

# NEWSLETTER

## INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN AMERICAN MUSIC

*Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York*

*Carol J. Oja, Interim Director*

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### KNOWING WHEN TO STOP *by Ned Rorem*

*On October 23, Ned Rorem will celebrate his seventieth birthday. We wanted to join in the birthday tributes, so we asked Rorem to contribute a little something to this Newsletter. And he did so—generously allowing us to print an excerpt from the beginning of his forthcoming autobiography, *Knowing When to Stop* (to be published in 1994 by Simon & Schuster). In what follows, Rorem ruminates on birth, death, the meaning of life—and; of course, on music. But he doesn't talk much about his own music, which he continues to compose prodigiously. This past February saw the premiere of a Concerto for Piano Left-Hand, and next season includes a new Concerto for English Horn. And his endless stream of songs and chamber works pours forth, unabated. —K.R.S.*

I very early understood that the universe is divided between two esthetics: French and German. *Everything*—is either French or German. Blue is French, red is German. No is French, yes is German. Cats are French, dogs are German. Night is French, day is German. Women are French, men are German. Cold is French, hot is German. Japanese are French, Chinese are German. Gay is French, straight is German (unless it's the other way around). Schubert is French, Berlioz is German. Generalities are French, specifics are German.

If all this is true—and it *is* (you disagree? you're German)—then I fall roundly into the French category. How do I draw these distinctions?

The difference between French and German is the difference between superficiality and profundity. To say that the French are deeply shallow is to allow that superficiality is the cloth of life. One's daily routine is mostly casual, fragmented, perishable, mundane, but the years flow by, and through such give and take our little lives are rounded. Even with close friends how often do we sit and ponder the meaning of the cosmos? Such meaning is reserved for work.

French is superficial in the highest sense of the word, skimming surfaces to invent Impressionism, the sight of an apple-cheeked child caught for a millisecond before the fading sun shifts ever so slightly through the sycamores, the never-to-recur Debussyan glint on an unseen ocean wave at the stroke of noon. The French are not longwinded, but like cheetahs they cover distance fast. French is economy.

German meanwhile is superficially pro-

found, driving one spike as deep as it will go, like Beethoven's motive of da-da-da-DUM hammered 572 times into his Fifth Symphony, devitalizing any subject by overanalyzing it, even humor. (A German joke is no laughing matter.) German is extravagance.

The famous quip of Jean Cocteau (which in my presence he once generously claimed to have "borrowed" from Péguy), "One must know how to go too far," might be expanded: A true artist can go too far and still come back. Satie does this, Bruckner doesn't. The secret lies in knowing when to stop.

\* \* \*

1923 was the year of Huxley's *Antic Hay*, of Ronald Firbank's *The Flower Beneath the Foot* which the author described as "vulgar, cynical and horrid, but of course beautiful here and there for those who can see," of Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*, Djuna Barnes' *A Book*, and Wallace Stevens' *Harmonium*. 1923 also saw the appearance of Millay's *The Harp Weaver and Other Poems*, Stravinsky's greatest ballet, *Les Noces*, Falla's *El Retablo*, and Honegger's *Pacific 231*, plus Chaplin's movie *A Woman of Paris* and George Grosz's picture *Ecce Homo*. Hitler led his "Beer Hall Putsch" in the Buegerbrautskeller outside Munich. Katherine Mansfield died at 35, as did Radiguet, age 19 (the same age that Rimbaud "retired"), likewise Sarah Bernhardt, who in 1844 had been born, as was Franz Liszt, on my birthday, October 23.

Henry James had been dead for eight years, Proust for eleven months. But Ravel (whose *Pavane* was played at Proust's funeral),



*Ned Rorem, 1992. Photo by Jack Mitchell.*

## KNOWING WHEN TO STOP (continued)

Gide, Satie, Mann, and Stravinsky still had major works before them. Cocteau was 34, Aaron Copland 22, Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo were 21 and 18, and Lenny Bernstein was five.

Marie Laure de Noailles (also a Scorpio baby, born on Halloween in 1902), who will become for me the most crucial "older woman" beyond my mother, is already married; and Virgil Thomson, who will become the most crucial older man beyond my father, is about to turn 28, one year younger than Father. Claude Debussy, far from Indiana, had died in 1918.

As the years float freezingly by, the fact of Debussy, the breathing man, recedes; we will never know each other; we were never on earth together. Thus his music with its acrid seconds and velvet ninths grows ever more poignant. But the fact of myself, the breathing child, vanishes too. Can I retrieve him, like Debussy, through his intellect? his sounds? his nightmares?

If many who would become friends, foes, and vague lovers were years from being born, others were in swaddling clothes, and still others already in grammar school on the outskirts of Chicago, Toulouse, and Milan. I ally myself to all of the above, fearfully praying that their essence will rub off on my unidentified self.

Mother said I "slipped out like an eel," easier and happier than my sister Rosemary. I was also longer, 21 inches, and would grow to be the tallest of the whole clan, including first cousins on both sides. Apparently I beamed continually, despite being circumcised on the second day, like most middle-class gentiles of the period. Unlike Rosemary, who was breast-fed for a year (which left Mother's "bosoms"—as she called them—pendulous and sacklike), I took to the bottle at six weeks and announced each meal's end by hurling the bottle from the cradle with a crash. Also unlike Rosemary, I was what's known as a birthright Quaker. (In a court of law I am not required to swear to tell the truth, because Friends are not liars, and if they are, the swearing is superfluous.) Again, unlike Rosemary who grew gregarious only as her years unfolded, I began by sitting on the laps of anyone who'd permit it and demanding "rock me," while as my years unfolded I built a glass wall around me and, grimly shy, frowned on the extroverts outside.

\* \* \*

The red is genetically in the green tomato, it's only a question of waiting. Were my so-called talent, sexual bent, love of candy and alco-

hol, latently in me as I lay there smiling? Was the oratorio, *Goodbye My Fancy*, which I would be composing when the phone rang 64 years later to say that Mother was dead—was it already in the blood?

Life has no meaning. We've concocted the universe as we've concocted God. (Anna de Noailles: "If God existed, I'd be the first to know.") Our sense of the past, our sense of encroaching death, are aberrations unshared by the more perfect "lower" animals. On some level everyone concurs—pedants, poets, politicians, priests. The days of wine and roses are not long, but neither are they short, they simply aren't. Hardly a new notion, but with me the meaninglessness was clear from the start. Our family stressed neither God nor the devil, so the indoctrination of meaning was no more crammed down our craws than was, say, the *idée reçue* that Beethoven had genius. When I first saw photos of the Gazelle Boy, raised by wild creatures and captured too late for the grace of civilization to take effect, I was enthralled to apprehend that if one is not conditioned to "learning" during the first three years, one will never read or even speak. Similarly the Roman Church knows that a true Catholic cannot be sculpted from an unbeliever after age seven. (In *Catherine the Great*, Mae West, as the lusty empress, requests that the handsome man who has lived in the dungeon since birth and never seen a woman, be brought before her. We are not shown the outcome.)

To contend that life has no meaning is not to say that life is not worth living. For if life is not worth living, is it then worth dying? Calderón said life's a dream. Isn't it rather a game? The charade of

self-expression, so urgent in childhood, and the rat race not only of moneymakers but of Great Artists is a not-so-complex competition to kill time before it kills us.

Yes, the red waits in the green tomato; but no, the artistic tendency is not there from the start, it's socially induced, in Debussy as in Palestrina—Debussy inhabiting an era like ours where art is socially superfluous and Palestrina in an era where art was an unquestioned angle of routine. What is there from the start is the gene of *quality*. I've often claimed that I can teach anyone to compose a perfect song, according to the laws of prosody, melodic arch, and so forth. But I cannot guarantee that the song (even my own song) will bleed and breathe, that it will be true music, worth heeding. Only God can guarantee that—the God I don't believe in.

What do I believe? For years I believed (still do, sort of) that you, them, it, all of us, exist only in my

(continued on page 14)



The image shows a page of musical notation for Ned Rorem's String Quartet No. 3. It features two staves, Violin and Viola, with complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. The score is printed on a white background with black ink.

Ned Rorem, String Quartet No. 3.  
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## I.S.A.M. MATTERS

**Champagne Gala for I.S.A.M.** On Sunday, 3 October at 3 p.m., Joan Morris, William Bolcom, and Max Morath will present *Yesterdays: An Afternoon of American Popular Song and Ragtime Piano*—a benefit concert for I.S.A.M. to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Bolcom and Morris's debut as performance partners (which occurred in a concert produced by I.S.A.M. at Brooklyn College) and honor I.S.A.M.'s founding director, H. Wiley Hitchcock, on his retirement. The event will take place at the newly renovated Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College on 68th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues in Manhattan, and will be followed by a champagne reception in the Hunter College Art Gallery. Ticket information will be mailed in late August. We hope to see you there!

\* \* \*

**Hail to the Outgoing Chief.** The Hitchcock retirement festivities will continue on Saturday, 9 October—one week after the I.S.A.M. benefit concert—when the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society will present a one-day symposium in his honor. The speakers will include Richard Crawford, Charles Hamm, Claude Palisca, Ellen Rosand, and Carl Schmidt, with papers spanning the French Baroque, Italian Baroque, and American music—the three subject areas most central to Hitchcock's own research. Sally Sanford and Ray Erickson will give a mini-recital of Baroque repertory, and Allan Atlas will serve as chair. The event will take place at Hunter College and is being planned by Robert Kendrick, a recent Ph.D. from New York University. Details will be mailed to chapter members early in the fall, or they can be obtained then by calling I.S.A.M.

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**The Times They Are A-Changin'.** Having weathered New York State's fiscal upheaval over the last several years, we are grateful to a number of key supporters at Brooklyn College for helping secure I.S.A.M.'s future, especially Nancy Hager (Director of the Conservatory of Music), Vernon Lattin (the new President of Brooklyn College), and Christoph Kimmich (BC's Provost). By September, a new I.S.A.M. staff should be in place, with Carol J. Oja as Director and Ray Allen recommended by the Conservatory of Music as Research Associate. Allen comes to I.S.A.M. from New York's World Music Institute and City Lore, where he has been director of special projects. His dissertation on black gospel music (completed at the University of Pennsylvania) has recently been published (see below). In addition, Jeffrey Taylor, fresh out of the University of Michigan with a dissertation on Earl Hines and Chicago jazz in the 1920s, will be joining the Conservatory of Music as Assistant Professor. We also look forward to a strong ongoing link to H. Wiley Hitchcock. Although busier than ever—especially with work toward a new edition of Charles Ives's *114 Songs*—he has promised to remain an adviser to I.S.A.M. We're grateful for that.

\* \* \*

Brooklyn-based jazz trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard will be I.S.A.M.'s Senior Research Fellow for the Fall of 1993. Blanchard will be in residence for an intensive one-week stint (tentatively scheduled for 12-15 October) of master classes, composition seminars, and meetings with students. Plans are underway for a symposium to explore his work writing the scores for two recent Spike Lee films, *X* and *Mo' Better Blues*.



**YESTERDAYS: AN AFTERNOON OF AMERICAN POPULAR SONG AND RAGTIME PIANO**, featuring Joan Morris, William Bolcom, and Max Morath, will take place 3 October 1993 at the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College.

**Guest Faculty.** During 1992-93, I.S.A.M.'s Senior Research Fellows, Mark Tucker (Columbia University) and Ray Allen (World Music Institute), conducted seminars on the music of Duke Ellington and on Brooklyn's diverse musical communities—the latter a class in urban fieldwork. During the spring semester Allen also produced *Sounds of Brooklyn*, a series of six concerts given on campus that featured local musicians and ranged from gospel to klezmer.

\* \* \*

**Extended Family.** Several new titles have emerged from folks connected with I.S.A.M. Former Junior Research Fellow Katherine K. Preston (now on the faculty of the College of William and Mary) published *Music for Hire: A Study of Professional Musicians in Washington (1877-1900)* (Pendragon Press), which uses a ledger kept by one John Francis Prosperi, a bandsman and orchestra musician in Washington, D.C., as the inspiration for a detailed and wide-ranging study of journeyman performers in the late nineteenth century. One of the *I.S.A.M. Newsletter's* regular columnists, Charles Wolfe (together with Kip Lornell), brought out *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (HarperCollins), a model of readable scholarship, especially in its presentation of new archival material. And Ray Allen's *Singing in the Spirit: African-American Sacred Quartets in New York City* (University of Pennsylvania Press) ranges broadly, analyzing the highly disciplined training practices used by quartets, illuminating the role of gospel music within the urban church, and examining its southern roots. The book concludes with an important list of off-the-beaten-track sources for gospel films and records, such as Phil's Barber Shop on Ralph Avenue in Brooklyn.

## CHRONICLING GOSPEL'S ROOTS

Until recently, African-American gospel music has received surprisingly little attention from scholars, and few in-depth studies have focused on the lives of its great pioneers, such as Thomas A. Dorsey. Thus *The Rise of the Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (Oxford University Press; \$29.95), by Michael Harris fills a critical void. Universally acknowledged as the father of black gospel music, Dorsey wrote more than four-hundred gospel songs and lobbied relentlessly throughout the 1930s for the acceptance of the new gospel sound in established northern churches.

Using a previously unpublished autobiography and extensive interviews, Harris focuses on the first forty years of Dorsey's life (1899-1993) and his crucial role in shaping the black gospel style that emerged in the late 1920s. But the work is more than a biography of an important composer; Harris frames Dorsey's life and music against the backdrop of early twentieth-century African-American social and intellectual history. The great migration of rural blacks to the cities and the dilemma of "double consciousness"—the experience of being simultaneously black and American—provide the context in which Dorsey's musical genius evolved.

Harris begins with Dorsey's early childhood in rural Georgia, where he was exposed to musical influences ranging from the "moaning" folk spirituals and downhome blues to his mother's sedate organ playing and shape-note singing. Following his family's move to Atlanta, young Dorsey picked up the rudiments of improvisatory blues from older piano players who frequented the city's black theater, clubs, and dance halls. But Dorsey's desire to attain a higher professional status inspired him to acquire more formal training in music reading and arranging.

At the age of seventeen, when Dorsey left Atlanta for Chicago, he was an experienced blues pianist, with a working knowledge of Western musical notation. In Chicago his familiarity with both oral and written traditions served him well as he launched a career as a blues accompanist, arranger, and composer. Yet coming from a religious background, Dorsey never forsook the church, and throughout the 1920s he oscillated between secular blues and sacred gospels. By mid-decade his musical interests converged in devising a new form that Harris calls "gospel blues"—songs that combined southern blues, spirituals, and down-home preaching with elements of European choral singing and hymnody. Harris argues that Dorsey's legendary 1932 composition, *Take My Hand, Precious Lord*, illustrates beautifully the composer's ability to "join his divine pleadings to his lowdown blues."

Harris concludes his study by chronicling Dorsey's success in promoting gospel music on a national level. As founder and president of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, Dorsey introduced the new gospel sound in African-American churches throughout the country. And his collaborative efforts with early gospel recording stars like Sallie Martin and Mahalia Jackson helped spread the music to a broader national audience.

If this book has a weakness, it lies in the author's exclusive focus on Chicago's large Baptist churches during the 1920s and 1930s. There, Dorsey's music spanned the gap between the old-line

assimilationists and southern folk migrants, but it was not the only arena in which his gospel blues flourished. Harris makes only cursory mention of the enthusiastic welcome given Dorsey's new songs in the Holiness and Sanctified Churches that were booming in Chicago and other urban centers during the 1920s and 1930s. These establishments never abandoned rougher, southern folk practices. They were quick to embrace Dorsey's music, and from their ranks sprang early gospel stars such as Rosetta Tharpe and Willie Mae Ford Smith. Nor does Harris give consideration to the "hard" singing gospel quartets that were emerging precisely when Dorsey's new gospel songs took hold. The legendary Soul Stirrers, for example, moved from Texas to Chicago in 1937; they began recording Dorsey's songs and spreading the demonstrative gospel style as they toured the country. Moreover, the author's decision to close his study with the 1937 National Baptist Convention seems unduly abrupt, offering no hint of Dorsey's achievements in the 1940s and beyond. A final chapter addressing these developments and Dorsey's later life would have broadened the inquiry and brought it to a fuller, more satisfying conclusion.

*The Rise of the Gospel Blues* is a complex and provocative work, providing a solid foundation for exploring the role of gospel music in the twentieth-century African-American church. Harris astutely concludes that Dorsey contributed more to black Protestantism than simply a new musical style, for his gospel blues "became a means by which black Americans could hold fast to their former religion in the face of powerful urging to plunge into mainstream America." This insight is as germane to gospel music today as it was in Dorsey's heyday, sixty years ago.

—Ray Allen

(World Music Institute and Senior Research Fellow, I.S.A.M.)

## American Operas A Checklist

by Edith Borroff

Those interested in American operatic tradition will find this preliminary list of operatic works by over two thousand American composers, particularly useful. Entries give the composer's name, opera title, date of work, its length, identity of the librettist, type of subject matter, and place of performance.

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## KLINGHOFFER RECORDED

For a few brief weeks in 1991, it seemed as if contemporary opera could be at the very center of American culture, rather than clinging to a marginalized fringe. When John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer* received its U.S. premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in September 1991, controversy erupted. Was it anti-Semitic? Pro-Palestinian? Did its portrayal of the 1985 hijacking of the cruise ship *Achille Lauro* oversimplify complex issues? Did it celebrate things best left unspoken?

A superb new recording of *Klinghoffer* (Elektra/Nonesuch 979281-2), performed by its original cast and the Orchestra of the Opera de Lyon under Kent Nagano, helps answer some of those questions. Now shorn of its opening scene—an offensive prologue in which a presumably Jewish suburban couple sit at home, spouting superficial, materialistic trivialities—*Klinghoffer* most certainly is not anti-Semitic, although harsh statements are made by all concerned. Nor does it seem particularly pro-Palestinian, aside from the fact that the terrorists are presented as flesh-and-blood humans with ideals and motivations.

But *Klinghoffer* remains odd and elusive—a latter-day Baroque opera-oratorio. There is neither much action nor linear narrative—even *Klinghoffer*'s death occurs offstage—so any dramatic impact arises from the cumulative effect of static, disconnected tableaux. Instead of drama, we get reflection, as one character after another ruminates on personal and political concerns. The emotional core of the opera remains the chorus, which stands outside the action, singing extraordinarily eloquent numbers that could have leapt from a Bach passion.

None of this is intended as criticism of *Klinghoffer*, and indeed it makes no sense to damn the opera, as some have done, for what it never meant to be. Rather than the bouncy exuberance and conventional narrative of *Nixon in China*, *Klinghoffer* delivers a meditation on people, politics, and power, merely using a contemporary event as its hook. Musically, as well, *Klinghoffer* is far removed from *Nixon in China*. Instead of burbling post-minimal repeated patterns, it exhibits a longbreathed, florid chromaticism, closer to early Schoenberg and Busoni than Steve Reich. Pervasively dark and dissonant, surprisingly contrapuntal, *Klinghoffer* at its best is capable of shattering emotional impact. Just try listening to Marilyn Klinghoffer's impassioned lament for her lost husband or the haunting *gymnopédie* sung by *Klinghoffer*'s dead body without shedding a tear.

*Klinghoffer* does have its problems—a libretto by Alice Goodman that, despite gorgeous imagery, can be maddeningly digressive and opaque, a clumsy and intrusive use of synthesized electronics, and a glacial dramatic pacing. But the opera comes across far better on recording than it did in the flesh, mostly because its anti-dramatic qualities no longer seem disturbing. Its superlative cast includes James Maddalena (who was once Nixon), Sanford Sylvan (once Chou En-Lai), Eugene Perry (once Malcolm in Anthony Davis's *X*), Thomas Young (once Elijah Muhammad in *X*), and Sheila Nadler—all of whom sing not only with passion, but with diction so precise that every word is audible, even without Nonesuch's elaborate and handsome program book.

—K. Robert Schwarz  
(Brooklyn College)



Courtesy of Rhino Records Inc. RNDP 200

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## Charles Martin Loeffler

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ELLEN KNIGHT

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## A DAZZLING DISSERTATION ON CAGE

*Wanting to explore intriguing new dissertations in American music, we plan occasionally to publish reviews of them. Following is the first in what we hope will be a continuing series.—C.J.O.*

Stop to think about it. Though the literature on John Cage is vast it tends to be thin: innumerable interviews, many short essays and anthologies of them, much chatter about Cage's "philosophy," but very little substantial confrontation with the music and no lengthy, sustained studies. The picture is, though, changing. No fewer than three major biographies are underway (by Charles Shere, Mark Swed, and Franz van Rossum & Stephen Lowey). James Pritchett's dissertation, *The Development of Chance Techniques in the Music of John Cage, 1950-1956* (NYU, 1988), is being expanded into a study of Cage's entire musical output for Cambridge University Press. And a more recent dissertation by Laura Kuhn, *John Cage's Europeras 1 & 2: The Musical Means of Revolution* (UCLA, 1992), complements Pritchett's work and is simply dazzling. It approaches Cage's last major composition primarily in the context of artistic Modernism and Postmodernism, and digs deep into the relation between Cage's aesthetic and the thought of such contemporaries as Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller.

*Europeras 1 & 2* was premiered in Frankfurt on 12 December 1987 and first performed in this country in 1988 during SUNY-Purchase's Summerfare festival. The word "Europeras" reads as implying "European operas"; it listens as "Your operas," suggesting populist leanings. *1* is a ninety-minute first part, separated by a very brief film from a forty-five minute *2*. The whole is conceived and constituted of chance operations—operations of great sophistication based on high-speed computer technology to simulate the hexachordal commentaries of *I Ching*.

The musical "content" of Cage's work is the alternately simultaneous and sequential presentation of arias and duets, from some seventy European operas of the past, heard in their entirety against and within a pulverized mass of one- to sixteen-measure instrumental fragments drawn from such operas. The cast is rather small—nineteen singers, twelve dancer/athletes—with a twenty-four piece orchestra, lacking strings but with a percussion section enlarged by a tape of 101 layered fragments (again, drawn from European operas). The extra-musical elements are conventionally operatic: elaborate lighting, costumes, and props; lively and varied stage actions; occasional dance; and an imaginative, subtly shifting stage decor. Each element of *Europeras 1 & 2* is conceived as completely independent from the others, in the most elaborate "circus of independent elements"—Cage's term—he ever attempted.

Kuhn was well equipped to deal with this work and its composer. She assisted Cage in developing *Europeras 1 & 2*, she was in Frankfurt for its rehearsals and premiere performance, and she continued to accompany and work for Cage, often full-time, through the summer of 1992. Her dissertation speaks with the authority of such first-hand experience. It also reflects a sovereign control over the literature of Modernism and Postmodernism: Kuhn seems to have read, and absorbed, *everything*. Her book has 730 pages, about 285 of them occupied by ten appendices that document the particulars of Cage's opera (computer program codes, lighting cues, score and notation, costumes, orchestral parts, singers and arias, etc., etc., ending with photographs from the Frankfurt production).

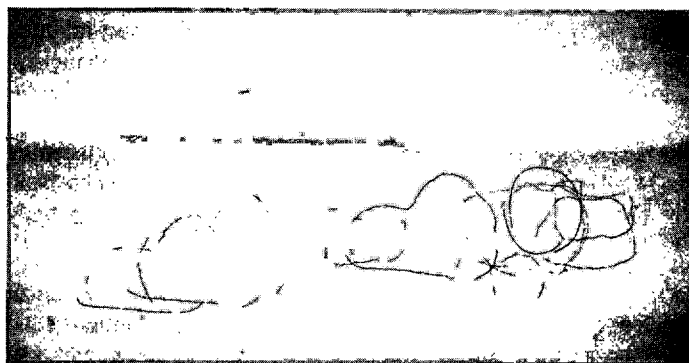
After an introductory chapter, Kuhn deals, in Chapters 2 and 3, with

Cage "in the context of late 20th-century socio-political art" and with his "spiritual foundation: Zen Buddhist philosophy and the *I Ching*." Then, in a key chapter on Cage's "philosophical foundation," Kuhn proceeds slowly, carefully, and comprehensively to reveal extraordinary interrelationships of thought among Cage, McLuhan, Fuller, "and beyond," before moving to a brilliant analysis of "Cage's Artistic Substantiation" in *Europeras 1 & 2* (Chapter 5) and a final chapter of "Conclusions and Directions for Further Study" (!).

Central to Kuhn's work is a search for the common ground among Cage, McLuhan, and Fuller, in terms other than the usual superficial ones. She finds it through "a metaphor of medicine or alchemy, wherein McLuhan's 'diagnosis' of and Fuller's 'prescriptions' for the problems of 20th-century living are seen as coming together in Cage's 'therapeutic' artistic conceptions." The most basic commonality among them lies in their profound belief in *synergy*:

For Fuller, synergy was . . . evidenced most elegantly by nature's basic coordinate system, the triangle, in which the complementary behavior of its three juxtaposed energy vectors leads to unanticipated strengths and discoveries. . . . McLuhan's repeated reference to a "brushing of information against information" . . . was in essence a repeated reference to synergy.

And Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* is "an artistic embodiment of synergy" in Kuhn's view, which rests largely upon the work's "existence as a collage-influenced hybrid art form" with unpredictable interactivity of disparate and independent artistic elements. Kuhn's development of this thesis is subtle and persuasive. More than any earlier writer I know, she leads us to understand in what ways Cage worked "toward a revolution of the senses, through the experience of art. [His] overturning of perceptions . . . is the intention behind non-intention, and the intended function of his art as a whole, and of *Europeras 1 & 2* as a complex case in point." —H.W.H.



John Cage, *Where R=Ryoanji R/5 - 12/90* (pencils on handmade Japanese paper). Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of John Cage and Margarete Roeder Galler, New York. Another drawing from this same series graced the invitation to a warm and lively party given in honor of Cage this past fall by Merce Cunningham. The event, which took place in the Cunningham Dance Studios in lower Manhattan, featured roving musicians and macrobiotic delicacies. Hundreds of Cage's colleagues, disciples, and friends attended.



## BOOKS IN BRIEF

In our era of postmodern theory, reading old-fashioned documentary biography is a bit like taking a walk in the woods after intergalactic space travel—a restoratively retro experience. Ellen Knight's long-awaited *Charles Martin Loeffler: A Life Apart in American Music* (University of Illinois Press, \$42.50) exemplifies such work at its best, giving a sure-handed and thoroughly readable account of the composer's career. She confronts the mystery of his national and personal identity, provides a rich context for the many venues in which his work unfolded, and sketches a revealing portrait of European culture's omnipresence in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Knight also unveils considerable archival materials, concluding with a catalogue of Loeffler's works. Surprisingly, there's not a single musical example, with the only exception being a faintly reproduced facsimile from an autograph manuscript.

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More fact-focused and less context-driven is Donna K. Anderson's *Charles T. Griffes: A Life in Music* (Smithsonian Institution Press, \$49), the latest in a series of Anderson's publications about this important early twentieth-century figure. In a compact and handsomely produced volume, Anderson lays out Griffes's odyssey in clear detail, concluding with a "stylistic overview" of his music. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the book is its preface. There Anderson recounts her own connection to Griffes's compositions—reaching back to high school—and reveals details of her continuing involvement with it. A useful discography appears at the end.

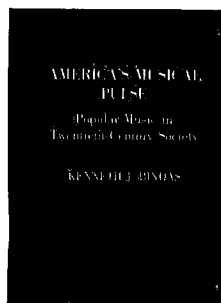
Collective biography and the impact of a shared heritage animate Howard Pollack's *Harvard Composers: Walter Piston and his Students, from Elliott Carter to Frederic Rzewski* (Scarecrow Press, \$52.50), an innovative study in tackling one of several major academic lineages in American composition. Pollack presents a series of thirty-three biographies, each with considerable discussion of music, and comfortably maneuvers around the widely varying styles that emerged within the Piston stable, seeming equally at home with Leroy Anderson and Arthur Berger. He delivers considerable information about figures who have been neglected in the scholarly literature, including John Vincent, Gail Kubik, Irving Fine, Harold Shapero, Daniel Pinkham, and Samuel Adler. Connections among these students of Piston are made in a brief concluding chapter.

\* \* \*

Memories, not documents, are the stuff of *Ross Lee Finney: Profile of a Lifetime* (series editor, Don Gillespie; C. F. Peters, \$35), a charming autobiography by this important composer and teacher. From boyhood on the Midwestern prairie to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris (whom he initially encountered at the University of Minnesota during her 1925 visit to the United States) and on to a distinguished career at the University of Michigan, Finney has been in step with our century's major musical developments. Here he gives a frank and friendly account of his life. An unusually engaging batch of photographs appears at the center of the book.

—C.J.O.

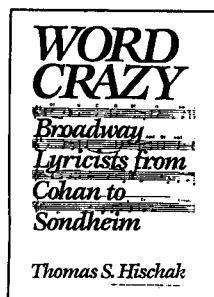
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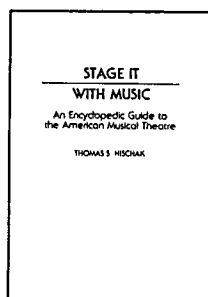
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## GIANT STEPS: POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES COME OF AGE by Robert Walser (Dartmouth College)

When I began writing about heavy metal in 1986, I knew I had chosen an audacious topic for a musicologist. I went ahead with it because heavy metal seemed too important to ignore: it was a complex, virtuosic music central to millions of people's lives, and around it revolved vital public debates about culture and censorship. But at the same time, I was keenly aware that by writing a dissertation on power, gender, and madness in heavy metal music I risked professional suicide.

Seven years later, musicology looks very different. Formerly taboo subjects like gender and sexuality have been taken up by some of the best minds in the field, and a variety of critical tools has been developed to deal with analytical and historiographical problems that an earlier generation of musicologists had pretended did not exist. New kinds of intellectual work have created simultaneous ripple effects that have transformed the discipline. As we continue to recover the diverse social meanings of the classical canon, we begin to see that the high-culture/low-culture split is a relatively recent construct that conceals more than it reveals. As we come to see how canonic music has articulated social values and shapes individuals (not always in laudable ways), we have been led to look more carefully at how the popular musics that seem most influential in our own society embody a variety of experiences and aspirations. As many of us have become dissatisfied with the model of "appreciating" music, we have found that the goals of historical understanding and cultural analysis that replace it are better able to accommodate the study of popular music. Things have changed.

Some of the most important changes can be credited to the influence of French philosophy and British cultural studies in developing theories and models that help scholars come to grips with the complexity of culture, and in breaking down disciplinary barriers that had discouraged critical thought about culture and society. Academics have studied popular music for a long time, of course—even rock and roll has been the subject of academic papers since it first appeared in the 1950s. But much of the scholarship of past decades has been hobbled by disciplinary limitations. While music scholars, for the most part, turned up their noses at popular music until rather recently, sociologists realized at once how important popular music had become in the rock era. They leapt in where musicologists feared to tread, attempting to explain why this music mattered so much to so many. But sociologists were unequipped to deal with the *music* of popular music, and many proceeded (and still proceed) as though rock and roll were a strange species of poetry, producing "content analyses" of lyrics with little attention to how music itself operates as a field of discourse that can articulate values, create communities, affect bodily experience, and sustain historical dialogue. Since their work was usually framed by a static Parsonian model of society, sociologists were also prone to conceive of popular music as a form of deviance rather than as one means whereby the members of a society stage conflicts and enact solutions, stake out social space, and try on each other's identities.

Today the academic study of popular music is no longer a cramped and furtive enterprise, wedged in between jingoistic defenders of high culture and pathologists of deviance. The field can boast a top-notch scholarly journal, *Popular Music*, along with several contenders, including the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* and *Popu-*

*lar Music and Society*. Increasingly, articles in the field are being welcomed not only by interdisciplinary journals such as *American Quarterly* and *Cultural Studies*, but even by mainstream musicological publications like the *Musical Quarterly*. Most important, as the discipline of musicology changes, scholars of popular music are able to participate in methodological discussions and interpretive debates that bear on the study and teaching of all music, instead of being limited to projects that work to legitimize popular music within the terms of traditional musicology.

Conferences devoted to contemporary popular music have become commonplace in their frequency and often impressive in their flow of ideas and dialogue. The International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) has long been an important forum for such work, but the American Studies Association and the Society for Ethnomusicology have also become supportive of scholarship focused on popular music. Quite a number of graduate programs are now at least tolerant of students who want to do such work; in American Studies departments, communications programs, and even schools and departments of music, a new generation of academics whose thought begins at disciplinary boundaries, rather than ends there, waits in the wings.

Yet music scholars who specialize in recent popular music are still few and scattered, and their best work barely sketches a rough map of an enormous terrain. And many people who are persuaded of the importance of popular music studies have little sense of what issues have shaped the field, what arguments and methods have been most productive. In what follows, I want to describe a few of the books that I have found most useful and stimulating. I feel that I have been lucky, professionally; a lot of barriers were taken down just as I approached them. So I am pleased to point out some of the books that have opened doors for me and, I think I can say, quite a few others.

\* \* \*

For musicologists, Charles Hamm led the way. Not only was he among the first American music scholars to teach and write analytically about rock, but in his books *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (1979) and *Music in the New World* (1983); he connected the rock and roll era with a long history of American popular music making. To be sure, the recent period is marked by significant changes from earlier historical moments—changes in audience, technology, commercial mediation, instrumentation, social structure, and ideals—but Hamm usefully countered the tendency to treat rock music ahistorically by connecting it with other traditions, genres, fusions, and controversies over popular culture. His writing on recent popular music impressively interweaves musical specificity, social criticism, and historical perspective. Moreover, his reputation as a preeminent musicologist helped to shore up the legitimacy of popular music studies, paving the way for the next generation of scholars.

Another pioneering study when it appeared was Simon Frith's *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (1981)—by far the most stimulating and sophisticated treatment of rock music then available. Frith led a dual life as a sociologist by day and a rock critic by night. The combination of his intimate



## GIANT STEPS (continued)



knowledge of British rock and his thoughtful application of social science methods enabled him to set the terms of debate for everyone who followed. Although some of his arguments have since been successfully challenged, Frith's formulations of the contradictions negotiated by rock as capitalist music remain influential.

Reebee Garofalo has been another important figure for the development of popular music studies in this country. With his co-author Steve Chapple, Garofalo wrote *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay* (1977), still the best critical analysis of the music business because it discusses not only the structure of the industry but also the politics of its marketing strategies and ownership. In particular, Chapple and Garofalo critique the racism and sexism pervasive in the industry. Garofalo recently edited *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements* (1992), a fine collection of essays on popular music's power to affect political struggles around the world.

Because popular music is not simply of academic interest, scholars have always shared the field with journalists. Indeed, most of its best reference works have been produced not by academics but by critics and fans, and some journalists have produced essential pieces of cultural analysis. The best history of post-war popular music is *Rock of Ages: The Rolling Stone History of Rock and Roll* (1986), by Ed Ward, Geoffrey Stokes, and Ken Tucker. Peter Guralnick's sensitive interviews and portraits of blues and rock artists are indispensable, as are Greg Tate's *Village Voice* columns on African-American culture, recently collected in his book, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (1992). In *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (1975), Greil Marcus wrestled with figures as different as Robert Johnson and Elvis Presley, trying to account for their power to articulate contradictions that he saw as constitutive of American history.

Dave Marsh's *The Heart of Rock and Soul: The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made* (1989) reminds me a little of Donald Francis Tovey's *Essays in Musical Analysis* (1935-39): short, passionate, musically specific entries, concerned above all with accounting for the power of the music to make people care about it. In addition, Marsh's book includes two introductions that work to rewrite the

standard narrative of rock history (which he helped to create in the first place). In contrast to critics whose rock tradition is one populated by young white men, Marsh insists on the dialogue between black and white, old and young, men and women that have shaped the music. He points out that for every song about rebellion, there is at least one about fitting in, finding or creating communal space, making sense of things. And he indicts romantic and modernist ideas about creativity for having led us to overlook the importance of collaboration and the contributions of women to popular music.

Among academics, a great deal of interesting work has recently appeared, and more is forthcoming soon. The best theoretical overview of popular music studies is Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* (1990), an impressively learned and comprehensive volume that traces relevant issues from the 1930s mass culture debates of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin to recent subcultural theory and postmodernism. Unfortunately, Middleton's book is not for everyone, for it is so densely written that relatively few people will think it worth trudging through. But it is a thorough and acute contribution to the field.

Christopher Small's work is not often cited by other scholars, but his *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (1987) is one of the best books on music I've ever read. Its strengths—engaging, opinionated, ambitious, makes you think—seem to have been perceived as weaknesses by those who have clung to positivist models of scholarship. Small's project is difficult to summarize, but he is interested first of all in examining music as an activity (something people do) rather than a thing (a work or a text that seemingly has its own existence). Small contrasts the musical and philosophical traditions of the African diaspora with those of Western Europe in order to explain relationships among social values and musical practices. His book thus falls within a tradition of humane but critical intellectual work on American popular music that includes LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* (1983), Ben Sidran's *Black Talk* (1971), and Charles Keil's *Urban Blues* (1966).

Only two of the essays in George Lipsitz's *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (1990) focus on music, but this book should be read by anyone who is interested in how popular culture works. Lipsitz's central concern is with the power of commercial culture to disrupt and enable historical consciousness. He deploys an amazing array of examples and theoretical arguments, laying bare the tensions of post-War culture in enviably clear and powerful prose. Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (1991) similarly includes only two essays on popular music within a larger project. But McClary's chapters on Madonna and Laurie Anderson provide popular music scholars with unexcelled models of musical analysis, along with a theoretical framework for addressing issues of gender and sexuality, which are obviously crucial to the impact of popular music but which have not received the attention they warrant.

Another welcome exception to the comparative neglect of gender studies in popular music is Lisa Lewis's terrific *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (1990). Lewis discredits widespread

(continued on page 15)

## IT'S A DIRTY JOB, BUT SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT by David Rakowski

Wanting to hear from a composer in the thirtysomething crowd—the decade of growing recognition more than widespread fame—we turned to David Rakowski. “Uptown” by training and current employment (a Princeton graduate and former Babbitt pupil, Rakowski now teaches at Columbia University), Rakowski shows how inflexible, not to mention inaccurate, the stereotypes connected with that label have become. To hear why, sample his luminously layered *Imaginary Dances*, as recorded by *Speculum Musicae* on CRI (CD-617). They, together with others among his pieces, are published by C. F. Peters. —C.J.O.

Being a composer of avowedly “serious” music is not all it’s cracked up to be. For instance, I too often find myself at a loss to explain to strangers and nonmusical acquaintances just what it is I do. When I’m asked that at a cocktail party or reception, I try to deflect the question simply by saying I’m a musician. This response often provokes a long exegesis about the acquaintance’s early music lessons and how he or she wished they had been continued, because his or her life is so unfulfilling now without music. If the matter is pursued further and I have to admit that I’m a composer, then the conversation suddenly stops for a moment. The tone of the acquaintance, newly expert in the subject of new music, turns confrontational: “Do you compose . . . (insert sneer) . . . modern music?” Usually I want to respond in one of two ways: thoughtfully (“You’ve uttered a tautology. How could I *not* write modern music?”) or bitterly and sarcastically (“No, I write music of the late eighteenth century. It never went out of style, you know”). In order to avoid being confrontational, though, I normally just respond blandly, “My music’s the best. Only the best.”

Given that “serious” composers are such a marginal part of American society, I naturally find myself asking what, exactly, have I or my colleagues done to provoke such automatic disdain simply by mentioning what we do. Are poets, playwrights, novelists, or painters in the same situation asked the same sneering questions? “Do you paint modern paintings?” “Oh, I wrote a poem when I was eight. I wish I’d continued with poetry.” “Plays? You mean like Shakespeare?” In any case, I seriously doubt that a layperson would claim the same level of expertise or taste in nonmusical artistic acts as he or she does with music.

I’ve just used a word—layperson—that belies

how complex and specialized the act of writing music is. The process of imagining musical utterance, writing it down, and shaping it according to my sensibilities doesn’t even come close to the popular, idealized notion of what composing actually is—as evidenced in a popular movie like *The Red Shoes*. In one scene from this movie, the composer character suddenly awakens to hear a haunting (the heavy reverb is what makes it “haunting”) tune sung as a vocalise by a mezzo-soprano, which he spends an agonizing time at the piano trying to write down. When the tune is finally notated, he returns to bed and gives his wife the look that means “I get my inspiration from you, honey. Incidentally, I’ll need breakfast by 7:30.” During the night, musical fairies apparently come into the composing room, take the tune, orchestrate it, develop it, write variations on it, invent new material for it, and liquidate it, because the next thing you know it’s turned into a complete ballet.

As real composers are aware, the *Red Shoes* model is fallacious. In real life, the “inspiration” for many of us comes from sorting the good ideas from the not-so-good ones out of a selection of hundreds. The real work lies in shaping the material into a coherent musical utterance, and this process isn’t simply intuitive, as even many musicians believe it is. Intuition is informed by the intellect, whether or not we admit it. Consider just some of the many dimensions to writing a simple phrase for a group of instruments: What range is suitable? Which instrument works best here? Has this instrument already played enough for the time being? How does this relate to what comes next or what came before? Shall I dovetail the line into another instrument? If so, what register will work best for a unison? Is this phrase too similar to something else I wrote in another piece? Is this the crest of the phrase or the middle of it? How long to the climax? What’s the best way to distribute the notes of the harmony instrumentally here? Will there be an opposing contrapuntal line? If so, where will it come from, what will it do, and will it take over from the main one? Do I write “modern” music?

Above, I made several assumptions that don’t necessarily come into play for all composers: that counterpoint and musical line are important musical factors; that instrumental color is a part of the rhetoric; that continuity depends on hierarchical levels of structural articulation; that “beginning” and “middle” mean something to the continuity; and

*Slange* by David Rakowski. Copyright © 1988 by C. F. Peters Corporation. Used by permission.

RAKOWSKI (*continued*)

that I have a specific idea of the sound of the performance and am not leaving a great deal to be improvised by the performers. As such, I've left out some interesting (and a vastly greater quantity of uninteresting) composers whose ideas about continuity differ from mine. Most obviously, they also write "modern" music. I will continue to omit them.

But there is a bigger picture involved in the act of composing: all composers are acutely aware of our relationship to the tradition of Western art music, whether we categorically reject it or place ourselves squarely in it. Composers being composers, whichever side of the fence we play, we tend to dismiss all those on the other side. I'm no different, and when I compose, I am acutely aware of the hundreds of years of music that have preceded my piece, the many ways of forming music that have emerged in this century, and the hundreds of years of performance tradition for *each instrument* I incorporate. So in choosing my "methods" and "style," I am conscious of where I fit in, and, not so trivially, if I write for human performers (as opposed to electronics), I realize that my piece will be interpreted with respect to centuries of performance practice, of which I must be aware.

The process of becoming a composer with something more to say than "Huh?" or "Aaaagh!" was a long and arduous one—in fact, I'm not sure I'll ever be finished with it. Through years and years of writing a lot of bad music and imitating composers whose music interested me—in turn, Hindemith, Persichetti, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Boulez, Babbitt, Martino, and Berg—I gradually became aware of a wide range of possibilities and, not so trivially, picked up a propensity to write dense, highly contrapuntal music phrased traditionally with cadences, pseudo-suspensions, and appoggiaturas that incorporates self-consciously "lyrical" lines, "classical" forms, and a marked hierarchy on the surface between main and supporting material. Since I also tend to structure pieces around priority pitches and priority sonorities (try saying that five times fast), I also think of my music as *tonal*. Yet I'm sure my cocktail party acquaintance would be hard-pressed to call my music anything else but "... (sneer) ... modern."

There is a question that does not beg to be asked, even though I've heard it far too frequently from fellow artists at various artist colonies—but I'll ask it anyway. For what audience am I writing? For many composers, this mundane consideration doesn't even come into play. We imagine ourselves above such meager issues when creating art, and considering such a question necessarily compromises the value of our work. Then we complain that audiences at our performances consist of exactly forty people, all of whom have been to our place for dinner in the last year. On the other hand, if we try to "write down" to an audience of unsophisticates whose attention span has been conditioned by TV remote control, we write music specifically for passive listeners, which more often than not can sound like warmed-over Barber or Copland. Such music is brain-dead. As for me, I'm well aware of the audience for whom I imagine writing, but for various cultural and educational reasons it constitutes a dying breed—active listeners.

\* \* \*

Yes, I have oversimplified. Those of us who deal in absolutes do so because we need a strong basis on which to make our musical choices. Without absolutes there is no way of distinguishing good from bad and therefore no basis for making a compositional decision. And since composing is such a painstakingly difficult and time-consuming thing, I always have great impatience with the music of composers who don't do the labor—who base a piece around a single concept without doing any actual work composing, who resort to literal repeats without variation, who write pianissimo low B-flats for the oboe, who write high Cs for soprano on words like "feel" and "scream," who obviously appropriate music from other periods just for the hell of it, who mix styles and cultures without understanding any of them, and especially those who don't expect much from me as an audience.



Now that you've heard me rant, you've probably pegged me as one of those narrow-minded uptown composers who only likes "music that nobody understands" (you know—*modern* music). Not so. Despite there being a proliferation of boring dreck in all styles out there, I've heard some extremely interesting music by young American composers in the last few years that has given me great satisfaction. In particular, Ross Bauer's *Piano Concerto* exhibits such enormous fantasy, sensuous surface, and crystal-clear formal rhetoric that I return to it often. It is a crime that orchestras aren't lining up to perform it. Allen Anderson's *Solfeggietti* is a lyrical and elegant piano piece I also recommend highly. In addition, I have also recently heard new works by Jeff Nichols, Michael Gandolfi, Tania Leon, Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon, Mike Ross, Lou Karchin, and my wife Beth Wiemann that left very favorable and lasting impressions.

\* \* \*

Not so coincidentally, I'm pretty sure that all of the above composers listen to jazz and pop music. I do, too. I get a certain pleasure from listening to Prince, Chaka Khan, Miles Davis, James Brown, and Level 42—not exactly the same kind of experience I expect from Berg or Martino, but certainly one that conditions my feeling for harmony and gesture. I would guess that the composers I mention above have also drawn upon their experience with popular music. I'm not suggesting popular music as a place to go for ideas when you're dried up; nor am I suggesting that multiculturalism in music as it's currently practiced is a particularly good idea. But I certainly believe it's possible to be open-minded—to bring into your work experience with music outside your training and still make a contribution, even to *modern* music.

COUNTRY AND GOSPEL NOTES *by Charles Wolfe (Middle Tennessee State University)*

Amidst the hoopla and celebration of the 50th anniversary of *Oklahoma!* this year marks another golden anniversary known by far fewer people—that of a record known as **King 500**. Though it sounds more like the name of a stock car race than a cultural event, the release of **King 500** signaled the start of a Cincinnati-based independent label whose country, R&B, and gospel recordings were to change the face of American music. The company emerged at a time when three huge forces—RCA, Columbia, and Decca—dominated the record market and were turning their backs on the kinds of folk-based grassroots music that had filled their catalogues in the 1920s. Increasingly, these major labels defined country music in terms of the slick, Los Angeles-produced cowboy sounds of Gene Autry or Roy Rogers, or the “hot dance novelty” Western swing of Bob Wills. The true vine of country music still flourished at hundreds of radio stations around the South and Midwest, but its practitioners were largely cut off from access to records and films. All that changed with **King 500**.

The producer of **King 500** was a Cincinnati record store owner named Sydney Nathan. He was an unlikely revolutionary: a short, round man with thick glasses and a case of asthma, he had been born in Cincinnati in 1904. There was little music in his background: he worked with his father in real estate, then moved to the jewelry business, and then to promoting wrestling events. Finally he got into the record business by buying out a local radio store and finding he had inherited a stock of records in the bargain. Many of his customers asked for what they called “hillbilly” records (Nathan had hardly heard the term before); they were “briars” and transplanted Southerners from Kentucky and West Virginia who wanted the kind of music they had known down home. Nathan obliged and then began to find out that he could also sell used records—especially the ones being pulled off the new jukeboxes that were suddenly in every tavern and cafe. As war clouds began gathering in the early 1940s, Nathan sensed that the shellac used to make records might well get into short supply and that records themselves might become scarce. He redoubled his efforts and managed to get some 12,000 discs at cut-rate prices.

In the meantime, WLW, the Crosley Company’s big radio station, had taken to the air in Cincinnati. At first, its signal strength was so massive (500,000 watts) that farmers said they could pick it up on barbed wire out in the countryside. The Federal Radio Commission eventually suggested a rollback on signal power. But the station still remained an enviable presence, having attracted a substantial roster of talent: Grandpa Jones, the Delmore Brothers, fiddler Curly Fox, harmony singers The Girls of the Golden West, singing newsman Lazy Jim Day, and guitarist Merle Travis. To fill an early morning slot, the station manager had asked the Delmore Brothers, Merle Travis, and Grandpa Jones to form a gospel quartet, which came to be called the Brown’s Ferry Four (after a ferry in northern Alabama, near where the Delmores grew up). This group later recorded extensively and became one of the best-known white gospel quartets. But during its first months on the air, the group constantly needed material. One day Travis and Alton Delmore discovered Nathan’s used record store. They sought records by black gospel groups, records of gospel songs they could adopt and use over WLW. By now Nathan had started gathering in such “race” releases and had thousands. Soon the members of Brown’s Ferry Four became regular customers and friends of Nathan’s.

By the fall of 1943 a nationwide recording ban was in effect, and no new issues of any consequence came out on national labels. Nathan decided he wanted to try making discs himself, recording them and pressing them, but found out that the big labels were not at all interested in giving him advice. He went to the Cincinnati public library and read what books he could find. Later he learned about a record pressing plant in Louisville, which had been set up for the American Printing House for the Blind. He visited it, made friends with the engineers and technicians, and began to learn. Soon he had his own presses and was refurbishing an old factory.

About September 1943, Nathan talked Grandpa Jones and Merle Travis into making some actual records. The three drove to Dayton, Ohio and recorded in a little room over the Wurlitzer Piano Company. The first two sides included duets by Grandpa and Travis—“The Steppin’ Out Kind” and “You’ll Be Lonesome Too.” They were spare, original songs that featured soft, close-harmony singing in the manner of the Delmore Brothers and some superb single-string guitar work by Travis. Nobody knows just how many copies of **King 500** were pressed, but it could have not been a lot. Today the disc is considered to be perhaps the rarest of all modern country records—only two copies are known to survive. Early scholars writing about **King** even thought the record had never been issued. Because of WLW’s hostility toward recording, Jones and Travis listed themselves on the label as “The Shepherd Brothers.”

Within a few months, both Grandpa and Travis were back in the **King Studios** (now in Cincinnati), recording better-selling discs. In a few short years Grandpa Jones went on to record songs like “Mountain Dew” and “Rattler” for **King**, yielding some of his classic hits and boosting his career to the national level. Travis moved to California, where he began recording for another new independent label, Capitol, and writing songs like “Sixteen Tons.” And Nathan, armed with a stable of talent and more new pressing machines, began monthly releases by the Delmore Brothers, Bill Carlisle, Hank Penny, Cowboy Copas, Wayne Raney, Wade Mainer, and others. Before long, Nathan had moved into rhythm and blues, releasing sides by Lucky Millinder, Wynonie Harris, Ivory Joe Hunter, Earl Bostic and Bill Doggett, Billy Ward and the Dominoes, and even early James Brown. Long before Sam Phillips began his legendary Sun operation in Memphis, Syd Nathan was merging black and white music and moving toward rock and roll. One of his biggest later hits, “Blues Stay Away from Me,” was a product of the Delmore Brothers, Nathan’s black A&R man Henry Glover, and an electric guitar pioneer named Zeke Turner.

**King’s** heyday occurred during the decade from 1945 to 1955, and the release list ran into the hundreds. Nathan himself died on 5 March 1968 in Florida. Today the remains of the **King** empire are housed in Nashville. The label merged with Starday Records in the late 1960s, and a few years later this company merged with Gusto. Today it operates under the name International Marketing Group (1900 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210) and has restored some of the old **King** masters to print on CD. **King 500** is not among them, however. The poor studio and inferior shellac created by the 1943 wartime restrictions made the disc difficult to remaster, and the original metal parts have long since been lost. Many of these early sides from 1944, though, are heard on *Grandpa Jones 16 Greatest Hits* (HCD 224), available from the above address through IMG’s mail-order service, Cindy Lou Music.

## MORE RECORDINGS

### BLACK COMPOSERS ON NEW WORLD

With this new release, *Videmus: Works by T. J. Anderson, David Baker, Donal Fox, and Olly Wilson* (New World Records 80423-2), Videmus, a Boston-based chamber ensemble that seeks to promote the music of minority and women composers, has done us all a great service. Good recordings of music by living African-American composers are all too rare. Of the seven works presented here, the earliest is Olly Wilson's *Sometimes* (1976) for tenor and tape, and the most recent are Donal Fox's *Four Chords from T. J.'s Intermezzi* for piano, *Duetto for Clarinet and Piano*, and *Jazz Sets and Tone Rows*—all composed in 1991.

This CD is a study in continuities and contrasts. The continuity lies in the connections, both internal and external, that bind these assorted works together as a unified whole. Two of Fox's compositions, for example, were inspired by T. J. Anderson's *Intermezzi* (1983), which is also featured here. Perhaps the most significant link is that all these composers (and most of the performers) have extensive backgrounds in improvisation and jazz. Given the diversity of their stylistic and formal expressions, it is remarkable that a shared background can speak in such different ways.

Unlike some of their predecessors from earlier generations, these composers convey no trepidation about using African-American vernacular forms as a resource for a new and vital concert music. The traditional spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" serves as the principal text for Wilson's electronic *Sometimes* as well as for the sixth movement of David Baker's *Through This Vale of Tears* (1986), which is set for voice, piano, and string quartet. Both works also feature the gifted and versatile tenor William Brown. The treatment of the voice in several of these pieces is consistently satisfying. At times it is used as an instrument, exploiting the traditional jazz and folk practices of scat singing and falsetto and also creating vocables that successfully explore new sonic possibilities. At other moments it conveys the power and pathos of texts by Mari Evans, Solomon Edwards, and Carl Hines.

There is little to complain about here, except to wonder why no African-American women composers were included. All the performances are convincing, and Donal Fox deserves mention as a striking new voice on the American musical scene. His compositions and improvisations reveal not only a breadth of vision but the musical intelligence and technique to articulate it. He and saxophonist Oliver Lake are an especially formidable duo in his *Jazz Sets and Tone Rows*. This recording serves as a powerful reminder that the important legacies of American vernacular and folk traditions—especially improvisation—still hold great potential to inform, influence, and energize the concert repertoire of today and tomorrow.

Yet one disappointment speaks almost as pointedly as the pieces considered here. In spite of the growing number of African-American composers and their longstanding contribution to the concert repertory of this century, they continue to be virtually invisible in the historical literature. It is hard to find a solitary reference to any of these figures even as the number of new volumes about American music continues to increase. The composers have done their jobs by writing the music. Have we done ours?

—Dwight D. Andrews (Emory University)

### ROCKABYE—BUT NO BABY!

It's a small voice but surprisingly arresting—reminiscent of the young Joan Baez some thirty years ago. Unlike Baez, though, Robin Holcomb writes her own songs, in her own style. Or *styles*, since there's quite a mix on her second CD, *Rockabye* (Elektra Musician 61289-2). (Her first, *Robin Holcomb*, came out in 1990.) You blink your eyes and rub your ears and ask, "What is this?" as she jolts you gently through a set of ten songs that are deceptively soft and sweet and yet have as much kick as a shot of Southern Comfort. Their music has a tinge of country, a touch of folk, some bits of gospel, the backbeat of rock and roll, and the surprise of jazz. Their lyrics are direct, photographic, nonlinear: Holcomb tells no tales, but a message emerges from each of her songs out of a crazy quilt of woven images. The title song, "Rockabye," tries to be a lullaby; it begins "Put pen to paper and sign / The lines on both sides of your hand / I can read / What settles out at the bottom / Of a bottle of wine / Are promises, lies / You can choose to believe." Another pleads for "The Natural World": "... Celebrate all high and private places / ... How much more can the waters hold? / How many more beats in the hallelujah? / Who can read these directions for turning around?" All linger in the ear and insistently demand relistening. A major musical and literate talent as singer-songwriter lies beneath the fragile front.

### PAINE ON THE PIANO

How mysterious and magical is musicality! That platitude is inescapable as one listens to the early piano music of a kid from Maine who, at age nineteen, went to Berlin to study music. That was in 1858; a year later he was composing such assured Beethovenian works as the twenty-five minute Sonata No. 1 in A minor, which he proudly dubbed Opus 1. This was, of course, John Knowles Paine. On a New World set of two CDs (80424-2), Denver Oldham offers the A-minor sonata and practically all the other known piano works of Paine in clean, crisp, and sympathetic readings. (He is apparently embarking on a long-range program to enrich us with substantial recordings of neglected American piano music, having released earlier *John Alden Carpenter: Collected Piano Works* [New World NW 328/329], *R. Nathaniel Dett: Piano Works* [New World NW 367-2], and *Piano Music of William Grant Still* [Koch International Classics 3-7084-2H1]). The Paine sampler includes mostly character pieces in such sets as *Four Characteristic Pieces* (Op. 25; 1876) and *Ten Sketches: In The Country* (Op. 26; ca. 1873). The scores are readily available in John Schmidt's compilation of Paine's *Complete Piano Music* (Earlier American Piano Music, vol. 27)—which, however, is not quite complete, omitting two unpublished works (the Op. 1 sonata and the Lisztian *Valse Caprice*) and the *Four Character Pieces* (Op. 11; publ. 1872) played here by Oldham. The last piece of Op. 11 is genially headed in the manuscript "Welcome Home to my Darling Lizzie, from John, March 31, 1868." Professor Paine, indeed!

—H.W.H.

## ROREM (continued)

fancy. All will stop when I stop. Then do I still ache for a more decent world? Sure. But at the age to which I've come, seeing new men in high places still stumbling into the old cruelties, there seems no hope until we evolve, or perhaps dissolve, from *homo sapiens* into another species.

How I came to such belief will not be a basis for this book of memories, except insofar as such belief, being pure sense, is the basis for all culture. My life—my *meaningless* life—has, after all, been not unfair. Everything connects.

\* \* \*

No one is more different from oneself than oneself at another time. Standing back to focus on other Neds at various heights and shapes cavorting, I will surely experience more than a twist of envy, of astonishment, of embarrassment, of ho-hum. If the vantage were from tomorrow or yesterday the recipe would surely vary, with anecdotes added or removed. But today is the day I've planned to begin the trial, and I'm an organized creature. Organization keeps me from suicide.

Otherwise stated: If indeed the universe is divided into French and German, then Mother was German and father was French, or mad and sane; and if indeed I'm a combination of the two of them, my whole existence—though I am seldom conscious of it—has been passed in crawling from the wild contrasts of folly into the dreary safety of routine without which work is implausible, then falling back, then crawling forth again, continually.

## DREAMS REVISITED

Responding to the nocturnal novelties in the last issue of this Newsletter—i.e., reproductions from the section on music in Robert M. De Witt's *Napoleon's Complete Dreambook* (New York, 1872)—the critic Andrew Porter sent the following tidbit:

Here's some confirmation, and a final warping, from *The Victorian Book of Dreams* (London, 1964; original date not given):

*Music*—To dream you hear delicious music is a very favourable omen, promising joyful news from a long-absent friend; to married people it denotes sweet-tempered children; in love it shows that your sweetheart is very fond of you, is good-tempered, sincere, and constant. Rough and discordant music foretells trouble, vexation and disappointment.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

For its twentieth National Conference in Worcester, Massachusetts on 6-10 April 1994, the **Sonneck Society for American Music** promises a "flavorful stew" of activities and events. Those wishing to propose papers or performances should send five copies of both a proposal (500 words maximum) and an abstract (100 words or less), together with two self-addressed stamped envelopes to Nym Cooke, Program Chair, 2 Stratham Road, Lexington, MA 02173. All materials are due by 1 October 1993.

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## GIANT STEPS (continued)

assumptions about the monolithic sexism of music videos by showing how female musicians have negotiated the medium to present a variety of images. She contrasts the sexism women encounter in the music industry with the opportunities for challenging gender stereotypes that have been made available by the mass-mediated spectacles of MTV. By including musicians, fans, structures of mediation, and textual readings in her study, Lewis achieves an exemplary adaptation of cultural studies methods to music scholarship.

Miles Davis was neither a journalist nor an academic, but *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989) directly challenges the ways in which both groups tend to think about popular music. Davis emphasizes the importance of dialogue, community, and history in jazz, which has increasingly been presented in terms of individual articulations of universal art. His revisionist arguments for jazz historiography become explicit when Davis discusses his quarrels with Wynton Marsalis, currently jazz's most effective "classicizer." And when Davis writes of his respect for and collaborations with Jimi Hendrix and Prince, he reconnects jazz with other kinds of popular music that are usually kept separate.

Several forthcoming books promise to keep the study of popular music intellectually exciting. Tricia Rose's *Black Notes*, will use ethnography, textual readings, and cultural analysis to position rap music as a post-industrial contribution to black aesthetic history. Rose's book will join David Toop's fine history of rap, *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop* (1991), as essential reading on contemporary African-American music. The University of Chicago Press will soon publish Charles Keil and Steven Feld's excellent collaboration, *Music Grooves*, which collects previously published essays by each and adds transcribed dialogues focusing on musical experience and participation, on the one hand, and musical mediation and commodification, on the other. Barry Shank's forthcoming *Identity, Community, Postmodernity: The Rock 'n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* combines sensitive ethnography, lucid historical writing, and the casually insightful musical analysis of a guitar player who is also a skilled cultural critic. Shank opens up new ways of conceiving scholarly projects by analyzing how the transition of Austin's music scene from country to punk happened in dialogue with persistent institutions, ideals, and social spaces.

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My own book, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993) analyzes heavy metal as a musical discourse that engages with contemporary formations of gender, identity, community, and cultural hierarchy. It emerged out of a dialogue with the people whose work is described above, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge their achievements. These books have made the study of American popular music, at its best, a vigorous and sophisticated area of scholarship, one which draws on interdisciplinary perspectives but remains centrally concerned with the power of popular music to reflect and shape so many people's diverse experiences and ideals.

\* \* \*

## NEW WORLD CDs

If your LP versions of the original one-hundred New World Records are well-worn to the point of near inaudibility, have heart. Some titles from that historic set have been reissued in durable and crisply-clear compact discs. Thinking it might be useful to have a list of titles currently available on CD, we obtained one from the company (New World Records, 701 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10036; phone 212/302-0460; fax 212/944-1922). The numbers here refer to the original set:

*Cecil Taylor Unit* (NW 201)

*Songs of the Civil War* (202)

*White Spirituals from the Sacred Harp* (205)

[Heinrich:] *The Ornithological Combat of Kings* / [Gottschalk:] *Night in the Tropics* (208)

*The Mighty Wurlitzer: Music for Movie-Palace Organs* (227)

*Works by Carpenter, Gilbert, Powell, Weiss* (228)

*Caliente=Hot: Puerto Rican and Cuban Musical Expression in New York* (244)

*Songs of Earth, Water, Fire, and Sky* (246)

*Roots of the Blues* (252)

[Paine:] *Mass in D* (262)

*The Pride of America: The Golden Age of the American March* (266)

[Griffes:] *Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan, Four German Songs, Three Tone Pictures, Op. 5* (273)

*Georgia Sea Island Songs* (278)

[Thomson:] *The Mother of Us All* (288/9)

[Sessions:] *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* (296)

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