

# AMERICAN MUSIC REVIEW

The H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music

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

Volume XLVIII, Issue 1

Fall 2018

## Institute News, and More

Jeffrey Taylor, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

Leonard Bernstein has been inescapable this year. A centennial celebration that features well over 3000 concerts worldwide, dozens of CD issues, and a variety of books has led one exasperated *Washington Post* critic to write: “I’ll grant that Bernstein was a very talented person. But I am looking forward to spending some time without him.” Here in New York one would think he had been a native son: images of him dancing on the conductor’s stand of the New York Philharmonic or gazing out at the treetops of Central Park from his apartment at the Dakota made him a Manhattan institution. I hear him referred to as “Lenny” or “LB,” as if he were a close personal friend, and often by people who never met him. But far from feeling oversaturated, at the Hitchcock Institute we are convinced there is still much to learn about this passionate, deeply complex man and his music. There is particularly a need for new scholarship on Bernstein’s music and career. This issue of *American Music Review* includes some examples, and we offer it in the hopes that the important work of Bernstein study will continue long after the furor of this year has died down.



*Bernstein with composers at the University of Michigan, 1988*

*Photo courtesy of the University Musical Society*

I never met “Lenny” myself. At least not in person. My first memory of him is the distinctive sound of his voice. When I was three or four I was given his recording of Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals* (a studio version of one of his Young People’s Concerts) which featured Bernstein’s narration and performances by several young artists. As kids often do with favorite music, I listened to this record incessantly, my eyes always fixated on the cover, which featured a kind of musical Noah’s Ark: two lions playing trumpet, two kangaroos playing clarinet, and so on. Bernstein’s script for this concert, which can be seen in the online archives of the Library of Congress, brought the music to life in

a dryly amusing way that seemed a perfect fit with Saint-Saëns’s own crafty sense of humor. I particularly remember his introduction to the “Fossils” movement, where the xylophone was played by then twenty-year-old Tony Cirone—as Bernstein intoned, “no old fossil HE.” (Cirone, by the way, now in his late 70s, had an illustrious career with, among other ensembles, the San Francisco Symphony.)

Much later, in the fall of 1987, I was beginning my second year in the musicology program at the University of Michigan, and a friend suggested I sign up for the volunteer usher program at Hill Auditorium, where students like me could hear all the concerts there in exchange for handing out

## Institute News, and More (cont.)

programs and helping patrons to their seats. Bernstein came to Ann Arbor that September to conduct two concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic, the first featuring Mahler's Fifth Symphony (a piece with which he is strongly associated) and the second presenting his own "Jeremiah" Symphony, with the great Christa Ludwig as soloist. On the evening of the first concert I arrived a couple of hours early, as was required, and as I walked up to my post in the second balcony, I heard Mahler's opening trumpet call, with the following thunderous A-major chord enveloping me in the stairwell. I don't know if the maestro was onstage (it may have only been a sound check) but it was a thrilling moment: At the time I was just beginning to discover Mahler's symphonies, and I was about to see one of their champions and preeminent interpreters. I distinctly recall watching the concert from the orchestra (I must have snuck down to an unclaimed seat) and the performance was revelatory. With one of his most prized talents, Bernstein made the famous "Adagietto" seem a private conversation with the audience. In a sense, I "met" Bernstein then and I was deeply moved.

Just a year later Ann Arbor was chosen as one of only four North American cities to celebrate LB's seventieth birthday. The celebration culminated with Bernstein conducting the VPO in Beethoven's "Leonore" Overture No. 3, his own *Halil* and *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*, and Brahms's Fourth symphony. I was still at my post in the upper balcony, and though often the ushers scrambled to find substitutes if they had an upcoming exam or paper (everyone tried to get out of at least one of the several *Messiah* performances each December), I don't think any of us missed this event. I distinctly remember watching the concert from the upper balcony—no unclaimed seats for this one! A colleague of mine reported that during curtain calls Bernstein had an assistant stand in the wings with a martini and a lit cigarette. Afterwards the President of the University hosted a reception with Bernstein for the composition students, some of them friends of mine, and I remember hearing about the magical atmosphere as the maestro held court, complete with cape. I imagine none of us attending these events could have guessed we would lose LB in just two years.

\* \* \*

We are pleased to be joined by **Dr. Leann Osterkamp** as a Guest Editor for *AMR* this fall, and to include her essay in this issue. Osterkamp defended an important dissertation on Bernstein's piano music this past spring at the CUNY Graduate Center, while finishing a complete recording of the repertory she studied, issued by Steinway & Sons Recording. She recently began her faculty appointment at Regis Jesuit High School where she is the Orchestra Director, Director of all Boys Choirs, Acapella Director, and is on the piano and guitar faculties. Aside from teaching, Osterkamp still actively performs and does research. Coming up, she will appear in NYFOS Mainstage in February and appear in a Young Steinway Artist solo recital in Denver in March.

This may have seemed the year of Bernstein here in New York, but at the Institute we have been fortunate to host once again a wide-ranging series of talks in our Music in Polycultural America series. On 29 October the Institute's own graduate assistant **Lindsey Eckenroth** presented "Cars and Guitars: The Sounds of Liberation?," drawing on her dissertation work on rockumentaries that place popular musicians in specific historical and geographic contexts and explore how their music is mediated by specific genres of television and film. On 4 December we joined with the Conservatory's Composers Forum to present **G. Douglas Barrett**, Assistant Professor of Communication Arts at Salisbury University and student of Alvin Lucier's neurofeedback experiments such as *Music for Solo Performer* (1965). Barrett sees Lucier's work in light of the expansion of the military-industrial complex and the large-scale labor transformations of late capitalism. And finally, on 5 December, **Elizabeth Newton** presented "The Raw and the Slick: Audio

## **Institute News, and More** (cont.)

Quality in the 1990s,” discussing the early 1990s reception of “lo-fi” music by critics and audiophiles. Do intentionally “bad” recordings offer authenticity and sincerity?

HISAM College Assistant **Whitney George** continues her visibility among New York’s composers. George’s orchestration of Miriam Gideon’s opera *Fortunato* will be performed in May 2019 at the CUNY Graduate Center. The project was recently recognized by the Graduate Center’s Baisley Powell Elebash Award Committee, which is funding this premiere performance of Gideon’s one-act opera. The performance will be presented in collaboration with the Fresh Squeezed Opera Company and The Curiosity Cabinet.