character types that had appeared in Cole Porter and Gerald Murphy's 1923 ballet *Within the Quota*—in addition to White Wings. By August 1925, however, Ziegler was complaining to Kahn of Carpenter's “intrusive manner” with respect to the production's staging and casting. Whether racial considerations were under debate is unclear, but in December Frank Wilson signed a Metropolitan contract to “furnish ... Twelve (12) Colored Singers to sing the music allotted to them in Mr. John Alden Carpenter's Ballet ‘Skyscrapers’” at a fee of \$120 per performance for the group, inclusive of all rehearsals.¹⁵ Any friction surrounding the engagement was likely to have been diplomatically resolved by Kahn, whose steady support also lay behind the 1918

Harlem Renaissance Man (cont.)

Place Congo production.

Wilson pursued serious aspirations throughout the Harlem Renaissance period as a dramatic actor, still a rarity among black performers severely limited by casting opportunities. Born Francis Henry Wilson, the actor endured an early life unsettled by his widowed mother's premature death from asthma in the overcrowded tenements of San Juan Hill (later the setting for *West Side Story*).¹⁶ Wilson joined the legions of African Americans consigned to grueling service work in the city before finding a new home among the family of actress Ann Greene. The couple married in 1907 at St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church on West 53rd Street, a center of black life for its proximity to several prominent congregations, the Colored Men's Branch of the YMCA, and especially the Marshall Hotel, epicenter of black Bohemia and the African American entertainment industry. Wilson demonstrated a fine singing voice on the vaudeville stage, touring with blackface minstrel Eddie Leonard and forming the Carolina Comedy Four vocal quartet, before delving into acting at Harlem's Lincoln and Lafayette theaters in his own plays of black life. The productions were frequently accompanied by a spirituals ensemble known as the Folk Song Singers, which he organized.¹⁷

In 1917 Wilson embarked on a course of study that would change his life when he enrolled at the American Academy of Dramatic Art along with Rose McClendon (1884-1936), a completely unknown artist destined to become the leading black actress of her generation. Both in their thirties at the time of their dramatic debuts, the pair appeared jointly in a number of increasingly visible New York productions: *Justice* (1919); *In Abraham's Bosom* (Pulitzer Prize, 1927), Wilson's breakthrough role, taken over from Jules Bledsoe at the Provincetown Playhouse one month after the conclusion of his *Skyscrapers* engagement; and *Porgy* (1927-1930), in which the actor logged 853 performances in the title role, including a European tour and command performance for George V.¹⁸ Given his arduous path to success, Wilson's reputation as man and artist is remarkable. Joining the Broadway cast of *Watch on the Rhine* in 1941 (Wilson appeared in both the stage and film versions), actress Ann Blyth encountered the actor as a supportive presence backstage and consummate professional. A young family member remembered him as exceptionally modest, yet highly aspirational: "He really encouraged us to make something of our lives."¹⁹

Wilson undoubtedly struggled with the pervasive racial

inequities of the legitimate stage, which the Metropolitan reinforced by casting the sole featured black role in *Skyscrapers* with a white dancer. This common industry practice continued to rob performers of color of the few roles to which they may have been able to gain access. Yet the garish blackface makeup worn by the White Wings character in publicity photographs, redolent of Al Jolson's in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), differs markedly from an alternate view (above) that was not released by the theater, in which Dodge attempts a visual portrayal without



Skyscrapers principals Rita De Leporte,
Albert Troy, and Roger Pryor Dodge
Courtesy Pryor Dodge

resort to obvious minstrel style. It is difficult to determine which version found its way to the Met stage, but a photograph of the *Place Congo* company indicates that in 1918 the theater followed a version of intricate racial coding that arose in early film productions to maneuver among performative conventions in flux: performers of color were portrayed with visual authenticity (albeit in stereotyped roles); principal dancers (all white, and identified in the program) wore ethnic makeup similar to Dodge's in the unreleased photograph; and *corps* men (all white, and by Met tradition not listed in the program) who portrayed black characters partnering women used minstrel-style blackface. The stratagem served to signal—rather than conceal—white male identities among the *corps*, differentiating them from actual performers of color in order to ostensibly quell audience anxieties surrounding the possibility of unsanctioned interracial intimacy. Some metro-

Harlem Renaissance Man (cont.)

politician journalists wrote dismissively of the relevance of such purported “morals issues” to artistic organizations, but fears of public protest were apparently not entirely unfounded, for during its 1916 American tour the Ballets Russes management was summoned before Manhattan’s chief magistrate to explain the behavior of “carousing slaves” in the harem scene of its staging of *Scheherazade*. Only “by urging upon the negro slaves the desirability of respectful demeanor toward the houris” was the troupe allowed to retain the ballet in its Met-sponsored engagements.²⁰

While critical response to the world premiere of *Skyscrapers* was generally positive, with the “Negro Scene” uniformly praised, the Metropolitan’s attempt to remain culturally relevant in the American imaginary dated rapidly and *Skyscrapers* was dropped from its repertory by 1930. By then, however, Wilson’s dramatic career was fairly launched, and the realpolitik of representing the nation’s shifting racial terrain on the lyric stage awaited renegotiation.

Notes

¹ *Skyscrapers* program (season 1925-1926), Metropolitan Opera Archives, Lincoln Center, New York.

² “American Ballet by Negroes at Opera House,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 February 1926, 5; Sanborn, “American Pieces Produced at the Metropolitan,” *New York Globe*, 25 March 1918, 10.

³ Mary Ellis Peltz, *Metropolitan Opera Milestones* (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1944); William H. Seltsam, comp., *Metropolitan Opera Annals: A Chronicle of Artists and Performances* (New York: H.W. Wilson and Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1947), 444; Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists* (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild and Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989), updated version available online as <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm>.

⁴ Dorle J. Soria, “Treasures and Trifles,” *Opera News* 52 (September 1987): 26; Howard Pollack, *Skyscraper Lullaby: The Life and Music of John Alden Carpenter* (Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995; rpt. as *John Alden Carpenter: A Chicago Composer*; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 223; Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930).

⁵ Interview with Carlotta Wilson Stanley (Brodheadsville, Penn.), 27 June 2014.

⁶ “The Metropolitan Opera: A Statement by Otto H. Kahn” (New York: Metropolitan Opera Company, 15 October 1925), 22-23; Otto H. Kahn Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J., box 171. The contents of this pamphlet were largely drawn from a speech Kahn delivered on 1 January 1924.

⁷ Carpenter letter to Ziegler, 21 October 1919, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Ziegler correspondence (season 1919-20); Sergey Prokofiev, *Diaries 1915-1923: Behind the Mask*, trans. Anthony Phillips (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 516.

⁸ Carolyn Watts, “America in the Transatlantic Imagination: The Ballets Russes and John Alden Carpenter’s *Skyscrapers*” (M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 2015), 20-21, 52.

⁹ Sergey Prokofiev, *Diaries 1924-1933: Prodigal Son*, trans. Anthony Phillips (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 270-71. Prokofiev negotiated unsuccessfully with the Metropolitan during his American period for the production of three of his operas: *The Love for Three Oranges*, *The Gambler*, and *The Fiery Angel*.

¹⁰ Watts, “America in the Transatlantic Imagination,” 21-23. The shift in appreciation of African art from ethnographic record to aesthetic object in New York dates from 1914 exhibitions at the Washington Square Gallery, curated by Robert J. Coady, and at Alfred Stieglitz’s Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. “African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2012/african-art/appreciation-for-african-art>.

¹¹ A detailed discussion of the score and associated staging appears in Pollack, *Skyscraper Lullaby*, 222-34. The concept of symphonic jazz was set in motion by the pioneering Carnegie Hall appearances (1912-1914) of African American conductor James Reese Europe (1880-1919) with the Clef Club Orchestra and promoted after his death by self-proclaimed “jazz missionary” Paul Whiteman (1890-1967), who premiered Carpenter’s *A Little Bit of Jazz* at his Second Experiment in Modern Music concert at Carnegie Hall in December 1925. The style had already been heard at the Metropolitan in 1924 when competing bandleader Vincent Lopez appeared at the house on a rental basis with a program that significantly featured a multiracial roster of composers. See Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 326-27.

¹² Carpenter’s scenario sketches, quoted in Pollack, *Skyscraper Lul-*

Harlem Renaissance Man (cont.)

laby, 232-33.

¹³ Financial strictures were cited as the primary reason; Watts, "America in the Transatlantic Imagination," 84-85.

¹⁴ Gatti-Casazza letter to Kahn, 26 May 1925, Metropolitan Opera Archives, Gatti-Casazza correspondence (season 1925-26).

¹⁵ M.L. [Minna Lederman], "Skyscrapers: An Experiment in Design," *Modern Music* 3 (January-February 1926): 25; Ziegler letter to Kahn, 12 August 1925, Kahn Papers, box 171; F.H. Wilson contract with Metropolitan Opera Company, 24 December 1925, Metropolitan Opera Archives.

¹⁶ Certificate of Death, Phebe Wilkinson Wilson (M10468, 4 April 1897), New York City Department of Records, Municipal Archives. Wilson's birth certificate remains unlocated, but the actor gave his birth date as 4 May 1885 on WWI and WWII draft registration documents. This date is also recorded on his Certificate of Death (Borough of Queens, 156-56-401783, 17 February 1956), and comports with the age reported on the certificate of his first marriage (M15470, 12 June 1907).

¹⁷ Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City before World War I* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 6, 76-77; "Famous Neighbors," *Long Island Sunday Press*, 14 February 1937, 2; "'Pa Williams Gal'" is Well Received at Lafayette Theatre," *New York Age*, 15 September 1923, 6.

¹⁸ Wilson letter to DuBose Heyward, 3 February 1930, Heyward Collection 1172.01.04.03 (P) 1-18, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. Wilson also had supporting roles in prominent O'Neill plays of the 1920s: *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924); and *The Dreamy Kid/The Emperor Jones* (double bill, 1925).

¹⁹ Telephone interviews with Ann Blyth (Toluca Lake, California), 13 May 2015; and Eula Gunther Evans (Petrolia, Ontario), 13 July 2014.

²⁰ "Tailoring of Police Spoils 'Scheherazade,'" *New York Tribune*, 27 January 1916, 9. A detailed historical discussion of racial coding appears in Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 50-90.

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Immigration and the Great Migration: *Porgy and Bess* in the Harlem Renaissance

Naomi André, University of Michigan

To say that *Porgy and Bess* was produced by a racially homogenous “white” creative team does not tell the full story. Indeed, there was someone on the collaborative team who personified quintessential American whiteness: DuBose Heyward. Heyward was from Charleston, South Carolina and though his family was not as financially prominent as it once had been, he could trace his ancestors back to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Heyward came from deep roots in a well-heeled southern white heritage. Conversely, George and Ira Gershwin were born to Russian Jewish parents who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1890s. In my discussion of immigration and the Great Migration in this opera, race matters. Though a scientific basis to biological differences rooted in race has been disproven in current scholarship, this was not the case for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century constructions of race and this directly affects *Porgy and Bess*. Yet rather than starting with the more expected discussion about whether or not *Porgy and Bess* is racially insensitive or how blackness is expressed, I will focus on how different articulations of whiteness can be found in the opera.¹

Scholars in the field of whiteness studies have examined how European immigrants from the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries tried to distinguish themselves from black people when they arrived in the U.S.. Sometimes these strategies included distancing themselves from black people and trying to climb up a hierarchy where the enslaved and formerly enslaved were oppressed to the bottom of the socio-economic and educational structure. But this was not the only tactic and sometimes immigrants joined in abolitionist and social justice movements that combined forces with African Americans and worked towards common goals of social uplift.² Regardless of their

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individual stance, Jewish people experienced anti-Semitism and were branded with negative stereotypes, some of which were similar to those associated with black people.³ At the time of *Porgy and Bess*, this was especially relevant. Karen Brodtkin, along with other scholars, cites the 1920s and 1930s as “the peak of anti-Semitism in America.”⁴ An area that has not received much attention in the *Porgy and Bess* literature is the richness of the interactions between blacks and Jews in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. At this time ragtime and the blues, Yiddish musicals, early jazz, and klezmer were circulating alongside each other in popular culture and their study could provide a more nuanced investigation into Gershwin’s experience and use of black musical idioms. My discussion here concentrates less on these provocative musical interactions themselves and more on their contexts; what

happens when we think about constructions of race around whiteness, Jewishness, and blackness in the time *Porgy and Bess* was written, and how might this shape our thinking about this opera today?

The themes of travel and relocation are central to the story of George Gershwin, who came from a family that immigrated to New York City at the end of the nineteenth century.

To further enrich this discussion, I want to juxtapose the concept of people moving to America with that of people moving within the United States, and specifically with the Great Migration. With this internal re-shuffling, we see a moment in American history, post-Reconstruction and after World War I, that featured the movement of African Americans from the South to the North and West. *Porgy and Bess* encompasses both worlds of displacement. George Gershwin’s parents, Moshe (Morris) Gershovitz and Rose Bruskin, emigrated from the area around St. Petersburg, Russia in the 1890s, and mar-



The Original Cast of Porgy and Bess
Photo by Richard Tucker
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Porgy and Bess in the Harlem Renaissance (cont.)

ried in New York in 1895. They lived in various locations in New York's Lower East Side—Ira Gershwin recalls the family moving twenty-eight times during his childhood, before 1916.⁵

Isabel Wilkerson has written insightfully about the Great Migration in her Pulitzer Prize winning national bestseller *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*.⁶ In tracing the journeys and stories of hundreds of people she fleshes out the themes, places, and rhythms of the lives she documents. Wilkerson conducted her research at the turn of the new millennium, as the era she had chosen to study (1915-1970) was rapidly receding into the past and few of the original migrants remained. With their stories, this narrative of extreme poverty, utter lack of opportunities for advancement, and the ever-present threat of lynching in the Jim Crow South, is re-written into current memory and preserved in history. The caricatures of the vicious white roles in *Porgy and Bess* (the Coroner, the Detective, and the Policeman) feel more “real” when reading page after page of Wilkerson's interviews, as we re-live some of the terror and constant fear of stepping out of place. The stereotypes in *Porgy and Bess* are usually leveled at the black characters in minstrel garb, and these are certainly present in the opera with the Jezebel Bess, Sambo Porgy, Crown the Buck, and others. Nonetheless, the exaggeration of operatic drama in the white characters serves the story well and brings to life some of the lived emotion Wilkerson captures in her documentary study of the motivations fueling the Great Migration.

Scholars have already noted a connection between some of Gershwin's tunes in *Porgy and Bess* that bear resemblance to styles of Jewish klezmer and Yiddish theater as well as liturgical music. Howard Pollack's 2007 biography of Gershwin picks out “Oh Hev'nly Father” (Act 2) as “reminiscent of a ‘davenning minyan.’”⁷ Geoffrey Block has demonstrated that Sportin' Life's “It ain't necessarily so” is similar to the Torah blessing “Baruch atah Adonai” in melodic shape and content.⁸

All of the references to the Bible are from the Old Testament, indeed from the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Five Books of Moses, and the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and

Deuteronomy). With cleverly crafted lyrics about David and Goliath, Moses found in the Nile by the Pharaoh's daughter, Jonah and the whale, and Methuselah (living 900 years)—these stories work well for the Bible-believing people of Catfish Row. Moreover, they would also have resonance for those from the Jewish faith. Hence, these biblical references spoke directly to the diverse religious backgrounds of the opera's first audiences through quotations spanning both Christian and Jewish cultural associations. Regarding the handling of “Baruch atah adonai,” the adaptation of this well known Jewish prayer appears strategically as it is featured in the “anti-sermon” (“It ain't necessarily so”) that Sportin' Life delivers after Sunday church services at the picnic on Kittawah Island. Making the connection between these two religious traditions allows us today to have a greater appreciation of this charged moment, laden with religious allusions, staging multiple identities at once.

In the Great Migration from the southern U.S. to the North and West, specific urban cities emerge as prime locations for where people would settle and relocate. Chief in outlining these paths of migration were the railways that provided transportation to new homes and futures.

These connections draw lines between otherwise seemingly unlikely geographical locations, with people from rural Mississippi ending up in Chicago, or people in Florida easily traveling up to New York City. Trains offered one of the main means of delivery in the Great Migration by physically transporting those formerly enslaved and their descendants to the North and metaphorically providing them with a route to a more plentiful



DuBose Heyward
Courtesy of the South Carolina Literacy Map

Porgy and Bess in the Harlem Renaissance (cont.)

and safer promised land out of the dangers of the Jim Crow South.⁹

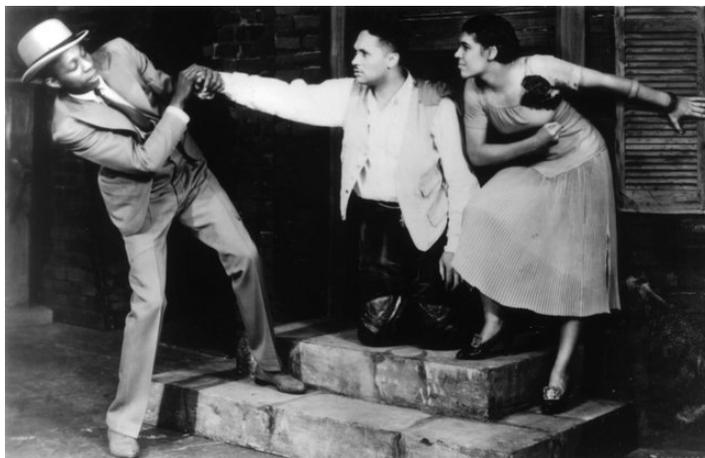
The conspicuous absence of this train metaphor near the end of the opera is significant. Here Sportin' Life has a big number that lures Bess to get back on "Happy Dust," leave Porgy (who is temporarily in jail), and join him in a high-struttin' lifestyle in New York City. In fact, this is one of the most memorable numbers in the show: "There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York." I argue that the catchiness of this tune has obscured a central question: *Why a boat?* Who would take a boat from Catfish Row, South Carolina to New York City, especially when there were several train routes available and running between Charleston and Manhattan?¹⁰

While it is probable that Gershwin's Porgy would take the train, the main question lurking in the background remains: why should Gershwin have him take a boat from Charleston, South Carolina to Manhattan? In fact, not even George Gershwin himself took a boat from New York City down to Folly Island (off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina) when he went there to learn more about the Gullah culture in June 1934; we know that he took the train.¹¹ These memorable lyrics signify multiple things at once. "There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York" presents a line of trochaic pentameter that jauntily scans with a swing beat over Gershwin's syncopated setting. With the black dialect presented against the syncopation, we hear Porgy's voice clearly. Yet the black man would probably find more consolation traveling in the company of other black train porters. Who takes a boat to New York City? I argue that it is Moshe Gershovitz and Rose Bruskin, Gershwin's parents, exemplars of the Jewish emigrant experience.

I bring these things to our attention not to nit-pick with transportation routes, but to expose a broader story of how *Porgy and Bess* can be seen to reflect the experiences of George and Ira Gershwin. They were not only writing about the African American experience (what they knew, what they made up, what they learned while working on the show), but also an immigrant experience that was familiar in their family and to many audience members who would have attended the early productions. These were the first generation

of children born to recently-immigrated Russian Jewish parents who had made the migration to a "promise land" (to quote Porgy's last number of the opera—"I'm on my way to the promise land"). And like many other Eastern European Jewish people who arrived at the end of the nineteenth century seeking opportunity, they traveled by steam ship. Does this bring a little of the Gershwin history into the opera? Were they writing themselves into history? Whatever the reason to use the word "boat" rather than "train," the context around it deserves investigation.

In addition to being a landmark work that represents a created experience of African Americans, *Porgy and Bess* as an "American Folk Opera" fits into the larger history of American music, one that encompasses immigrant white and black folk cultures in the United States, as well as a troubled minstrel past. It might also tell us a little about the experiences of being Jewish—and not quite white—in the 1930s.



John Bubbles, Todd Duncan and Anne Brown
in the original 1935 *Porgy and Bess*
Courtesy of the University of Michigan

Notes

¹A sampling of the excellent literature that mentions *Porgy and Bess* and blackness includes: Richard Crawford "It Aint' Necessarily Soul: Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* as a Symbol," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical*, Vol. 8 (1972): 17-38; Ray Allen "An American Folk Opera? Triangulating Folkness, Blackness, and Americanness in Gershwin and Heyward's *Porgy and Bess*," *Journal of American Folklore*, 117/465 (Summer 2004): 243-261; and Gwynne Kuhner Brown, "Performers in Catfish Row: *Porgy and Bess* as Collaboration," in Naomi André,

***Porgy and Bess* in the Harlem Renaissance (cont.)**

Karen Bryan, and Eric Saylor, eds., *Blackness in Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 164-186.

²The literature on how immigrants to the U.S. navigated racial identities between black and white includes: Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, eds., *Are Italians White: How Race is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³See Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*. A picture is reproduced from 1902 (with the caption “Is the Jew White?”) which is described as “a Jew with protruding lips and dark, kinky hair, physical traits that were often attributed to blacks in popular culture.” (45).

⁴Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 25-26. Brodtkin also cites David Gerber, ed. *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) and Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Anti-Semitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁵Richard Crawford and Wayne J. Schneider, “George Gershwin.” *Grove Music Online/Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed 20 June 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2252861>

⁶Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage, 2010).

⁷Howard Pollack, *George Gershwin: His Life and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 46. Pollack in this connection between “Oh Hev'nly Father” and the davenning minyan cites Maurice Peress as making this observation about the similarity in the counterpoint.

⁸Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77-78, Example 4.2 (b). Several Internet sites also mentioned this connection between Gershwin and this Torah blessing.

⁹Not only a primary means of transportation, the railways were also one of the career areas for black men to earn a respectable

living. For example, a specific subgroup of porters that started soon after the Civil War—the Pullman Porters—were black men hired to work on sleeping cars. As workers with gainful employment and wages, they soon formed an influential voice. A. Philip Randolph organized and led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925, later important agents in the Civil Rights movement. See Larry Tye, *Rising From the Rails: Pullman Porters And the Making of the Black Middle Class*. (New York: Henry Holt, 2004); Robert L. Allen, *The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: C.L. Dellums and the Fight for Fair Treatment and Civil Rights* (Boulder, C.O.: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

¹⁰The Atlantic Coast Line RR 1900-1967 included Charleston-NYC under a different name (the Wilmington & Manchester RR connected with the North Eastern RR—which brought in Charleston in 1857). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Coast_Line_Railroad]

¹¹“On June 16, 1934, George Gershwin boarded a train in Manhattan bound for Charleston, South Carolina. From there he traveled by car and ferry to Folly Island, where he would spend most of his summer in a small frame cottage.” David Zak, *Smithsonian.com* 8 August 2010. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/summertime-for-george-gershwin-2170485/?no-ist> Gershwin's train trip to Charleston is also mentioned in Robert Wyatt and John Andrew Johnson, eds., *The George Gershwin Reader* (New York.: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184.

The H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music

and

The Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities at Brooklyn College

In collaboration with the Conservatory of Music, the Department of Africana Studies,
and the American Studies Program at Brooklyn College present:

Fall 2015

Music in Polycultural America

Spirituals as Art Songs

Marti Newland, soprano

Magdalena Stern-Baczewska, piano

Soprano and ethnomusicologist Marti Newland, accompanied by Magdalena Stern-Baczewska, will perform and discuss spirituals as art songs. The event will explore the concert tradition of spiritual singing, addressing how singers and arrangers complicate “folk” and “art” music categories through a critique of the politics of racial inequality in the contemporary life of the repertoire.



Monday, October 26th at 2:15 p.m.

State Lounge, Brooklyn College Student Center (SUBO)

American Folk Music: From Field to Archive

The Down Hill Strugglers with John Cohen

Film maker, photographer, and old-time musician John Cohen will present highlights of his folk music collecting trips to Kentucky and North Carolina that date back to the 1950s. His current ensemble, the Down Hill Strugglers, will perform a lecture/recital of traditional ballads, blues, and mountain dance music that Cohen, Alan Lomax, and other folklorists collected for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress.

John Cohen is Professor of Art Emeritus, SUNY Purchase. He also performed for two decades with the New Lost City Ramblers, the foremost proponents of old-time string band music in the 1960s folk music revival. The Down Hill Strugglers carry on in the tradition of the Ramblers, crafting creative interpretations of string band music and old-time songs from the 1920s and 1930s.



Wednesday, November 11th at 2:15 p.m.

Tanger Auditorium, Brooklyn College

Maghrebian Music in New York: Routes and Intersections
Samuel Torjman Thomas

Prof. Thomas will present a lecture on the musical traditions of the Maghreb (North Africa), and the place of these traditions in New York's Moroccan Jewish community. He will include a look at several traditional instruments, rhythm and melodic systems, and an exploration of how ASEFA, Thomas's New York-based modern music ensemble, blends Maghrebian and Jazz approaches to improvisation to produce a unique American sound. Samuel Torjman Thomas is an ethnomusicologist, performer, and composer who, besides directing ASEFA, leads the New York Andalus Ensemble. He is currently on the faculty at John Jay College/CUNY.



Monday, November 23rd at 2:15 p.m.
State Lounge, Brooklyn College Student Center (SUBO)

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Spring 2016 Preview: Events at the Hitchcock Institute

An Evening of Calypso Jazz with Etienne Charles, David “Happy” Williams, Frankie McIntosh, and Garvin Blake with Arturo O’Farrill & the Brooklyn College Big Band



The program will headline Trinidad born Trumpeter and composer **Etienne Charles**, Brooklyn’s own maestro of soca music **Frankie McIntosh**, steel pan virtuoso **Garvin Blake**, and renowned jazz bassist **David “Happy” Williams**. Charles is known for his daring compositions that blend indigenous West Indian rhythms and instrumentation with elements of American jazz. McIntosh, one of soca’s leading arrangers and keyboardists, recently collaborated with pan man Blake to produce the critically acclaimed recording *Parallel Overtones*, which explores the synergy between steel pan, calypso and jazz.

Charles, McIntosh, and Blake will be joined by Grammy Award winning pianist and band leader **Arturo O’Farrill** and the Brooklyn College Big Band.

Thursday, 21 April 2016

Whitman Hall, Brooklyn College

8:00 pm—Concert

7:00 pm—Talk
