

# Institute for Studies In American Music

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

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume XXIX, No. 2

Spring 2000

## The Muze 'N the Hood: Musical Practice & Film in the Age of Hip Hop

by  
Guthrie P.  
Ramsey, Jr.

Since the release of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the medium of film has communicated, shaped, reproduced, and challenged notions of black subjectivity in twentieth-century America. Writing in 1949, Ralph Ellison argued that *Birth of a Nation* "forged the twin screen image of the Negro as bestial rapist and grinning, eye-rolling clown—stereotypes that are still with us today."<sup>1</sup> Such negative stereotypes had already existed in books, magazines, and sheet music for some time, and would continue to persist in all mass-mediated contexts throughout much of the twentieth century. It is film, however, that has become a particularly salient medium for the visual representation of African American subjects. If, as Manthia Diawara has argued, the camera is "the most powerful invention of modern times," then it becomes an even more influential tool when its technology is coupled with music.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, when filmmakers commingle cinematic images and music, they unite our most compelling modes of perception: the visual and the aural.

With these thoughts in mind, I want to consider African American films produced during the Age of Hip Hop, focusing on Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989). I am interested in how the soundtrack shapes the way we perceive cinematic narratives; how the music helps audiences experience characters, locations, and plots; and how the soundtrack relates to the techniques of the classical Hollywood scoring tradition. How does the score, in fact, invent a black cinematic nation? More specifically, how do musical practices in films like *Do the Right Thing* provide examples of the fluidity of "black identity?"

For many scholars, Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* stands as the symbolic beginning of American cinema, providing a grammar book for Hollywood's historic portrayal of black subjects. Likewise, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* may be viewed as an Urtext for black representation in the so-called ghetto-centric, New Jack flicks of the hip hop era. Lee's use of rap music, dance, and fashion demonstrates the power of hip hop expression in depicting a range of cinematic factors, including black subjectivity (both male and female), ethnic identity, generational tensions, and a sense of geographic and historic location. In these realms, *Do the Right Thing* casts a long shadow over the repertoire of acceptable cinematic strategies for subsequent new ghetto films.

Lee's use of rap music works provocatively in *Do the Right Thing* because of the audience's unconscious knowledge of conventional Hollywood scoring techniques, naturalized through their repetition over the years. Music enhances the "storyworld" of these classic films, deepening the audience's experience of the narrative, adding continuity to the film's scene by scene progression, and providing what Claudia Gorbman calls the "bath of affect."<sup>3</sup> The core lexicon of scoring techniques in American classic films is derived primarily from the



*Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out*  
in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*  
Photo courtesy of Forty Acres and a Mule Filmworks

## Inside This Issue

Caribbean Roundup  
by Ray Allen \_\_\_\_\_ 4

Sondheim's *Assassins*  
by James  
Lovensholmer \_\_\_\_\_ 5

The Pianist's Space  
by Marilyn Nonkon \_\_\_\_\_ 7

Behind the Beat  
by Mark Tucker \_\_\_\_\_ 9

## The Muze 'N the Hood (continued)

language of nineteenth-century Romanticism. The constant repetition of these musical cues, Gorbman notes, allows traditional Hollywood soundtracks to signify specific emotions, geographic locations, personality types, frightening situations, and so on. If the classic Hollywood film score renders the audience "less awake," as Gorbman contends, then Lee's use of rap music is exceptional. Despite the popularity of rap, Lee did not submerge the audience in a "bath of affect." Rather, he positions rap as an intrusive, embodied presence in the film, highlighting its difference from other musical styles in *Do the Right Thing*'s score. Nonetheless, as the film progresses, the manner in which Lee codes rap cinematically becomes familiar to the audience.

Victoria E. Johnson has recognized the importance of music in *Do the Right Thing*, calling it Lee's "most musical film."<sup>4</sup> Three broad musical types exist in the film. The "historic-nostalgic" strain encompasses, for the most part, chamber orchestral music written by Lee's father, Bill Lee. It is non-diegetic and signifies, in Johnson's view, a romanticized vision of community within the ethnically mixed neighborhood in which the story takes place. At the other end of the spectrum is rap music. The strains of Public Enemy's rap anthem "Fight the Power" is heard diegetically at various points in the film pouring out, at an assaulting volume, of Radio Raheem's boom box. The third cluster of musical styles heard in the film—jazz, soul, R&B, and Latin—mediates the two extremes represented by rap and orchestral music.

Johnson argues convincingly that Spike Lee is conversant with classical scoring conventions and that he manipulates these conventions to orient the audience within the story. In addition, Lee explores unconventional approaches that "disorient" the audience, through strategies that include "unrealistic" camera angles that call attention to the camera itself, cartoonish characters, and music that establishes both "bath of affect" and "listen to me" narrative positions. Moreover, Lee's use of rap music and its associated musical practices provides a compelling discourse on the body, dance, gender, and black nationalistic politics.

Consider the opening scene, which features a dance sequence by actress Rosie Perez. Dressed in boxer shorts and gloves, she aggressively executes a series of boxing and hip hop moves to the beat of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Critic bell hooks has

leveled scathing criticism at this scene, concluding that: "Alone, isolated, and doing a male thing, this solitary dancer symbolically suggests that the black female becomes 'ugly' or 'distorted' when she assumes a role designated for males. Yet simultaneously the onlooker, placed in a voyeuristic position, can only be impressed by how well she assumes this role, by her assertive physicality."<sup>5</sup> hooks's discussion, while provocative, misses much of the signifying potential at the heart of the scene. Boxing is certainly an important metaphor in the performance, but the role of dance is even more significant. If we begin, as hooks does, with the necessary observation that the brand of black nationalism echoed in *Do the Right Thing* downplays the role of women in that struggle, then there is a temptation to read everything in the film through that particular lens. If we position this performance in the realm of vernacular social dance, however, we can arrive at a more thorough reading of this segment.

Perez progresses with agility and authority through many of the hip hop dance moves that appeared during the 1980s. She moves from the Womp to the Charleston, the Running Man, the Cabbage Patch, the Kid 'n Play, the Fight, the Roger Rabbit, the Elvis Presley, and various other highly stylized pelvic thrusts, shuffles, jumps, and "up-rocking" movements that are closely associated with breakdancing and other hip hop-inspired gestures. Perez is, quite simply, "working it." At no time during this sequence, in my view, does she appear ugly or distorted. Rather, she looks totally engaged, especially near the end of the performance when she appears to be smiling, as if to say, "I know I'm working it!" Although this sequence is not, as hooks points out, in the film narrative proper, it does inform how rap music signifies throughout the film. Our identification of Perez as a black Puerto Rican resonates with the history of breakdancing itself. This important art form has had its Puerto Rican origins erased or at best eroded in the popular imagination, although research is beginning to correct this cultural amnesia. That Perez went on to be the choreographer of the black television variety show *In Living Color* in the early 1990s is also significant to the multi-ethnic landscape of what has been called the hip hop nation. On another level, we cannot discount the historical, signifying, and liberating tradition of black dance, a tradition in which Perez expertly participates and on which she comments non-verbally.

Women have played a key role in the creation and dissemination of black social dances that circulate and re-articulate powerful cultural energy. For these reasons, I see Perez as doing a very female thing and not an exclusively male one. While it is true that at points in the dance sequence (which is a series of jump cuts) Perez wears boxing gloves and shorts, her costume in other frames are more typical of late-1980s fashions. Since the boxing movements of jabs, uppercuts, and shuffles are similar to the upper body gestures of hip hop dance, I experience strong political links among the lyrical and instrumental import of "Fight the Power," the sport of boxing, and the expression of hip hop dance. The lyrics of "Fight the Power," a call to arms for black liberation, are given life through Perez's kinetic narrative.

*Continued on page 12*

ISAM Newsletter Vol. XXIX, No. 2 / ISSN: 0145-8396

Editors ..... Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen

Managing Editor ..... J. Graeme Fullerton

Contributing Editors ..... H. Wiley Hitchcock  
Carol J. Oja  
Jeff Taylor  
Mark Tucker

Computer Consultant ..... David Latulippe

Production Assistant ..... Kathleen Mason Krotman

The ISAM Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring. Copyright 2000 by the Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 2900 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11210.

Tel: 718-951-5655 Fax: 718-951-4858

Email: <isam@brooklyn.cuny.edu>

Website: <http://dephome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>

# ISAM Matters

This spring, the Institute presented the lecture series **American Music at the Millennium: Transnational and Transcultural Perspectives**. Four speakers explored the relationship between identity and contemporary American music. **Guthrie Ramsey** of the University of Pennsylvania opened the series by considering how hip hop mediates African American subjectivity in the films *Do the Right Thing*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and *Love Jones*. (A revised version of his paper appears in this issue of the *Newsletter*.) Continuing the work in her book *Listening to Salsa*, **Frances Aparicio** of the University of Michigan illustrated the ways in which women are depicted in the lyrics of salsa and examined the connections between gender and power in Latin popular music. My own lecture, "'The American Dream': *Miss Saigon* and the Politics of Memory," argued that this musical's widespread success over its ten-year run allows the United States to discard its uncomfortable history of military intervention by rewriting the tragedy of the Vietnam War into a simplistic cross-cultural love story. In "Gender and Sexuality, Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Space," **Linda Dusman** of Clark University explored contemporary electronic compositions by Thomas DeLio and Ruth Anderson in relation to recent theoretical work on gender, sexuality, and performance.

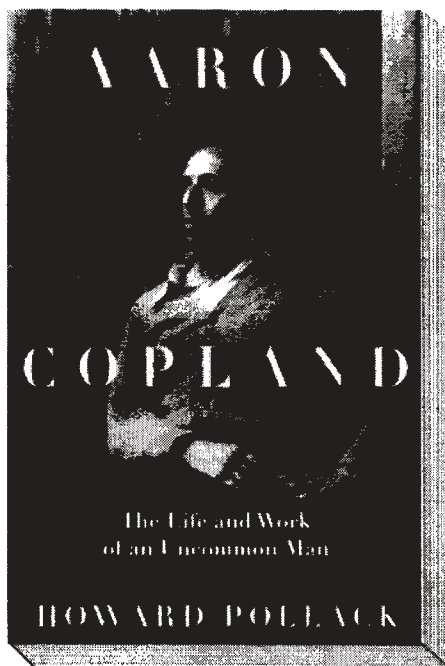
We gratefully acknowledge the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities at Brooklyn College for underwriting the series, and thank Brooklyn College's Programs in American Studies and Women's Studies, and its Departments of Africana Studies, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, and Film for their enthusiasm and support.

Ray Allen and I are pleased to announce ISAM's next conference, scheduled for 9-10 March 2001. **Local Music/Global Connections: New York City at the Millennium** will focus on ethnic music cultures of New York City. The conference will preview the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife, an annual celebration on the Washington, D.C. Mall that will feature New York City urban folk culture in 2001. Co-sponsored by the Smithsonian, New York University, and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Local Music/Global Connections will be the first ISAM event supported by the Baisley Powell Elebash Fund. This \$1.5 million endowment supports conferences and concerts on the music of New York City as well as New York-related dissertation research by students in CUNY's Ph.D. Program in Music. If you would like further information about Local Music/Global Connections and other upcoming events, please visit our website <<http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>>.

Congratulations to this year's winner of the ISAM composition prize, **Ben Bierman**. A graduate student in the Conservatory's composition program, Ben wrote his award-winning *Four Preludes for Violin Solo* while studying with **Tania León**.

Welcome to **Kumiko Katoh** as ISAM's librarian and office assistant. A student in the master's program in musicology at the Conservatory, she is researching the music of Meredith Monk, Bang on a Can, and Henry Cowell.

—Ellie M. Hisama



## NOW AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK

"A book as sober, respectful, and finely nuanced as this is just what [Copland's] legacy deserves."

— *New York Times Book Review*

"Taut and clear. . . . A valuable model of what biography can and probably should be."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"In this honest, exhaustive, well-written, and loving biography, Copland appears as the quintessentially American composer."

— *Booklist*

*A volume in the series Music in American Life*

Illustrated with 35 photographs; \$24.95



UNIVERSITY OF

ILLINOIS

PRESS

(800) 541-4703

[www.press.uillinois.edu](http://www.press.uillinois.edu)

# Caribbean Roundup

The choice of Trinidad as the site for the Spring 2001 meeting of the Society for American Music and the Center for Black Music Research promises to bring attention to one of the New World's richest musical regions. The Caribbean's position as a wellspring of musical innovation has been long recognized by ethnomusicologists and students of world music, but American music scholars have been slower to realize the region's impact on the music of the United States. American musicologists are familiar with influence of Caribbean rhythms on the works of American composers from Gottschalk to Copland and on many forms of American jazz. Occasionally a lecture on salsa or calypso slips into our survey courses when we scramble to include a sampling of American "ethnic" music. But such lip service belies over a century of marvelous musical exchange between the Caribbean and the continental United States.

There are two compelling reasons why the study of Caribbean music should be more integrated into the larger field of American music. First, as scholars of world music have argued for some time, the Caribbean, the southern United States, and parts of coastal South America form a unified musical region where the fusion of European, African, and (occasionally) Amerindian traditions has shaped vernacular musical practice for centuries. Creolized Caribbean forms like the Cuban *son*, the Puerto Rican *plena*, the Trinidadian calypso, and Haitian *Vodou* music have much in common with American hybrid genres such as spirituals, blues, early jazz, and gospel music. Second, the diaspora of Caribbean music to the United States in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has indelibly shaped the vernacular music cultures of urban centers like New Orleans, New York, and Miami. Moreover, transnational interchange among Caribbean, Latin, and North American urban centers promises to foster some of the new century's most imaginative popular styles.

The diversity of Caribbean musical styles can dazzle and intimidate the uninitiated. Fortunately, a tremendous upsurge in scholarship in the 1990s has begun to chart the complex terrain of musical expression in the islands and in the diaspora. Peter Manuel's solid introductory text, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Temple University Press, 1995; \$19.95), is the best place to start. Viewing the Caribbean basin as a crucible where European and African musical cultures met and commingled, Manuel surveys traditions from Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and the Lesser Antilles, Jamaica, and Trinidad. Well organized and clearly written, the work is enhanced by musical examples and substantial bibliographic/discographic citations for the music cultures of each island.

Cuban music, considered by many to be the Caribbean's most influential expression, has received surprisingly little attention in the English-language literature. *Essays on Cuban Music: Cuban and North American Perspectives* (University Press of America, 1991; \$60), edited by Peter Manuel, is a useful compilation of essays that includes English translations of historical and ethnographic works by several of Cuba's leading ethnomusicologists. *The Roots of Salsa: The History of Cuban Music* (Excelsior Music, 2000; \$19.95), forthcoming from noted Cuban journalist Cristobal Diaz Ayala, promises a more thorough history. Maria Teresa Velez's *Drumming for*

*the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe Garcia Villamil* (Temple University Press, 2000; \$19.95) documents the musical traditions of the Afro-Christian Santaria cults through the life history of one of Cuba's most esteemed practitioners of sacred drumming.

The definitive work on Puerto Rican music has yet to be written, so most information must be gleaned from popular works on Latin jazz and modern salsa such as *Musica: The Rhythm of Latin America* (Chronicle Books, 1999; \$22.95), by Sue Steward, and *Salsology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (Excelsior Music, 1992), edited by Vernon Boggs. Though not a comprehensive history, Frances Aparicio's innovative interdisciplinary study, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998; \$19.95) deftly explores the cultural politics of Puerto Rican music, revealing how salsa illuminates the complexities of class, race, and gender identity among Puerto Ricans at home and in the continental United States.

Merengue, the popular dance from the Dominican Republic that has recently challenged salsa's claim as the preeminent Latin pop sound, is the subject of Paul Austerlitz's *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Temple University Press, 1997; \$19.95). The work traces the stylistic development of merengue from its roots in nineteenth-century European contredanse and African folk drumming to its ascension, by the mid-twentieth century, as a nationalist popular style, and finally its diaspora to New York and other parts of the Caribbean.

The music of the French-speaking Caribbean is explored in Jocelyne Guilbault's *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies* (University of Chicago Press, 1993; \$24.95). The work meticulously traces the development of Zouk, an Antillian/Creole style that burst onto the world music scene in the mid-1980s with the success of the group Kassav. Combining musical analysis with ethnography and socio-political considerations, Guilbault studies the role of Zouk in the assertion of Antillian/Creole identity in Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, and Dominica. Music and politics are the twin themes of Gage Averill's study, *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (University of Chicago Press, 1997; \$17.95). Moving chronologically from the first American occupation (1915-34) through the reign of the two Duvaliers and into the 1990s, Averill traces the emergence of various popular styles in relation to Haiti's tumultuous political struggles: the salon meringues of the 1910s and 1920s, Vodou-Jazz of the 1940s and 1950s, *konpa-direk* of the 1950s and 1960s, the *mini-djaz* of the 1960s and 1970s, and the *mizik rasin* (roots music) movement of the 1980s and 1990s. The more traditional styles of drumming and singing associated with Haiti's sacred *Vodou* ceremonies and *Rara* celebrations are well covered in Lois Wilcken's *The Drums of Vodou* (White Cliffs Media, 1992; \$19.95).

Turning to the English-speaking Caribbean, Trinidad's rich calypso tradition is chronicled in Donald Hill's *Calypso Calaloo: Early Carnival Music in Trinidad* (University Press of Florida, 1993; \$49.95). Hill follows the evolution of calypso from Trinidadian

*Continued on page 14*

# Unifying the Plotless Musical: Sondheim's *Assassins*

Stephen Sondheim's 1990 musical *Assassins* challenges the ways in which American musicals have been traditionally unified. Instead of presenting a linear, Aristotelian plot, the musical is unified through a web of intertextual references.

The network of elements that links the musical's elements is dense: familiar music, original music parodying familiar and popular styles, contemporaneous poems and other writings, original lyrics and speeches based on those poems and writings, and actual historical characters who often appear non-chronologically throughout various time periods. Without the tightly connected use of these elements, the show would be little more than an anecdotal revue. Through Sondheim's and librettist John Weidman's adroit and powerful deployment of intertextual references, *Assassins* is a highly organized and brilliantly composed unit.

Throughout *Assassins*, Sondheim uses the Presidential march "Hail to the Chief" as a unifying device as well as a way to emphasize certain scenes. The show opens with the tune transformed from common time to a 3/4 meter. Through this metric shift, he ironically connects a march typically associated with ritual and respect with the act of assassination. Sondheim also uses "Hail to the Chief" to introduce scenes that link characters from different time periods, such as that in which John Wilkes Booth, John Hinckley, Leon Czolgosz (assassin of McKinley), and Giuseppe Zangara (would-be assassin of FDR) all sit around a New York neighborhood bar. By defamiliarizing the Presidential march, Sondheim successfully uses it as an emblem of the show's across-time bias. Many other songs in *Assassins* use a version of the opening motive from "Hail to the Chief" as Stephen Banfield has noted.<sup>1</sup>

Other musical works are directly quoted and often used ironically. Note, for instance, Sondheim's use of Sousa's music to frame a musical number about an anti-capitalist Zangara. In "How I Saved Roosevelt," a suite of dances in 6/8 time, Sondheim contrasts the familiar and the traditionally American—the Sousa marches "El Capitan" and "The Washington Post"—with the Other—an ethnic peasant Tarantella for the immigrant Zangara. A moment of supreme irony arises when Zangara begins crying out for photographers at his execution: "Only capitalists get photographers," he complains. At this point his melody and dance change from the Tarantella to a countermelody of the Sousa march, suggesting Zangara's final, albeit momentary, nod to the appeal of capitalist self-promotion. Using another defamiliarization technique, Sondheim

inverts the opening gesture of the "Star-Spangled Banner" to begin the refrain of a number titled "Another National Anthem."

Sondheim's incorporation of familiar songs is closely related to his best-known stylistic trait, the use of pastiche, which is itself a technique of intertextuality. In *Assassins*, Sondheim uses pastiche to maximum effect, employing the familiar vocabulary and comfortable genres of American popular music to give voice to disenfranchised and desperate characters from society's underside. This is Sondheim's technique throughout the show: defamiliarize popular music by putting it in the mouths of those whose acts we have been taught to deplore, but whose disenfranchisement, as we begin to see by the show's end, is just as American as the comfortable space they inhabit. Popular songs are part of America's collective memory: to most Americans, for instance, "Hail to the Chief" connotes the importance of the Executive Branch of the government or the President of the United States; a Sousa march suggests zealous patriotism. When Sondheim uses popular song styles to subvert the very meanings they have borne for a century or more, he is making a drastic stylistic leap, one that disturbs and unsettles audiences. His use of this technique to unify *Assassins* is an ingenious trick.



*The opening number of Assassins*  
Photo by Michael Le Poer Trench

Contemporary texts from the periods in which each assassin lived are woven throughout the musical. For instance, a number sung by Charles Guiteau, who was executed for assassinating President James Garfield in 1881, opens with the first lines of a poem he wrote on the day of his execution. "I am going to the Lordy" is hymn-like and unaccompanied, and the theme recurs between sections of the song. After the third section, Sondheim begins to alter Guiteau's text. The rest of this number consists of a parlor-waltz narrative and a cakewalk to which the jaunty Guiteau climbs the scaffold. The waltz sounds as if it should be played on a harmonium, and its lyrics are derived from one of several folk songs about Guiteau. The folk song begins, "Come all ye Christian people, wherever you may be, / Likewise pay attention to these few lines from me...." Sondheim switches the speaker from Guiteau to a Balladeer but nonetheless begins, "Come all ye Christians, / And learn from a sinner...." Later, Sondheim conflates the folk song with Guiteau's poem: one section, in which Guiteau swears "I shall be remembered!" comes from the folk song's line "But when I'm dead and buried, you'll all remember me." The Balladeer's second verse is drawn in part from Guiteau's final address to his jury, a meandering diatribe. The third section of the number, Guiteau's cakewalk, is an invention of

*Continued on page 14*

# Spreadin' Rhythm

Is it possible to imagine American popular music without the African American component? Would our songs have their lilt and swing, our lyrics their humor and irony? Would the musical elements of the blues have become so pervasive? How remarkable it is that a once-marginalized sector of society has become such a vital force in our popular, national expression!

*Spreadin' Rhythm Around: Black Popular Songwriters, 1880-1930* by David A. Jasen and Gene Jones (Schirmer Books, 1998; \$29.95) sets out to explore how African American songwriting became a force in the development of Tin Pan Alley. Their method is to present a succession of twenty-four biographical sketches of key figures or song-writing teams who made their impact prior to 1930. Beginning in the minstrel era with James Bland and extending to Fats Waller, the parade includes many of the giants one would expect: Gussie Davis, Irving Jones, Bert Williams, Will Marion Cook, Cole and Johnson Brothers, Cecil Mack, Chris Smith, Shelton Brooks, Spencer Williams, Maceo Pinkard, Andy Razaf, Clarence Williams, Jo Trent, Perry Bradford, Sissle and Blake, Creamer and Layton, and James P. Johnson. A few who would not make the cut on songwriting credits alone are included because of their importance as performers or publishers: Ernest Hogan, James Reese Europe, Shep Edmonds, W. C. Handy, and J. Mayo Williams.

Jasen and Jones tell their stories well, and the narration soars in several of the introductory overviews. Eighty-one photographs, including many sheet music covers, enhance the book's attractiveness.

In contrast to the biographies, the authors' attention to the songs is slight. They quote and discuss a few lyrics, but mostly on a cursory level, and they overlook opportunities to go into greater depth or provide adequate illustration. For example, their discussion of Razaf's racial protest lyric in "Black and Blue" builds to the point that one wants to read the lyric, but they end the discussion without quoting a line.

Music is discussed only in rare instances, and then inadequately. They make a valiant effort to convey the significance of "St. Louis Blues," comparing it with "Jogo Blues" and "Memphis Blues," but, lacking any musical example, the argument is virtually impenetrable (pp. 237-38). Without substantive musical discussions, we never learn about the songs responsible for "spreadin' rhythm around."

Though the book occasionally imparts new information, as with stories of Jo Trent or J. Mayo Williams, it usually retells what is available in other publications. Even more troubling, however, is the authors' indifference toward documentation, leaving the careful reader wondering where information comes from and whether it is accurate. Without footnotes, what are we to think of categorical statements that lace the book, such as those concerning sales: "'Baggage Coach' sold over a million copies of sheet music within a few months of its issue (p. 20); "'Some of these Days' sold over two million copies over the next few years" (p. 147)? Do these statements reflect reliable information or do they depend upon publishers' exaggerated advertising claims?

The authors provide little indication of their sources or methods, and their two-page "Select Bibliography" and puzzling three-page "Sources" fail to clarify issues.

Citations occasionally occur within the narrative, but more as teasers than as information. We are told that Gussie Davis was interviewed in "the New York *Evening Sun* early in 1888" (p. 18); the authors quote a passage from "an 1899 editorial in the *Musical Courier*" (p. 45), and another from "the New York *Age* in 1908" (p. 55). Why are they so intent upon keeping the precise information to themselves?

In effect, the reader is expected to trust the judgment and veracity of the authors. However, evidence argues against such trust. For example, citing the September 1947 issue of *Theatre Arts* (a rare instance in which they identify the source), they recount an incident told by Will Marion Cook about his composition of *Clorindy*. But they embellish Cook's story: "The next morning, Cook couldn't wait to play his score for his mother." He plays for her "Who Dat Say Chicken in Dis Crowd?"; his college-educated mother, who had dreams of him becoming a great classical musician, is devastated (pp. 82-83).

This account raises questions: Cook must have known how his mother would react to a coon song. Why was he so anxious to play it for her? Was this a cruel intention to shock her? However, the original article says nothing about his wanting to present the music to his mother; he was simply practicing it, alone, when his mother, in another room, overheard him. Whatever the authors gain in drama, their "poetic license" introduces a disturbingly false element.

One wonders also about their account of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The great music sales, they maintain, were "prompted by Sophie Tucker's hit recording" (p. 242). Do the authors have information on a hit recording whose very existence seems to have escaped the notice of Tucker herself (as recounted in her autobiography) and of her discographers? If so, why not share it?

The authors' interpretations, presented as facts, also raise questions. In comparing Ernest Hogan with Bert Williams, they write: "Like Bert Williams, he was funny; unlike Williams['], his comedy was tinged with pathos." It's difficult to imagine how Williams, the sad-faced comic whose public persona was built upon such tunes as "Jonah Man" ("My hard luck started when I was born") and "Nobody" ("When life seems full of clouds and rain,/ And I am filled with naught but pain") could be perceived as lacking pathos. Furthermore, how was the comparison even made? Hogan, unlike Williams, never recorded.

Fluent narration cannot compensate for the lack of scholarly rigor and integrity. We should not only enjoy a story, but be convinced of its truth. Authors should win our confidence rather than raise suspicions that they hide behind a veil of secrecy.

—Edward A. Berlin  
New York

# The Pianist's Space

Since my late teens, when I discovered the music of Schoenberg and the postwar moderns, I've been fascinated by the twentieth-century repertoire. In college, I was fortunate to study with a pioneer of new music piano performance, David Burge, for whom many landmark works were written, including George Crumb's *Makrokosmos I*. As my tastes have developed over the past decade, my repertoire now includes a variety of composers, ranging from Alvin Lucier, Mario Davidovsky, Milton Babbitt, Salvatore Martirano, and Charles Wuorinen to younger voices such as Lee Hyla, Jason Eckardt, Jeff Nichols, and David Rakowski. I generally find myself drawn to atonal works that are rhythmically adventurous, conceptually unusual, and physically demanding, and to composers with distinct voices and strong musical personalities.

As a performer, I mediate the delicate space between the work as written and the music as heard. Composition, writes the composer Chris Dench, is "the making manifest of a particular vision, an envisaged musical domain that is...unendurably absent from the expanding musical universe."<sup>1</sup> As a player of new music, I have the chance to render the "unendurably absent" a vital and sonorous part of reality.

Performers of contemporary music have extraordinary responsibilities. In contrast to works of the common practice era, new works are rarely performed. The pieces I bring to the concert hall are usually unavailable on recording and won't be performed again anytime soon, or by anyone else. Often, the audience's impression of a composer's music will depend wholly on my interpretation. If I were to play a Beethoven sonata or Chopin ballade poorly, for example, it is unlikely that Beethoven's or Chopin's reputations would suffer as a result. But when I play a new work, whatever I do may be attributed to the composer, for better or worse. As the boundaries between the work and its interpretation become blurred, I become less and less like an actor—one who reads a script presumably written by another—and more like a simultaneous translator. In the act of performance, I essentially assume the voice of the composer and must speak with extreme care.

Faithfulness to the score is paramount. However, just as playing only the notes on the page won't do justice to Bach or Mozart, it isn't sufficient for a new work. Because the listener's memory will iron out details over time, ultimately rendering the most vivid musical impressions in muted shades, I seek to play not only accurately but memorably. Nothing is as dissatisfying as the stereotypical "new music" piano sound—dry, clinical, and relentlessly percussive—or as immediately forgettable. But brashness, reticence, passion, and sentimentality are the kinds of characteristics we remem-

ber, long after notes and rhythms have faded. Sudden shifts of color and dynamic and the kinds of exuberant and shocking gestural juxtapositions only found in the contemporary repertoire need to be articulated with clarity and conviction. Although listeners may not be able to determine the correspondence between my performance of an unfamiliar work and what's on the page, they can certainly distinguish the eloquent from the inarticulate.

In October 1999, I premiered a work written for me, Jeff Nichols's *Chelsea Square* (1999). In this harmonically luscious but formally unpredictable composition, extended passages of stormy polyphony subside suddenly into areas of stillness and calmness; yet in the pauses between violent gales of activity, even the most beautiful, lyrical writing is imbued with tension. It is as if the piece is powered by an inner windstorm. The composer suggested that I project a sound "that you could take a bath in," and I chose to play his piece with a Brahmsian tone, using a heavier, deliberate touch softened by the pedal. This warm sound would invite listeners to bathe in the sheer lushness of the material, set them at ease, and free them to ponder the unusual formal developments. On the

same program, I premiered another work written for me, Milton Babbitt's *Allegro Penseroso* (1999). Finding this new piece joyous and lively, as colorful as a Bosch triptych, I sought to play it with the bright and sparkling tone one might associate with Poulenc or Milhaud. This brought out the work's natural vivaciousness and the playful quality that lies just beneath its rhythmic and contrapuntal intricacies: the giddiness of the high-register hocketing that begins and ends the piece and the fragments of jazz-influenced tunes curiously poking out of the texture. There's something about the work's dryness, its taut brilliance—perhaps its lack of

nineteenth-century sentimentality—that seems very French to me. I don't expect that many of my listeners will mistake Nichols for Brahms, nor Babbitt for Poulenc, or even make these same whimsical associations. But in the absence of established contemporary performance practice, each new work deserves an evocative sound world in which to live.

As an avid listener, I tend to be dissatisfied with most "mixed programming"—the combining of works from earlier centuries with those of the postwar period. To me, new music demands creative listening strategies. The music of Carter and Crumb asks us to listen with different ears than the ones we use for the standard repertoire. Certainly, some factors are an integral part of almost all musical experiences, tonal or atonal: the tension and release of harmony, the play of rhythm and counterpoint, the drama of form and development, and the arousal of the emotions. Yet in listening to common-practice music, we become accustomed to its signature

*Continued on page 15*



Marilyn Nonken  
Photo © 2000 Thomas Dallal

# Ives and his Times

Philip Lambert's *Ives Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1998; \$69.95) is a comprehensive and provocative survey of research by ten prominent Ives scholars. By presenting current thought on the realization, performance, interpretation, influence, and importance of Ives's works, this collection grapples with many critical issues in Ives research and will invigorate interest in this unique American voice.

Several articles dig deep into the music itself. Robert Morgan explores the wonderful strangeness of the song "The Things Our Fathers Loved" and its connection to European musical tradition. He demonstrates the singular yet compelling logic of Ives's compositional language by showing how Ives understood tonality as a historical language, still meaningful and powerful, but no longer necessary or inviolable. Ives's unfinished *Universe Symphony* is the subject taken up by both Larry Austin and Philip Lambert in their essays. Austin provides a complete description (plus sixteen pages of facsimile) of the *Symphony* sketches and explains why and how he accepted Ives's open invitation to complete it. Lambert's more philosophical and contextual article considers the *Symphony* as a part of a tradition including Scriabin's *Mysterium* and Schoenberg's *Die Jakobsleiter*. It is intriguing that in his most transcendental, mystical work, Ives was thinking primarily in abstract and experimental terms. Austin's description of the sketches shows how different the *Symphony* is from the *Concord Sonata*, for instance. Lambert's focus on cyclic structures in the sketches demonstrates the importance and intentionality of musical complexity in the piece. The context Lambert provides for the *Universe Symphony* proves how appropriate this hypercomplexity is in a work that attempts to embody grand cosmological principles.

In his survey of the challenges in preparing a critical edition of Ives's songs for the Music of the United States of America series, H. Wiley Hitchcock presents compelling evidence that the songs have been printed and reprinted without any editing. Although he judiciously acknowledges the danger of correcting wrong notes that are right (to paraphrase Ives), Hitchcock's long experience with Ives's music and his demonstrated eye for detail make him an obvious choice for the project. Geoffrey Block examines the sketch materials and the two published editions of the *Concord Sonata*. He argues that the second edition (1947) represents Ives's final intentions and that the piece should be performed scrupulously from that edition. Block also presents a close reading of the *Concord* sources partially in response to questions about chronology and revision famously raised by Elliott Carter and Maynard Solomon. Block shows convincingly that later additions of dissonance usually restored ideas from original orchestral sketches that were omitted from the first edition—thus, the revisions show us Ives's earlier ideas. In "Redating Ives's Choral Sources," Gayle Sherwood dissects the chronology of Ives's choral works. Her analysis of paper types and handwriting provides reliable dates for the pieces and demonstrates a logical compositional pattern. The reordering does not radically alter the familiar dates; rather, it shows that Ives, like Bach, wrote choral pieces as required for his various church jobs. The dates Sherwood assigns are often later than Ives's own, but she finds no evidence

that Ives systematically changed dates to make himself appear more "modern." The order of pieces remains essentially unchanged and, in her words, "the revised chronology supports Ives's reputation as a compositional innovator."

Other essays address historical and philosophical issues. In a style recalling research on Ives from the 1970s, Wolfgang Rathert postulates an aesthetic of "potentiality," a transcendental openness to inspiration that produced Ives's "extremely unstable concept of the work." He relates the intentional incompleteness of Ives's works and his reliance on intuition during performance to Emerson's concept of "repose," or an emptying of the mind to allow artistic inspiration. Ironically, Ives uses the term quite differently. Drawing on Emerson's essay "Intellect," Ives uses "repose" as the opposite of "truth" in the Essays. It is a synonym for "manner." Rathert's assertion that the *Concord Sonata* (and by extension much of Ives's oeuvre) "abides in an undefined zone of a modern 'work in progress,' whose richness of associations does not allow for completion," provides a provocative—although to my mind less-than-persuasive—counterpoint to Block's argument for the finished work.

In "Charles Ives and the Politics of Direct Democracy," Judith Tick reconsiders Ives's political ideas and projects them into a more central political position. By linking Ives's ideas and popular movements for initiative and referendum, Tick presents his support for direct democracy as a logical extension of mainstream politics, not an impractical outgrowth of transcendentalism. She also illuminates Ives's views on class and commercialism—issues often overlooked in commentary on his extreme use of gendered rhetoric. Stuart Feder argues that Thoreau was a constant figure in Ives's inner life. To explore Thoreau's symbolic value for Ives, Feder turns to the music. He considers works obviously related to Thoreau and those he calls Thoreauvian, such as "Walking," "Sunrise," and *Tone Roads No. 3*. He points out connections of style and substance between Ives's works and Thoreau's and uses the correspondence between Ives and Thoreau scholar Walter Harding to show the Concord philosopher's importance in the last decade of the composer's life. Peter Burkholder closes the volume by reviewing the reception history of the music and the history of Ives scholarship. He notes that Ives did not compose haphazardly or randomly but that he was "a skilled composer with excellent command of his materials." Ives's substantial ties to the European tradition, as noted by Morgan and Lambert in their essays, are also an important subject for Burkholder, who notes the influence of Debussy and of the nineteenth-century symphonic tradition. He also points out our increased awareness of Horatio Parker's influence on Ives.

By connecting Ives with contemporary musical, philosophical, and political currents rather than portraying him as an isolated figure, Lambert's comprehensive volume demonstrates how necessary it is to understand Ives as a part of his time, and how engaging and vital he and his music still are.

—Tom C. Owens  
George Mason University



## Behind the Beat with Mark Tucker

A child piano prodigy grows up in poverty to become star soloist and arranger with one of the leading swing bands in America. She rides the crest of the boogie woogie wave while entertaining at Café Society in New York, arranges for Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington, and joins the bop revolution in Harlem, serving as a mentor to Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, and other young musicians. Disillusioned with the jazz life, in the 1950s she drops out of the music business, converts to Catholicism, and starts her own charitable foundation. Eventually a Jesuit priest coaxes her back into performance and she resumes an active career while also composing several large-scale sacred works. At Duke University she becomes artist-in-residence and continues to concertize until her death in 1981 at the age of seventy-one.

These are the bare bones of the story recounted by Linda Dahl in *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* (Pantheon, 2000; \$30). It's a wonder no one has come along to tell it sooner, but fortunately Dahl's richly comprehensive account can serve as a standard for some time. Given full access to unpublished sources by Williams's close associate, Father Peter F. O'Brien, Dahl draws upon letters, diaries, and autobiographical writings to reveal the private side of a complex artist. Plagued by personal problems throughout her life—involving family, lovers, financial woes, and career struggles—Williams found solace through music and spirituality, persevering in her mission to spread the gospel of jazz and blues wherever she went.

Curiously, given Dahl's subject and background (author of *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazzwomen*), she does not delve into issues of gender in this biography. Williams herself apparently steered clear of the topic ("As for being a woman, I never thought about that one way or the other. All I've ever thought about was music."), but for a biographer to follow suit is surprising. There is also little detailed discussion of the music—Dahl mainly cites critics and scholars for opinions—but we can hope that future studies will tackle this subject, now that the basic elements of Williams's story have been put into place.

One of the odder episodes in Williams's career was a concert she gave in 1977 with avant-garde pianist Cecil Taylor, portions of which can be heard on *Embraced* (Pablo PACD-2620-108-2). Williams cared little for experimental jazz, but apparently she perceived Taylor as a sympathetic figure utterly dedicated to his art. At the concert, though, the two pianists seemed to inhabit radically different worlds, with Williams digging deep into the blues, ragtime, and boogie-woogie while Taylor carried on as though oblivious to what she played, building up dissonant waves of sound that constantly threatened to drown out her contribution. They appeared to be

antagonists rather than collaborators, and afterwards Williams was angry with Taylor for stubbornly going his own way and refusing to meet her in the middle.

Trumpeter Dave Douglas pays tribute to Williams on his major-label debut disc, *Soul on Soul* (RCA Victor 09026 63603-2)—the title is a phrase Duke Ellington bestowed on her. The music is beautiful and invigorating, much of it by Douglas, who contributes nine originals and interprets only four of Williams's compositions. She would be pleased to know that her musical legacy is being explored by a young musician this way. Certainly her high standards of musicianship, fusion of traditional and modern values, and unstoppable creative drive remain an inspiration.



Mary Lou Williams  
Photo courtesy of the Institute for Jazz Studies,  
Dana Library, Rutgers University

**All Miles.** When the autobiography of Miles Davis appeared in 1989, many were stunned that such a flood of words and memories could pour forth from someone whose public reticence was legendary. Davis riveted the jazz community with his frank assessments of other musicians, graphic accounts of drug addiction, and troubling revelations of violence toward women. At the same time, one wondered how such a tough-talking, hard-edged character could produce music prized for its emotional intimacy, vulnerability, and fragile beauty.

This question is addressed, though not resolved, in *Miles and Me* (University of California Press, 2000; \$19.95), an engaging memoir by poet Quincy Troupe that relates his personal history with the trumpeter—first as a listener and young fan growing up in St. Louis, later as Davis's neighbor on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and eventually as literary collaborator, friend, and confidante. Davis's "blunt, even hostile exterior," Troupe writes, "hid from public view a funny and caring person." Partly the forbidding facade protected Miles from hordes of people seeking contact with a star; a surefire way to incur his wrath was to walk up and initiate a conversation, as Troupe and many others learned the hard way. But Troupe also attributes Davis's aloofness and seeming arrogance to his identity as an "unreconstructed black man," placing him in the company of other defiant, uncompromising individuals—among them Paul Robeson, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and Amiri Baraka—who went their own way, regardless of how whites (or anyone) judged their actions.

Beyond presenting a rare close-up of this enigmatic artist, Troupe surveys Davis's recorded career and celebrates his legacy. "Great art has mystery and magic," Troupe writes, "an attitude, a stance." Davis had these traits in abundance. As for human warmth, sensitivity, kindness—look for these not in the man but in his music.

*Continued on page 10*

## Behind the Beat (continued)

**Back to the Future.** An energetic advocate for jazz and new music, **Howard Mandel** is known to many as a print journalist, National Public Radio commentator, and website editor for the Jazz Journalists Association (<[www.Jazzhouse.org](http://www.Jazzhouse.org)>). In *Future Jazz* (Oxford University Press, 1999; \$26) he celebrates such innovators and experimenters as John Zorn, Cassandra Wilson, David Murray, Geri Allen, Henry Threadgill, Vernon Reid, Steve Coleman, Butch Morris, and John Scofield, presenting interviews with them in the familiar format of jazz magazine profiles. Despite its title, *Future Jazz* is more retrospective than forward-looking, giving a sense of trends and issues that surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s—including an interview with Wynton Marsalis from 1984, just as his solo performing career was starting to soar.

In his forecast for jazz in the years ahead, Mandel implies that eclectic, risky, genre-crossing artists will set the agenda. A sampling of musicians fitting this description can be heard on the companion CD for *Future Jazz* (Knitting Factory Records KFR-249; available through <[www.knittingfactory.com](http://www.knittingfactory.com)>), which limits its contents to artists who have recorded either for the Knitting Factory label or Blue Note. Except for two older tracks by Eric Dolphy and James Newton, all the performances date from the 1990s, including selections by Don Pullen, Cassandra Wilson, Andrew Hill, and the Jazz Passengers. The compilation is a kind of updated version of the “Wildflowers” loft-jazz recordings from the 1970s, giving a vivid picture of New York’s vital downtown musical scene with performances that embrace heterogeneity and flaunt canonical virtues.

**Recent Jazz.** Chicago-born pianist **Anthony Wonsey** debuts as leader on *Open the Gates* (Criss Cross Jazz 1162), a set of smoothly swinging straight-ahead jazz that features outstanding performances by trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** and drummer **Nasheet Waits**. Like Mulgrew Miller, one of his early keyboard mentors, Wonsey knows how to create uncluttered textures and infuse a contemporary musical language with plenty of blues and soul. . . . Vibraphonist **Stefon Harris** displays quicksilver fluency and sophisticated harmonic ideas on *Black Action Figure* (Blue Note 7243 4 99546 2 5). The roiling textures and sense of urgency may result in part from the presence of M-Base alumnus **Greg Osby**, who produced the recording and plays alto on a number of tracks. Harris’s compositions don’t yet have the force of personality heard in his playing, but he’s a young artist-in-progress, heading in a promising direction. . . . Clarinetist **Don Byron**’s latest effort, *Romance with the Unseen* (Blue Note 7243 4 99545 2 6), is pure delight. From the quirky good humor of Ellington’s rarely heard “A Mural from Two Perspectives,” to the sweet setting of Lennon and McCartney’s “I’ll Follow the Sun,” the artful reworking of Herbie Hancock’s “One Finger Snap,” and the eerie David Lynch-Angelo Badalamenti mood of “Basquiat,” the level of musical engagement is consistently high and refreshingly off-center. Guitarist **Bill Frisell**’s gritty rock and country licks nicely balance the open, rounded tones of Byron’s clarinet, while drummer **Jack DeJohnette** creates surging rhythmic undercurrents that send everyone flying forward. . . . Not long after releasing the classically tinged *Elegiac Cycle*, pianist **Brad Mehldau** continues his prolific recording streak with *Art of the Trio 4: Back at the Vanguard* (Warner Bros. 9 47463-2), featuring

*Continued on page 15*

## Custer's Just Intonation

Kyle Gann’s new compact disc, *Custer’s Ghost* (Monroe Street Music, msm 60104), presents six electroacoustic works composed between 1992 and 1999. All the music is in some form of just intonation, rather than in the equal temperament tuning system common to most Western music. Because just intonation sounds out of tune to listeners accustomed to Western musical practice, they may need a few minutes to adjust their ears to Gann’s tunings. But the effort is worth it—beneath the pieces’ shiny surfaces is real gold, the kind that makes us want to listen again and again.

Gann’s musical vocabulary is characterized by deceptively consonant harmonies, conjunct melodies, and nearly straightforward rhythms. Like a magician, Gann creates smooth illusions; you barely notice the sleight-of-hand. Surely those are triads, and yet not quite major or minor ones, but somewhere in between. Rhythms that initially seem to be quarter and eighth notes refuse to come out squarely on the beat. The pulse seems steady at first, until you try to tap. Do we have one foot too many or one too few? A careful listener is likely to replay the track in an effort to identify the nature of its puzzles.

Most of the compositions are for synthesizer alone, while *Custer and Sitting Bull* is for voice with electronic accompaniment. Gann performs in all the works and narrates *Custer and Sitting Bull*. His “orchestrations” bring together fanciful casts of musical characters assembled into musical palettes far removed from European instrumental traditions. *So Many Little Dying*s, for example, features various birds, a gong, toy piano, splashing waves, guitar, and the voice of poet Kenneth Patchen. Such improbable alliances of disparate timbres produce ambiguous environments in which synthetic and sampled instruments, tuneful melodies, triads, percussion, and assorted sound effects convincingly occupy the same time and space. The audacious *Superparticular Woman* (1992) displays the sounds of a synthetic celesta, whistle, guitar, and drum machine in such extreme ranges and tempi that they seem to have drifted in from different rooms. Although they eventually cadence together on what is very nearly a G major triad, there is more than a hint of musical schizophrenia here and elsewhere on the disc.

*Custer and Sitting Bull*, a one-man opera for voice and electronic background, is the most recently composed work on the disc. Gann describes it as “a musical document of two male egos, taken as symbolic of the tragic clash of two cultures.” Drawn from Custer’s *My Life on the Plains* and from verbal statements that Sitting Bull made at various times, the composition is politically bold. The text for this thirty-five-minute work is fused with Gann’s most ambitious and accomplished musical score to date. What emerges is as disturbing as any musical-political work in recent memory, for its emotionally riveting portrayal of Custer, Sitting Bull, and the events surrounding them.

As musicologist and critic, Gann labels, classifies, analyzes. As composer, he seeks to obscure categories. Resolutely opposed to academicism in music and in music education, Gann creates sonic environments that are simultaneously familiar and enigmatic, but always unique and recognizable to anyone who listens to his work.

—Noah Creshevsky  
New York

# Carter's Reflections

*Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995*, edited by Jonathan Bernard (University of Rochester Press, 1998; \$24.95) is an anthology of writings by one of the most important American composers since 1950. The compilation provides access to Carter's musical sensibilities as an internationally eminent composer and as an articulate and insightful critic. His writings about music help to illuminate his own aesthetic as well as that of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

Bringing his considerable experience as a scholar of Carter's music to bear on the project, Jonathan Bernard edited the volume in consultation with the composer. The collection is notable for making available several essays that were either not in print or have not yet been published in English. Most of the unpublished essays were originally lectures, the manuscripts of which are housed at the Paul Sacher Foundation. Forty-seven of the fifty-nine essays in the volume have previously appeared in journals or books (a large majority in the 1977 collection *The Writings of Elliott Carter*, edited by Else Stone and Kurt Stone); twelve are published for the first time. While the duplication of so many essays raises questions about the book's goals, the collection is important for continuing to make Carter's thinking about music available to the musical community and for presenting previously unpublished essays.

Bernard divides the essays into six topical categories. One wishes that he had provided introductions to each of these categories—Bernard's reflections upon Carter's thinking about these topics would have provided a useful context in which to contemplate Carter's ideas.

The first section, "Surveying the Compositional Scene," includes essays from 1946-65 about compositional practices in the early post-World War II years. Carter stakes out his own technical preferences in "Fallacy of the Mechanistic Approach" (1946), yet shows his sympathetic understanding of other compositional techniques in "La Musique sérielle aujourd'hui" (1965; rev. 1994). The second section, "American Music," shows Carter struggling not only with the idea of what an American music might be but also with his attempts to forge such a music. He is particularly insightful about differences between the social contexts in which American and European composers work and how they affect musical production and consumption. Essays in the third category, "Charles Ives," demonstrate Carter's great respect and occasional love for Ives's music, while at the same time showing his uneasiness with Ives's often impenetrable textures. Correctly, the essays chronicle the occasional rocky events in Ives's and Carter's personal and professional encounters.

The fourth section, "Some Other Composers," includes essays on Fauré, Debussy, Stravinsky, Varèse, Steuermann, Piston, Sessions, Wolpe, Petrassi, Babbitt, Boulez, and the little-known com-

poser Henry F. Gilbert. The fifth section, "Life and Work," presents essays in which Carter reflects on his own musical practices. Many of these essays are program notes; others are extended philosophical and theoretical contributions that emerge from Carter's own compositional concerns. The inclusion of such well-known essays as "Shop Talk by an American Composer" (1960) and "Music and the Time Screen" (1976) is questionable, since some of the lesser-known essays cover the same topics and the result is considerable repetition. Bernard might well have decided not to include these essays, since they are easily available.

The sixth and final section, "Philosophy, Criticism, and the Other Arts," is a "grab bag" category, including essays on a great variety of topics: dance, film, poetry, Soviet music, among others. Some of the essays which fall, apparently, in the domain of philosophy and criticism present ideas that have occurred in earlier essays.

Taken together with the duplication of essays in the Stones' collection, this internal repetition raises questions about the goals of Bernard's volume. If one assumes that readers will pick and choose among the essays, then internal repetition will be minimized. But if the essays were chosen as representative of Carter's thought, as the topical organization suggests, then the decision to include essays with substantial overlap of content is problematic.

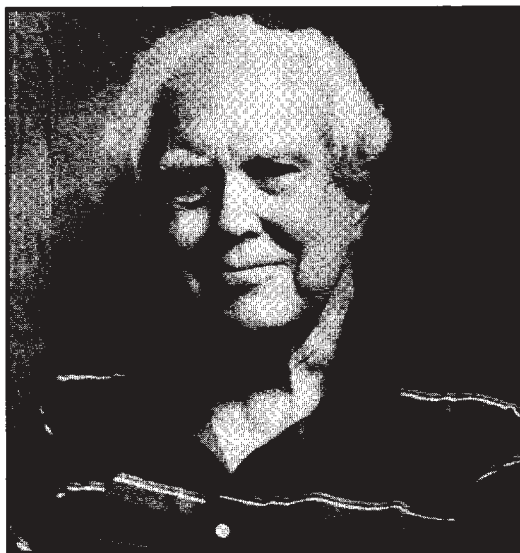
Despite these questions, the essays provide insight into Carter's technical and aesthetic concerns as well as documentary evidence about musical practices and ideas in American concert traditions. Carter's commentary reveals mid-century attitudes toward musical unity, popular music and jazz in relation to concert mu-

sic, improvisation, race and its connection to production, and a host of other issues. Scholars can also glean information from what Carter chose *not* to write about and from the dates of his essays. For instance, he does not write about "Downtown" or West Coast composers but considers only those composers with whom he feels an affiliation. Most of the essays in the collection were written during the years of about 1940 to 1975, a period in which composers were deeply interested in articulating their aesthetic and technical concerns. In contrast, today's composers seem to write substantially less about their music than did their counterparts of the 1960s and 1970s.

This collection provides a renewed incentive to engage Carter's music through critical, historical, and analytical terms. It will stimulate further scholarly and critical attention to the music not only of Carter but also of other composers who have continued and transformed the traditions of American concert music.

—Judy Lochhead

State University of New York at Stony Brook



Elliott Carter

Photo by Kathy Chapman

## The Muze 'N the Hood (continued)

In fact, at one point during the dance she mimes the lyrics of a particularly salient political statement. Perez's lip-syncing, together with her gestural emphasis on the words (unlike any other sequence in the dance), connects her unquestionably to the song's overtly political sentiments. Moreover, this moment of "self-consciousness" invites the viewer to make an explicit connection between the flowing words and the moving body. From this perspective, Perez's performance can be seen not as extratextual, or as merely objectified by the camera's lens, but rather as the active insertion of a distinctly female presence into Public Enemy's somewhat phallogentric cultural nationalism.

The lyrics of "Fight the Power" scream "1989!" at the beginning of the piece. The immediacy of Perez's dance says the same thing. We are in the present, a present that has urgency, particularity, politics, and pleasure. Lee's choice to introduce in dance an entire song that will be of utmost importance to the film's story line works exceptionally well. Because music with a plethora of lyrics would lose some of its communicative effect if heard solely within filmic narrative or action, the wordless yet semantic dance allows viewers to experience the full impact of song's sentiments. When we do hear this song nine more times during the film, we can concentrate almost exclusively on the cinematic meanings it generates.

Lee replaces the cinematic use of Perez's body during the film proper with that of Radio Raheem, a key character who speaks sparingly but who signifies much. In the climatic scene of *Do the Right Thing*, Raheem is killed—"accidentally on purpose" as folks used to say—by police officers trying to quell a riot outside of Sal's Pizzeria, an Italian American owned business in a predominately black neighborhood. Radio Raheem, a Bigger Thomas with a boom box, is almost represented in shorthand by Lee. He rarely speaks and doesn't have to. "Fight the Power" speaks for him. And what's more, his body is objectified as an imposing presence that is to be taken seriously, if not feared. The sonic force of producer Hank Shocklee's innovative and explosive rhythm track combines with the lyrics to create a palpable and pleasurable tension. More so than any other musical form heard in the film, rap music stands alone because of its singular cinematic treatment. In fact, because Radio is associated with rap music, no other character, in my view, approaches the intensity that his presence achieves.

A good deal of the dramatic thrust of Radio Raheem's character is due to how he is framed musically. No music underscores the two scenes prior to his first appearance on screen. This strategy effectively establishes Radio Raheem as an important presence in the film. He never responds to the tune by dancing or even moving to its rhythm. Yet because of Perez's dance performance, the bodily connection is never lost on the audience. After we meet Radio Raheem, he has a brief but very important interaction with one of the characters who serves as an important marker in the narrative. Earlier in the film we had met Mister Senior Love Daddy, the DJ at the neighborhood's radio station, which programs various popular musical styles throughout the day. Importantly, the music of the station is, for the most part, heard diegetically and situates this neighborhood in a specific cultural space, not a universal one.

Love Daddy's on-the-air patter belongs to a long tradition of black radio DJs. When he and Radio Raheem share a scene, one would expect the stationary and portable DJs to have an unpleasant confrontation. Instead, while standing outside of the control booth's exterior window, Radio Raheem salutes Mister Senior Love Daddy, who responds in kind by acknowledging and complementing him on the air. This passing sentiment, together with the opening scene, situates rap music within the cultural orbit of other black vernacular traditions. At the same time, the cinematic use of rap singles it out as hyperpolitical when compared to the treatment of other musical styles of music in the soundtrack. The singularity of Lee's artistic and political construction insisted on the silencing of rap music and the threat it posed to the white establishment. This move was achieved, for the sake of narrative closure, through the inevitable destruction of Radio Raheem's boom box and his subsequent death at the hands of the police.

The cinematic and the musical construction of a character like Radio Raheem was very influential on later hip hop films. After *Do the Right Thing*, cinematic depictions of black maleness, violence, nihilism, or certain strains of black cultural nationalism could be closely tied to certain forms of rap music. In *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), for example, director John Singleton used gangsta rap to depict the nihilistic aspects of South Central Los Angeles gang culture. At the same time, he employed soul music and the New Jack Swing style of rap music as the sound track of "community." And in the film *Love Jones* (1997), director Theodore Witcher portrayed a Chicago-based black bohemia culture that absorbed and expanded the performance codes of hip hop culture, reflecting the way that rap had multiplied into numerous satellite idioms.

More than a decade after the release of *Do the Right Thing*, rap music and hip hop culture continue to speak to diverse audiences. The use of rap in recent black cinema demonstrates this dynamism and provides valuable insight into the process by which music and visual imagery intertwine to generate cultural meaning.

—University of Pennsylvania

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (Vintage, 1972), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Manthia Diawara, "Black American Cinema: The New Realism," in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (Routledge, 1993), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Victoria E. Johnson, "Polyphony and Cultural Expression: Interpreting Musical Traditions in *Do the Right Thing*," in *Do the Right Thing*, ed. Mark A. Reid (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (South End Press, 1990), 181.

*Editors' Note: This essay is a condensed version of a lecture delivered in the series American Music at the Millennium: Transnational and Transcultural Perspectives, Brooklyn College, 17 February 2000. Ramsey's forthcoming book, Race Music: Post-war Black Musical Style from Bebop to Hip Hop, will be published by the University of California Press.*

# New Ives Sources

In the fall of 1995, I searched in the study of Charles Ives's West Redding, Connecticut home for theory notes Ives tantalizingly mentioned in *Memos*.<sup>1</sup> Although I never located the notes, I discovered documents that had neither been deposited in The Ives Collection at Yale University nor previously catalogued. Subsequently I prepared *New Sources for Ives Studies: An Annotated Catalogue*, which divides this material into four categories: I. Music-Related Materials, II. Politically Related Materials, III. Music, and IV. Librettos in English Translations. The listings in categories III and IV are an addendum to the catalogue prepared by Vivian Perlis's students.<sup>2</sup>

The documents in categories I and II consist of newspaper clippings, complete sections of newspapers, and periodicals that include journals, magazines, and bulletins, as well as several letters from the political organizations responsible for particular bulletins and journals. Some of this material was stored in the music-cabinet drawers; most was in a cardboard box on the floor. The political articles examine a limited number of issues by different writers, issues familiar from Ives's own political writings.<sup>3</sup> Comparing the themes in the materials Ives preserved to those in his own essays points to his focused approach to these issues. As Howard Boatwright noted in his introduction to "A People's World Nation": "Newspaper and magazine clippings saved by Ives (often with notes written in the margins) show that he followed eagerly any development that supported his general idea."<sup>4</sup>

The dates of these documents show Ives to have been well-informed about newsworthy developments in national and international affairs until late in his lifetime: of the fifty-four music- and politically related items, forty-two are from the 1940s and 1950s, the final one dating from eight months prior to Ives's death. Moreover, they testify to his concern about social problems that first commanded his attention in his younger years.

After Ives stopped working and composing, he contributed to organizations and subscribed to journals and bulletins through which he could continue to nurture his interests in democratic processes, the relationship between the distribution of wealth and political power, and the benefits of world government. Most of the items in the first two categories were acquired through subscription. Since this collection represents a very small and highly selective sampling of those periodicals Ives actually received, its careful preservation underscores the significance these publications held for him. There can no longer be any question about his ongoing involvement with contemporary political developments.

*New Sources for Ives Studies: An Annotated Catalogue* can be found on the ISAM website: <<http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/ivescat.html>>.

—Carol K. Baron  
State University of New York at Stony Brook

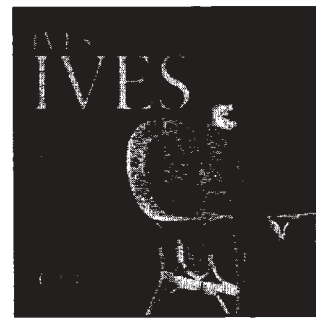
## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Charles E. Ives, *Memos*, ed. John Kirkpatrick (Norton, 1972), 120.

<sup>2</sup>"Lists of West Redding books made by Perlis class," 1979 (box 70, folder 3), MSS 14, The Charles Ives Papers, Music Library of Yale University.

<sup>3</sup>See Charles E. Ives, "George's Adventure" and "The Majority" in *Memos*, Appendix 9, 205-28, and Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata, The Majority, and Other Writings*, ed. Howard Boatwright (Norton, 1962).

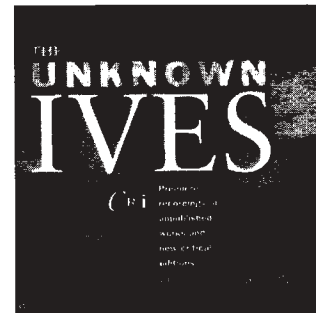
<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Ives, *Essays*, 225.



CD 811

## IVES PLAYS IVES

The complete Ives recordings  
from four sessions, 1933 to 1943.  
42 tracks representing 17 different works  
including  
Four Transcriptions from "Emerson,"  
Studies Nos. 2, 9, 11, 20 & 23;  
The Alcotts, They Are There! and  
Here's To Good Old Yale!



CD 811

## THE UNKNOWN IVES

DONALD BERMAN, piano  
"Extraordinary" — Boston Globe  
Premiere recordings of unpublished  
works and new critical editions.  
Three Page Sonata, Set of Five Take-Offs,  
ten piano studies, and also  
Ruggles: Evocations,  
Four Chants for Piano



COMPOSERS RECORDINGS, INC.  
73 Spring Street, Suite 506  
New York, N.Y. 10012-5800  
Phone (212) 941-9673 Fax (212) 941-9704  
[www.composersrecordings.com](http://www.composersrecordings.com)

## Assassins (continued)

Sondheim's that utilizes the upbeat dance form to indicate Guiteau's madness alongside his unrelenting optimism that everything he has done has been for a good cause. The cakewalk, originally a dance among American plantation slaves in which they mocked their masters, retains its ironic character as Guiteau sings "Look on the bright side" on the scaffold, all but momentarily blind to his fate. This single song, then, combines three popular song types—the parlor waltz, the cakewalk, and the hymn—with actual writings of Guiteau and mixes them with Sondheim's paraphrasing of Guiteau, a folk song about Guiteau, and Sondheim's original lyrics, resulting in a chilling yet somehow amusing portrait of a lunatic assassin in his last moments.

Perhaps to connect the idea of a firearm with homespun American values, Sondheim sets the following lyrics for a barbershop quartet in 3/4 time:

All you have to do is  
Crook your little finger,  
Hook your little finger  
'Round...  
Simply follow through,  
And look, your little finger  
Can slow them down  
To a crawl,  
Big and small,  
It took a little finger  
No time  
To change the world.

The song about Czolgosz is a hoe-down, and the mutually demented John Hinckley and Squeaky Fromme sing of their unrequited loves—his for actress Jodie Foster and hers for Charles Manson—to "I'm Unworthy of Your Love," a sweet, top 40-style ballad.

The opening and closing number, "Ev'rybody Has the Right to be Happy," is a chirpy soft-shoe, and the John Wilkes Booth scene presents a combination of ballads, each reflective and touching while angry and bitter. In short, Sondheim's musical vocabulary is vast, and it is organized into a tightly controlled series of references that propels *Assassins*.

By exploiting familiar genres of popular music to explore the desperate actions of characters from society's fringes, Sondheim creates a sense of increasing tension and inevitability that replaces traditional, forward-looking plot development. Sondheim draws on far more than simply his audience's awareness of the relationships of multiple texts: his use of intertextuality makes it possible to eschew the usual means of linear plot development while unifying the unpredictable actions of a disparate cast of characters.

—James Lovensheimer  
Ohio State University

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (University of Michigan Press, 1993), 57-58.

## Caribbean Roundup (continued)

Carnival celebrations through its commercial recording and diaspora to New York City during the 1930s and 1940s. *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* by Stephen Stuenkel (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; \$18.50) provides the definitive history of Trinidad's unique steelband tradition, moving from its emergence during Carnival celebrations in the 1930s to its establishment as a symbol of national identity in the 1960s and its role in shaping class and ethnic sensibilities in contemporary Trinidad society. The writings on Jamaican popular music are wide but thin. *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music*, by Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen (Temple University Press, 1998; \$19.95) offers a brief account of reggae's roots in Afro-Christian *Pocomania* and Rastafarian cult music and in popular mento, ska, and rock steady styles. The development of reggae in the 1960s and 1970s and the arrival of contemporary deejay-driven dub and dancehall music round out the work. Peter Manuel's forthcoming *East Indian Music in the West Indies: Tan-Singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture* (Temple University Press, 2000; \$29.95) surveys Indo-Caribbean folk and popular music in Trinidad as well as Guyana and Suriname.

The literature on Caribbean music in the diaspora is uneven, with Cuban and Puerto Rican genres—both central to the development of Latin jazz and salsa—receiving the most thorough coverage. The pioneering work here is John Storm Roberts's popular 1979 survey, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, which traces the development of rumba, mambo, Latin jazz, and salsa in New York City, as well as the more general influences of Mexican, Brazilian, and Argentinian styles on the popular musics of North America. The second edition (Oxford University Press, 1999; \$14.95) includes a new chapter on the internationalization of salsa in the 1980s and 1990s and the rise of contemporary salsa romantica, Latin rap, and Dominican merengue. Roberts's most recent offering, *Latin Jazz: The First of the Fusions, 1880s to Today* (Schirmer Books, 1999; \$29.95) covers much of the same ground, but with a clearer focus on the Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Brazilian influences on American jazz, from Jelly Roll Morton to contemporary fusion styles.

Puerto Rican music in New York City is explored in two important works: Ruth Glasser's *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (University of California Press, 1995; \$17.95) and Juan Flores's *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (Columbia University Press, 2000; \$17.50). Glasser's work, a superb historical documentation of Puerto Rican music making in New York between the two world wars, reveals the complex interplay between musical practice and ethnic identity, while adroitly debunking the myth that the city's Latin music scene was exclusively Afro-Cuban. The relationship between popular expression and identity politics is further explored in Flores' collection of insightful essays focusing on contemporary Nuyorican culture. Ranging widely from the revival of traditional *bomba* and *plena* music to the emergence of Latin rap and performed poetry, Flores grapples with the nature of Puerto Rican/Latino identity in the rapidly changing landscape of late-twentieth-century New York City.

Continued on page 15

## Planist's Space (continued)

regularities of rhythm and meter, harmony, form, and style. When faced with a work that does not exhibit these regularities, we cannot help but note their absence. Too often, we begin by characterizing unfamiliar works by what they are not, rather than judging them on their own merits.

A few years ago, I performed a recital of recent works, each of which explored a different kind of aesthetic and perceptual complexity. Inspired in part by the New Complexity movement, Jason Eckardt's *Echoes' White Veil* (1996), which represented the United States at last year's World Music Days, has been described as "daring and exuberant...somewhere between Szymanowski and Luciano Berio."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Alvin Lucier's *Music for Piano With Pure Wave, Slow-Sweep Oscillators* (1991) required that I play only occasional pitches on the keyboard; these sounds triggered intricate and elegant webs of acoustic phenomena, resulting from the interaction of the piano's timbre and an electronic tape part. Also on the program was Salvatore Martirano's witty hybrid of late 1960s serialism and jazz, *Cocktail Music* (1962), whose complexities are rooted in the collision and fusion of styles and materials. Each of these pieces contains a world in itself, a unique vision of what music can be.

It is often argued that audiences won't come to a program of all twentieth-century music, when half of the works are by emerging composers whose names are unfamiliar. Yet this argument underestimates today's listeners. In my experience performing in New York City and in smaller venues around the country, I've found listeners to be wonderfully open-minded. Audiences today are exposed to more kinds of music than ever before: classical, jazz, world music, and all veins of rock and popular music. Research in the field of music perception and cognition affirms that the more diverse our listening experiences, the greater the wealth of associations we bring to all our listening experiences and the more meaningful they become. I'm not surprised when some of the most enthusiastic listeners who approach me after concerts are not the standard "new music enthusiasts," but listeners whose experiences with John Coltrane, Stephen Sondheim, and the throat singers of Tuva have prepared them for their encounters with late-twentieth-century composers. These are the listeners who make me optimistic about the future of new music.

The late-twentieth-century repertoire is a rare bird, a body of works for which the media hasn't provided sound bites and video clips. Some lament the lack of attention our art form has received. Yet its seeming anonymity is also a gift: new music offers today's audiences a uniquely uncorrupted listening experience. With our own ears and imaginations, we explore uncharted musical domains and become an active part of the expanding musical universe.

—Marilyn Nonken

For more information on Nonken, visit <[www.ensemble21.com](http://www.ensemble21.com)>.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Chris Dench, "Sulle Scale della Fenice: Postscript," *Perspectives of New Music* 29/2 (1991), 101.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Griffiths, "Galaxies Apart in Style Yet Following a Certain Path," *New York Times* (15 May 1998), E8.

## Behind the Beat (continued)

regulars Larry Grenadier on bass and Jorge Rossy on drums. Technically, Mehldau continues to grow. His bold rhythmic experiments and fluent ability to play independent left-hand lines are especially impressive. The unaccompanied cadenzas, though, are becoming a bit mannered—like the one that ends "Sehnsucht," resembling a student etude inspired by Bach, boogie woogie, and Chick Corea. More troubling is the aura of virtuosic grandstanding now hanging over Mehldau, as though he feels under pressure to reaffirm his artistry rather than just letting it flow. . . . In the early 1960s, soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd formed a quartet devoted exclusively to the works of Thelonious Monk. Only one recording (*School Days*, 1963) documents that historic group, but a mini-reunion occurs on *Monk's Dream* (Verve 314 543 090-2), with Lacy and Rudd placed once again in a "pianoless" quartet, demonstrating their uncanny telepathy in a set of tunes by Monk, Ellington, and Lacy himself. What's impressive about both players is their air of relaxed mastery. Even while striking out into realms of freedom, they maintain a calm insouciance not normally associated with the avant-garde. Then again, "avant-garde" hardly seems an adequate label for Lacy and Rudd. Call them two Old Masters of improvised music, graduates of the school of Monk who keep alive their guru's playful spirit and probing intelligence.

*Editors' Note: An exhibition entitled Mary Lou Williams in Her Own Right will run from 21 September through 31 December 2000, at the Flushing Town Hall in Flushing, NY (718-463-7700). The exhibition will be on display at the Duke University Museum of Art from 26 January through 18 March 2001.*

## Caribbean Roundup (continued)

Glasser and Flores contributed essays to ISAM's most recent publication, *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music in New York* (University of Illinois, 1998; \$14.95), edited by Lois Wilcken and myself. The compilation focuses on the transformation of Latin, West Indian, and Haitian music in New York City, a Caribbean crossroads currently home to over two million people of island lineage, and a center of Caribbean music production and distribution.

The plethora of recent surveys and popular histories of Caribbean music provides a broad though incomplete map of one of the world's most diverse and complex musical regions, and an initial glimpse at the musical interplay between the islands and the United States. The more theoretical studies lay the foundation for future research into the process of musical creolization, the nature of transnational music networks, and the constellation of issues surrounding the relationship of music to nationalism, ethnicity, class status, and gender.

—Ray Allen



*Pioneering Latin Big Band leader  
Tito Puente (1923-2000)*

**Inside this issue:**  
**Caribbean Sounds**  
**Public Enemy**  
**Williams**  
**Sondheim**  
**& Nonken**

Enclosed is my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.  
Suggested donation: \$25. Please make payable to:  
Brooklyn College Member Organization (memo ISAM)  
*All contributions are tax-deductible.*

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

*f*

Are you among the 4,000 scholars,  
composers, and performers passionate about  
American music who receive the *ISAM News-*  
*letter* twice a year and free of charge?

*Please become a voluntary subscriber.*

*Your help is essential  
to continue issuing this publication.*

**Brooklyn College**  
**Institute for Studies in American Music**  
Conservatory of Music  
2900 Bedford Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11210

Address Correction Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Brooklyn, NY  
Permit No. 671