Institute for Studies In American Music

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

NEWSLETTER

Volume XXVIII, No. 2 Spring 1999

Defining American Music

by
David Nicholls

Harry Partch, global American, holding his adapted guitar
Photo by Betty Freeman

What do we mean by "American music"? From a millennial perspective, the answer is apparently simple: as *America's Music*, the *Cambridge History of American Music*, and *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* make manifestly clear, it is synonymous with inclusivity. From Barber to barbershop, Cage to Cajun, and Ruggles to ragtime, it's all there, reinforcing the contemporary view of American culture as pluralistic and multifaceted. Implicit in this definition, though, is the acknowledgment that "American music" cannot be quantified either stylistically or otherwise; rather than defining some aurally-perceivable nationalistic trait, the term actually identifies "music created by Americans, usually in America." A century ago, the situation was rather different: there was no clear idea of what "American music" could or should be, let alone what it supposedly was. Indeed, it was only during the 1930s that this identity crisis began to resolve itself, paradoxically at a time when stereotypical images of "American music" were at their most potent, both in America and elsewhere.

As is well-known, in 1893 Antonín Dvorák opined in the *New York Herald* that "the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called the negro melodies. . . . These are the folk songs of America, and your composers must turn to them. . . ."[1] Dvorák subsequently modified his view, suggesting that Native American melodies were also worthy of consideration, and in 1895, in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, he finally conceded that "the germs for the best in music lie hidden among all the races that are commingled in this great country." In retrospect, Dvorák's remarks are noteworthy on three counts: for their ignorance of both earlier and contemporaneous attempts at creating an "American music"; for their failure to understand the profound demographic and socio-cultural differences that existed between America and Europe; and for the fact that they were taken so seriously by so many people.[2]

At the end of the nineteenth century, it was perfectly possible for European composers like Dvorák, Grieg, or Tchaikovsky to write genuinely nationalistic music by integrating into the existing European musical lingua franca the folk music of their compatriots: they spoke a common musical tongue, but with characteristic and identifiable ethnic or regional accents. But in polyglot America no such musico-linguistic purity was possible, except in the most particular circumstances, such as the African American-derived pieces of William Grant Still, or the regionally based compositions of Charles Ives. Any other use of "folk songs" strikes me as disingenuous and appropriative–and I include here not just the obvious Aunt Sallys, such as MacDowell's *Indian Suite* or the Alaskan Inuit melodies of Beach's late String Quartet, but also Still's *Danzas de Panama* and Ives's setting of the spiritual "In the Mornin'."

Inside This Issue

Somewhat ironically, just when Dvorák was encouraging American art music composers to borrow freely from African American sources, several interrelated popular music genres (all of which were to some extent intrinsically linked with African American culture) were about to enter the mainstream of American–and subsequently Western–cultural life. The meteoric rise between 1895 and 1925 of ragtime and blues (with their love-child, jazz), together with musical theater and Tin Pan Alley songs, could not have been predicted by Dvorák or anyone else; nor could the extent to which they would be perceived in the public imagination as the only authentic examples of American culture. The degree of their ubiquity by the late 1920s is easily demonstrated: think of the *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, *La Création du Monde*, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, *Die Dreigroschenoper* or Shostakovich's *Tahiti Trot*, an arrangement of "Tea for Two." (Incidentally, anyone doubting the threat that ragtime and jazz apparently posed to the European cultural establishment at this time is directed to the outrageously racist remarks contained in part three of Constant Lambert's *Music Ho!*[3])

By the 1930s, a veritable smorgasbord of apparently incompatible musics sought approbation as the authentic voice of America. Apart from the popular music genres mentioned above, there was an assortment of art music contenders. The Second New England School and its descendants had created a substantial body of Eurocentric but often appealing music. Farwell and the other Indianists had taken Dvorák at his word in exploring the rich traditions of Native American music; a smaller number of composers had similarly approached the African American heritage. Copland, like Gershwin, had initially been drawn to a synthesis of jazz and art music, but by 1930 he had moved toward a hard-edged version of the neoclassical internationalism also espoused by a legion of Nadia Boulanger's other American students. And then there were the self-styled ultra-modernists, with Henry Cowell as high priest, Varèse, Ruggles and Crawford among the communicants, and Ives as recalcitrant patron saint.

Perhaps the greatest myth of American music is the idea that a particular musical sound can somehow encapsulate the aspirations and fundamental character of the nation. Given the bewildering profusion of possibilities, the reality is rather of the pointlessness of attempting to justify a preeminent position for *any* single composer or genre. Yet for two authors writing in the early 1930s, it was this very multiplicity that was the key issue. Unlike Dvorák and his countless successors, who–in attempting to define American music–sought to privilege one genre or style above the others, John Tasker Howard and Henry Cowell adopted the all-embracing, anticanonical, egalitarian approach customary today. As Cowell noted in the introduction to his 1933 *American Composers on American Music*, the bibliography of American music was, at the time, scant. Thus both his volume, and Howard's 1931 *Our American Music* (which Cowell praised), set an important precedent.[4] From them, one can trace a direct line of descent through Gilbert Chase's 1955 *America's Music*, to the more recent histories by Wilfrid Mellers, H. Wiley Hitchcock, Daniel Kingman, Charles Hamm and others.

Our American Music has been criticized for being "too genteel and 'respectable'," an "unmethodical, browsing chronicle," compiled by someone who "fit Sonneck's description of an American who wrote 'as a European'."[5] Yet for almost a quarter-century, Howard's book was the only generally available account of American music. Crucially (and very unusually at this period), alongside its predictable chapters on art music stand substantial discussions of "other" American musics–folk, Native American, African American, popular song, and jazz–which occupy approximately a quarter of its pages. Howard's tone may occasionally be pejorative, particularly in relation to Native Americans, but this was the unfortunate norm of the time and Howard was by no means the only culprit. The important point–one that would not have been lost on the very many readers of its first three editions–is that, in general, *Our American Music* examines all of its subjects with an admirable degree of dispassionate and scholarly interest.

That is not a comment one could honestly make regarding Cowell's *American Composers on American Music*. Designated as a symposium, its tone is inevitably subjective rather then objective, and its overt aim is the promotion of ultra-modern art music. But the book is remarkable for two reasons: first, it includes not only a series of chapters in which composers as different as Howard Hanson and Ruth Crawford are considered by their peers, but also a second group in which general tendencies are examined. Among these we find sensitive and at times provocative statements concerning Latin American musics (Chávez and Caturla), African American composers (Still), oriental influence (Rudhyar), and jazz (Gershwin). Like Howard, Cowell took an unusually ecumenical view of American music.

American Composers on American Music is also remarkable for Cowell's opinion, fundamentally different from Dvorák's, that while "Nationalism in music has no purpose as an aim in itself . . . Independence . . . is stronger than imitation . . . [Thus] more national consciousness is a present necessity for American

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I.S.A.M. Newsletter Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 / ISSN: 0145-8396

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The I.S.A.M. Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring.

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I.S.A.M. Matters

A New Director! We are happy to announce that **Ellie Hisama** will assume directorship of I.S.A.M. in the fall of 1999, joining the faculties of both the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College and the Ph.D. and DMA Programs in Music of the City University of New York. Born in Cleveland, Ohio and raised in southern Illinois, she received a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Chicago before moving to New York, where she received a Bachelor of Music from Queens College and a Ph.D. in music theory from the City University of New York, Graduate School and University Center. She has taught at the University of Virginia, Queens College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Ohio State University, and most recently at Connecticut College.

Professor Hisama's primary field of research is twentieth-century American music, with a focus on theory, gender, and cultural criticism. Her work has been published in *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz Since 1945*, *Journal of Musicology*, and *Popular Music*; she has also contributed chapters to books forthcoming from Oxford University Press, Carciofoli Verlagshaus, and Garland Press. She is completing a book for Cambridge University Press that analyzes music by Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon in relation to gender, politics, and society. She is also working on a book-length study that explores American popular music in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation. In addition, she serves as an Associate Editor of *Perspectives of New Music* and is a member of the editorial boards of *American Music*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*.

Ray Allen, currently the Acting Director of I.S.A.M., will remain an I.S.A.M. associate while taking over the directorship of the American Studies Program at Brooklyn College. The American Studies Program, recently moved from English to the Conservatory of Music where it shares office space with I.S.A.M., seeks to encourage creative collaborations between American music and American Studies scholars.

Another American music specialist, **Michael Salim Washington**, will be joining the Brooklyn College faculty in the spring of 2000. Currently teaching at Trinity College, Professor Washington is a highly regarded jazz saxophonist, band leader, and scholar. He is completing his dissertation, a musicological and cultural analysis of the works of John Coltrane, at Harvard University.

A special thanks to Visiting Professor **Edward A. Berlin**, who joined the I.S.A.M. team for the 1998-1999 academic year. Author of the definitive ragtime studies *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (University of California Press, 1980) and *King of Ragtime: Scott Joplin and His Era* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Professor Berlin treated Brooklyn College music majors to provocative seminars in American music and ragtime and served as co-editor of the Fall 1998 and Spring 1999 issues of the *I.S.A.M. Newsletter*.

And finally, best wishes to our Managing Editor, **Michael W. Sumbera**, who is moving on to devote more time to his dissertation, a source study of Bernstein's *Candide*.

Post-Canonical Ellington

Amidst the crescendo of praise marking the Ellington centennial celebration, something important is being forgotten: Duke Ellington was not just a "Great American Composer."

It's astonishing to have to remind anyone of this. During his lifetime, after all, Ellington was known throughout the world as an urbane, gracious entertainer who led a superb big band, played piano, and engaged in playful banter from the stage–instructing audiences on the proper technique for snapping fingers and reminding them that he *did* love them madly. This was the Ellington familiar to my parents, who grew up during the 1930s and 40s dancing to "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" and "Do Nothin' Till You Hear from Me." This was the Ellington I saw in 1972 at a concert in New Haven, Connecticut: a distinguished though weary-looking bandleader playing what sounded to my untutored ears like popular music from an earlier era–not "classic" works of art.

But after Ellington's death in 1974 something changed. Reissues of Ellington's recordings–like the series of Smithsonian compilations put out by critic Martin Williams, focusing on the years 1938-41–presented the music as a series of stunning "masterpieces." When the jazz repertory movement picked up steam in the 1980s and 90s, Ellington emerged as its patron saint: the figure more than any other who had left an enduring body of music that deserved to be recreated note-for-note in live performance. The increased support of jazz by foundations and powerful cultural organizations further reinforced Ellington's image as Great Composer. Here was a jazz musician who looked reassuringly familiar to those who had never heard of Archie Shepp or the Five Spot–an internationally acclaimed composer who had performed suites, concertos, and tone poems in concert halls from Toronto to Tokyo. Skeptics who required convincing that jazz was a noble and serious musical tradition needed only gaze upon Edward Kennedy Ellington to see the light.

Photo courtesy of RCA Victor

Now as we honor the man in his centennial year, his transformation into a classical composer is virtually complete. His recorded "masterpieces" are slowly finding their way into print, with pieces getting transcribed, edited, arranged, and published as scores for performance and study. Scholars researching Ellington can go to the Smithsonian and pore over his original manuscripts in the archives. Concert-goers hear "Come Sunday" and "Harlem" mixed in with their Mozart and Brahms.

In many ways, these are positive developments. Ellington would not be receiving such attention if he didn't deserve it. And it's sweet revenge, for during his long creative career Ellington repeatedly faced prejudice from those who didn't take him or his art seriously–like the notoriously blinkered Pulitzer prize committee that denied him an award in 1965. So why not applaud wildly as Ellington settles down for a long afterlife in the pantheon of Great Composers?

Quite simply, because he doesn't fit comfortably there. He was the first to acknowledge this, in fact. In 1944, soon after his first two appearances at Carnegie Hall, Ellington wrote a magazine article (reprinted in *The Duke Ellington Reader*) on the subject of his relationship to classical composers. His tone is both perplexed and proud. He doesn't understand why comparisons are being drawn between his work and that of the European masters ("I am not writing classical music"), but at the same time emphatically affirms the importance of home-grown idioms: "Jazz, swing, jive and every other musical phenomenon of American musical life are as much an art medium as are the most profound works of the famous classical composers."

What he finds especially objectionable is the well-meaning (but patronizing) practice of critics seeking to draw connections between his music and that of great composers from the past: "To attempt to elevate the status of the jazz musician by forcing the level of his best work into comparisons with classical music is to deny him his rightful share of originality."

This was not simply a defensive posture resulting from insecurity on Ellington's part. It was a declaration of independence. Ellington knew exactly who he was, where he came from, and what he was trying to accomplish. Earlier in his career he had deliberately chosen not to attend a music conservatory. "They're not teaching what I want to learn," he explained to one of his mentors, the conductor and composer Will Marion Cook. The people Ellington looked to for inspiration were not Bach and Beethoven, but his own band members, friends and family, outstanding black artists like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Bert Williams, and Mahalia Jackson, and the ordinary citizens he celebrated in such works as *Black, Brown and Beige* and "My People."

Yet the current misperception of Ellington goes beyond this historical confusion over his identity. It stems from a basic inability (or reluctance) of people to view him whole. Understanding the multiple identities that defined Ellington as a musician requires seeing them as different-colored threads tightly interwoven: together they combine to form the larger pattern.

So how to reclaim the Ellingtons that have been lost through his posthumous canonization as Great Composer? One way is to

go back and read what the man had to say about himself. The portrait that emerges from his memoirs *Music Is My Mistress*, for example, is complex and multi-dimensional. Repeatedly he addresses the various musical roles he is called upon to play–composing, arranging, conducting–writing at one point that all are "interdependent on each other," elsewhere implying they are virtually interchangeable: "None is as important as–or more important than–the one being enjoyed at the moment."

Then there are recordings. A short discographical expedition provides ample proof that the Great Composer niche is far too restrictive for Ellington. Consider a half-dozen other leading roles he played with distinction:

The Bandleader: Ellington's remarkable ability to inspire and motivate his musicians can be heard most readily in live recordings. Away from the pressures of the studio, both Ellington and his fellow band members loosened up and enjoyed themselves. Soloists played with more fire. The brass and reed sections remained tight but their phrases breathed more. The rhythm section swung harder–especially the extroverted drummer Sonny Greer (with Ellington from 1924 to 1951), who often held back in the studio. Compare the original 1941 studio recording of "Jumpin' Punkins" (**The Blanton-Webster Band**, RCA/Bluebird), for example, to the band's 1943 performance of the same tune in Carnegie Hall (**The Carnegie Hall Concerts (January 1943)**, Prestige); not only has the tempo picked up in the later recording, but Greer now plays his breaks with much more animation and flair. Partly this difference results from the dynamic performer-audience relationship in a live setting. But also, by 1943 the Ellington band had lived with "Jumpin' Punkins" for a while and knew the arrangement intimately. Ellington's studio recordings, by contrast, often preserved versions of pieces before they had properly gelled through repeated performance.

To hear the Ellington band in its full glory before a live audience, listen to **Duke Ellington and his Famous Orchestra, Fargo, North Dakota, November 7, 1940** (Vintage Jazz Classics), where the familiar "masterpieces" recorded for Victor that year–"Ko-Ko," "Cotton Tail," "Warm Valley," and the rest–come alive and rock the house. Also recommended are **Ellington at Newport** (Columbia) from 1958, **Duke Ellington & His Orchestra–Live at Newport 1958** (Columbia/Legacy), the **All Star Road Band** sessions (Sony), and **The Great Paris Concert** (Atlantic) from 1963.

The Band Pianist: In the 1930s, Ellington (like Count Basie) retooled his solo Harlem stride style to make it more effective in a large-ensemble context. He dropped the left hand's steady oom-pah accompaniment and began filling spaces with expertly timed chords, inserting riff figures high in the treble, and generally using the keyboard to give cues, set tempos, and energize rhythms.

Partly due to improvements in the recording process, Ellington's strengths as a band pianist emerge most forcefully in the later years. On **The Far East Suite–Special Mix** (RCA/Bluebird), recorded in 1968, he's in especially fine form. Listen to his masterful performance on "Depk," in which he echoes and anticipates phrases in the horns, tugs against their rhythms, and plays single-notes with such intensity they sound like full chords. On "Ad Lib on Nippon," an extended minor blues bristling with dissonance, he drives the band forward with pounding low-register chords. **Ellington Indigos** (Columbia) also features excellent ensemble work by Ellington in a program of well-known pop songs and several of his own standards (including a gorgeous, meditative piano introduction on "Solitude").

The Small-Group Pianist: Ellington's skills as an ensemble pianist emerge with even greater clarity in more intimate settings. The small-group sessions Ellington made with alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges in the late 1950s (released by Verve as **Back to Back** and **Side by Side**) attest to his highly effective comping style. Instead of the jabbing, spare, rhythmically unpredictable comping of postwar bop players, Ellington favored an older, more orchestral approach, sustaining chords like the reed section or punching out brass-like hits between a soloist's phrases.

There are many opportunities to hear Ellington holding forth in trio settings, as well. Beyond the justly celebrated **Piano Reflections** (Capitol Jazz), he teams up with bass and drums on **Piano in the Foreground** (Columbia), **Duke Ellington–The Pianist** (Fantasy), and **Money Jungle** (Blue Note/Capitol). On this last disc–featuring Charles Mingus on bass and Max Roach on drums–Ellington plays with wild abandon. The pressure of the date and volatile combination of personalities brought out some of the most aggressive pianism of his career.

Paring down even further, there are Ellington's duets, most often with bassists. The half-dozen sides he made with Jimmy Blanton in 1940-41, available on **Duke Ellington: Solos, Duets and Trios** (RCA/Bluebird), have a relaxed, jam-session feel to them, even when arrangements were worked out in advance (e.g., "Pitter Panther Patter"). The piano duets on **Great Times! Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn** (Riverside) are breezy and informal; they present Ellington not in his guise as "genius composer" but as a quick-thinking jazz player improvising in the moment.

The Solo Pianist: There are not many of these recordings overall, but hearing Ellington alone is a good reminder of his early musical roots growing up in Washington, D.C., then absorbing the lessons of Harlem stride in New York during the 1920s. "Black Beauty" and "Swampy River," his first solo sides recorded in 1928 (**Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: 1928**, Classics), show the impact of Fats Waller and Willie "The Lion" Smith, while "Lots O' Fingers" from 1932 (**Reflections in Ellington**, Everybodys) reveals a degree of virtuosity not usually associated with Ellington. A very different solo style–introspective and impressionistic–emerges in the later decades, as heard in the haunting "Meditation" from the **Second Sacred Concert** (Fantasy).

The Arranger: Ellington didn't devote his writing energies solely to coming up with pathbreaking compositions. Together with Strayhorn, he often turned his attention to revamping music written by others, whether pop songs, dance numbers, or classical

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Twentieth-Century Originals

For anyone exploring the nooks and crannies of American music, Kyle Gann offers a guided tour in his recent survey, ***American Music in the Twentieth Century*** (Schirmer Books, 1998; $35). As a music critic for *The Village Voice* for over a decade and composition teacher at Bard College, the author combines a broad knowledge of his subject with considerable journalistic flair in a readable and enjoyable book. Gann has both the compositional insights of an able practitioner in his own right and the contagious enthusiasm of a true advocate for a distinctively American musical "tradition of originality," a history "not of procedures and rules," he says, "but of resources, attitudes, and pragmatic inventiveness."

The author's forthrightly nationalistic objective is to "claim America's creative heritage" and "find Americanness" by "taking the entirety of what American composers have done and subtracting from it the identifiable European, Asian, African, and Latin elements." His "Prelude: What is American Music?" sets the stage by boldly alleging that "America is not an empty vessel into which the musics of other societies may be poured, but a culture capable of influencing other cultures as they have influenced us." "Every American composition," asserts Gann, "is a dialogue between inheritance and freedom."

The book presents a chronological and stylistic panorama of the major composers in different periods with listening examples from representative compositions. Its taxonomy includes: Forefathers (Ives, Ruggles), Ultramodernism (Cowell, Varèse, Crawford), Populism (Copland, Schuman, Bernstein, Thomson), Experimentalism (Partch, Johnston, Nancarrow), Atonality and the European Influence (Sessions, Wolpe, Carter, Babbitt), New York School Revolution (Cage, Feldman, Brown), Conceptualism (Ashley, Oliveros, Lucier), Minimalism (Young, Riley, Reich, Glass, Monk), New Romanticism (Crumb, Adams, Druckman, Van de Vate), Electronic Music (Luening, Ussachevsky, Subotnick, Trimpin), Rock and Jazz Interface (Anderson, Branca, Braxton, Galas, Zorn), Postminimalism (Duckworth, Giteck, Lentz, Lauten), and Totalism (Rouse, Gordon, Vierk, Beglarian, J.L. Adams).

Gann's insights regarding more established, well-documented composers are generally interesting, but somewhat old hat. Fortunately, this review of major players is balanced by a broad overview of others less conspicuous coming off the bench. The book's greatest value is its wonderful breadth and comprehensiveness: Gann offers a handy reference guide to the myriad of lesser-known American composers, particularly of more recent times. This is a virtual "who's who" of musical modernism and post-modernism in America.

The author focuses primarily on the Cagean, experimental "downtown" tradition, as is clear from the array of composers cited above and the relative weight he devotes to them. Some readers might question, for instance, why Gershwin–arguably the most famous American composer ever–is dismissed in less than two pages of text, while the talented but less significant Anthony Braxton commands six, a bold heading, full-length picture, and a musical example. Likewise, Barber garners only a half-page against Partch's seven. Gann's teacher, microtonalist Ben Johnston, has five plus an excerpt, compared to a goose egg for serialist Charles Wourinen. Cage is clearly the pivotal figure, lording over thirteen pages. The book's refreshing concentration on experimentalism and the under-reported contemporary scene is by no means exclusive, though, and requires no apology–only a caveat for those possibly expecting a more traditional "uptown" approach.

Anthony Braxton performing at The Kitchen, 1976
Photo courtesy of New York Public Library

Gann's personal experience as a journalist and composer is what makes this book tick. It has a compelling aura of authenticity and conviction; he knows the scene inside out. But his hands-on methodology presents a drawback: there are insufficient citations of other sources, and these are restricted mostly to direct quotations. Either Gann actually commands encyclopedic personal knowledge of factual tidbits about his composers (he did conduct some personal interviews), or he has cut corners in scholarly documentation. Whatever the reason, the relative dearth of comprehensive footnotes and bibliographic references detracts from the intellectual heft of his study. Where citations *do* appear, they often reflect Gann's acquaintance with such arcana as Rhys Chatham's *Composer's Notebook* (on the internet), Laurie Anderson's *Stories from the Nerve Bible*, and an interview with Diamanda Galas in *Re\Search Publications #13: Angry Women.*

Most theorists may find the analytic payload in Gann's examples light fare, probably intentionally so. His analysis of Babbitt's complex partitions and arrays, for instance, merely scratches the surface, thus avoiding confusion. But the musical excerpts, often from difficult-to-obtain scores, are useful in themselves. Where else can one readily find bits of Rosenboom's *Systems of Judgment*, Young's *Well-Tuned Piano*, Tenney's *Chromatic Canon*, Lentz's *Crack in the Bell*, and Gordon's *Yo Shakespeare*?

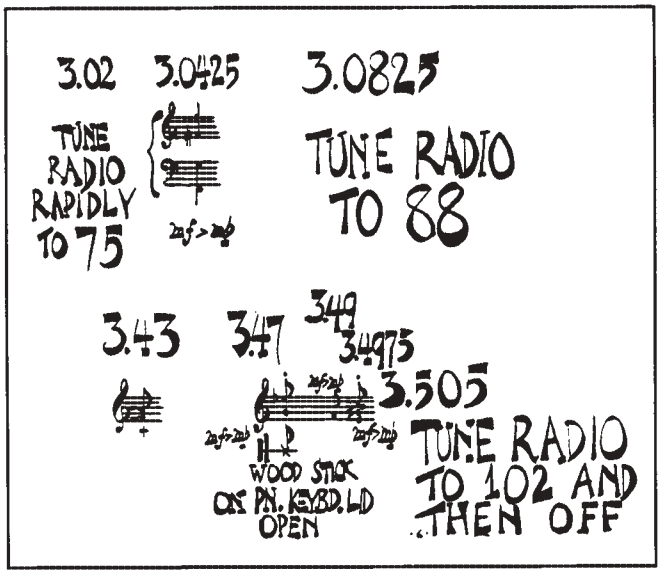
American Music in the Twentieth Century does not present itself as a hardcore analytical primer. It is rather a lively, first-hand account by an articulate, enthusiastic, and well-versed observer of the contemporary scene, tracing its roots in our vibrant American tradition. Few authors could conduct this tour as deftly as Kyle Gann.

–Wayne Alpern
Brooklyn College

Cage, Notation, and Theatre

William Fetterman's ***John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances*** (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996; cloth $74, paper $37) attempts to locate Cage's achievements in expanding conceptions of musical performances by showing how theatrical aspects influence our understanding of works, problematizing distinctions between music and theater. He defends Cage's sometimes confusing attempts at this blurring of generic boundaries by claiming a priority for his compositional processes and their notational result against the popular impression of Cage derived purely from the reception of performances. While Fetterman focuses on what he call Cage's "theatre pieces," his concern that critics pay close attention to his composing and notation to be able to correctly judge the value of any performance applies to his music as well. As a kind of spin-off of Pritchett's *The Music of John Cage*, Fetterman's book focuses on works that result in an overt attention to visual elements: "theatre."

In a number of Cage's works Fetterman examines, it may be difficult to determine where a "musical" piece leaves off and "theatre" begins. Any time the process of making music draws attention to the performer's body in the course of unconventional sound-production, Cage has created a theatre piece. Fetterman doesn't spend time on the question of what is meant by "theatre piece," deriving his choices loosely from Cage's own open-ended notion of theatre: "theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear."



A page from Cage's Water Music *(1952)*
Reproduced by permission of Henmar Press Inc./C.F. Peters Corporation

Fetterman notes that "Much of the negative criticism or misinterpretation by critics of Cage's work has been because reviewers rely on their experience of a specific performance, rather than first studying the score and then comparing the two." But the primary problem is that a number of Cage's scores are so indeterminate that a specific score, realized in different ways, would be unrecognizable as the same piece. What is to be valued more: Cage's compositional methods and notation, or their realization as performance? Fetterman is evasive about this, while always maintaining that "In Cage's work the process involved in performance can only be critically viewed in terms of the relative faithfulness to or ignorance of the score." What does faithfulness to an indeterminate score entail? How is the performer supposed to know when he is doing it right? There is only the insistence that the performer is to conduct himself as seriously and selflessly in exact execution of the score as possible, with no extraneous showiness. Fetterman sees David Tudor as the best model of Cage's aesthetic, a practically transparent medium for the realization of the score, not acting, but singlemindedly carrying out his task.

Perhaps what makes notation so important an issue comes from the false impression that for Cage "anything goes." How do listeners distinguish pure free improvisation from an exact manifestation of a fixed score whose contents were derived by chance methods? To prove the actual disciplined nature of Cage's works, knowledge of the score and the performer's faithfulness to it are thus essential.

Fetterman distinguishes Cage's use of chance from the idea of indeterminacy. Chance methods–such as using the *I Ching* or Tarot deck layout (for *4'33"*)–are employed to create a composition whose notations may be determinate or indeterminate, but are to be strictly followed. In the creation of indeterminate notation, "Cage invents a variety of notation systems that provide a bounded, limited range of possible events or actions which are then to be determined by the individual performer or performers." One consequence of indeterminate notation is that the performer is required to come up with their own determinate score, following the indeterminate general patterns given them.

Fetterman indicates that as Cage's pieces got larger and more environmental, as "musicircuses" after 1967, indeterminacy as notational method got looser: a master score was no longer used, and sometimes no score was provided at all. It's then that one wonders how Fetterman's admonition to critics to evaluate performances by reference to the score can mean anything.

He concludes on a critical note, drawing attention to Cage's claim of finding a selflessness in chance composition: "If there was a major failure by Cage to implement his aesthetics into actual performance practice, it was in the fact that he never fully gave up his own subjective taste, in either composition or performance." But there are clues that point to the nature of this failure: reviewers noting Cage's "masterful authority," Cage scolding performers about taking expressive liberties, and Cage's centering presence as "guru/patriarch/elder statesman of the avant-garde." Fetterman even admits that "On the most trivial level, much of the popular success of the various musicircuses has been because Cage was either a simultaneous performer or known to be in attendance." The lack of direction that radically indeterminate notation brings to the performance situation necessitates Cage's personal intervention, or his performative presence as model, making up for what the score itself cannot provide.

Fetterman's study is valuable in its suggestability for people wishing to critically analyze Cage's *oeuvre*. This is possible be-

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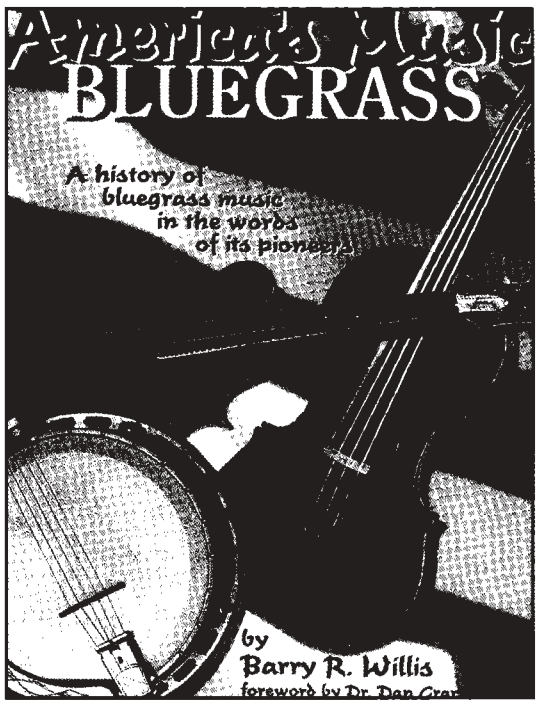
Country and Gospel Notes by Charles Wolfe

The looming millennium seems to have inspired many chroniclers of American music to undertake large retrospective assessments of their fields. In the arena of country and gospel, these include a number of new entries in Oxford's mammoth *American National Biography*, the twenty-four volume reference work that promises to become a staple on most library shelves. While it by no means deals only with music-related figures, there are a significant number of entries on people ranging from gospel publisher Aldine Kieffer and singer Roy Acuff to A&R man Ralph Peer and guitarist Merle Travis.

No fewer than three specific country music encyclopedias have also emerged in recent years. One is ***Definitive Country*** (Perigree, 1995; cloth $40, paper $20), edited and largely written by British rockabilly fan Barry McCloud. A second is ***The Comprehensive Country Music Encyclopedia*** (Times Books/Random House, 1995; $25) produced by the editors and writers of the leading slick magazine for the genre, *Country Music*. The third and most recent is ***The Encyclopedia of Country Music*** (Oxford University Press, 1998; $55), edited by Paul Kingsbury and the staff of the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, with contributions from 137 experts in the field.



Since this writer was involved in varying ways with each of these encyclopedias, it would be inappropriate to evaluate them in a formal sense. However, some general descriptions might be in order. The McCloud compilation is the largest of the three, boasting 1200 entries, and is strong on songwriters and older performers. *The Comprehensive Country Music Encyclopedia* is the most readable, since most of its authors are experienced journalists with well-honed writing skills; it contains, though, only 600 entries. The Oxford encyclopedia boasts 1300 entries on specific subjects and people, as well as mini-essays on country music and touring, country music and the growth of Nashville, and early recording techniques. Among the illustrations is an entire section devoted to a history of country record covers–though it is marred by poor color reproduction. Commentators who have evaluated the three have noted that the McCloud publication contains too many errors of fact and interpretation, while *The Comprehensive Country Music Encyclopedia* is too slick and superficial. Others have noted that the Oxford book contains disturbingly short entries on earlier historical figures like Fiddlin' Arthur Smith and Dock Boggs, and plays to the cheap seat galleries by having long, glowing accounts of currently trendy acts like Brooks and Dunn, Alan Jackson, and Alison Krauss. Considering that a "serious" encyclopedia devoted to any form of popular culture represents an uneasy alliance between historians on one hand and fans on the other, some of these difficulties are inevitable. I would gauge at this point that the Oxford entry is the more dependable of the three, and the only one deserving of a substantial shelf life.

Though not an encyclopedia per se, Barry R. Willis's ***America's Music, Bluegrass*** (Pine Valley Music, 1997; cloth $135, paper $59.95) is a huge compendium of all things having to do with bluegrass. After languishing for years as a sub-genre of country music, bluegrass has come into its own in the 1990s. Once described by Alan Lomax as "folk music in overdrive," bluegrass now has its own trade organization, museum, best-seller lists, and crossover hits. Mainstream country stars like Vince Gill and Dolly Parton often return to their bluegrass roots, and a recent tribute album to Ralph Stanley included no less a figure than Bob Dylan. And though there has been considerable bluegrass history and appreciation written in various periodicals and in liner notes, there are surprisingly few book-length works. The standard survey is Neil Rosenberg's *Bluegrass: A History* (University of Illinois Press, 1985), while an earlier, more informal look is Bob Artis's *Bluegrass* (Hawthorne Books, 1975).

America's Music, Bluegrass is not like either of these. It is a huge, oversized volume that contains hundreds of thumbnail biographies and historical sketches; it is certainly the largest compendium of bluegrass data in print. Barry Willis, a former airline pilot, organizes his book not by traditional chronology, but by instruments–fiddle, mandolin, dobro, guitar, etc.–and those who play them, as well as tangential subjects like commercial recording companies, festivals (a sorely needed treatment), instrument companies and makers, and bluegrass on the international scene. Each of the chapters is in turn subdivided into shorter, titled segments, some only a few paragraphs long. This scattergun effect yields considerable information–much of which is borrowed from and credited to the journalists who originally published their work in *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Banjo Newsletter*, *Bluegrass Now*, and other fan magazines. The trouble is that the book is too large and diffuse; it is hard for someone first coming to bluegrass to really appreciate the complex interconnections and relationships that so characterize the music. A textbook it is not, but as a supplement for someone who already knows something about the music, it is instructive and rewarding.

Whatever one makes of them, these encyclopedias and compendiums do testify to the increasing seriousness with which country music is now being taken. In the thirty-one years since Bill C. Malone published his pioneering study, *Country Music USA*, an impressive amount of research has been done, and these volumes reflect its extent and depth.

The Eclectic World of Tom McDermott

How appropriate it is that Tom McDermott makes his home in New Orleans, a city defined by its polyglot and multi-cultural tradition. This locale perfectly matches McDermott's protean approach to music. Barrelhouse boogie one moment, a delicate neo-Chopin another, then perhaps Cajun, Latin, klezmer, Gottschalk, and then blues, rock, and traditional New Orleans jazz. Add a dose of microtones, polymetrics, improvisation, electronics, and we enter the musical world of Tom McDermott.

Born in St. Louis in 1957, McDermott adopted New Orleans as his home in 1984. Before the move he earned an art degree from St. Louis University and a Master of Music from Washington University. Making his way as a non-academic, working musician, he toured extensively as a pianist with the Dukes of Dixieland, worked with New Orleans legend Danny Barker, composed and performed on screen for the movie *He Said, She Said* (1991), arranged for the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, and wrote music criticism for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* and the *Times-Picayune*.

Tom McDermott

McDermott's suite ***All the Keys*** (printed score published by Dermitunes Music, 1996) presents twenty-four piano miniatures passing through the familiar tonal landscape in unfamiliar ways. The content along the route reflects many traditions, including nineteenth and early twentieth-century Romanticism, blues and boogie-woogie, Latin American dances, pseudo-klezmer, and a touch of Poulenc. A central and recurring presence is the New Orleans of Professor Longhair, Dr. John, and James Booker.

In "Madame Zag," one hears echoes of Chopin or Rachmaninoff, though nudged by an occasional blues inflection. Similarly, "Barcarolle" introduces elegant filigrees reminiscent of a nineteenth-century trifle, but stirred to restlessness by frequent key changes and dominant chords with flatted fifths. The Romantics also clearly inspire "The Murmur" and "Waltz Looking East."

In contrast to the Romantic mood, McDermott changes gears with such pieces as "Grunge Piano," a percussive, brutally dissonant, metrically-shifting, sixteen-measure, two-handed chord sequence that serves as a foundation for improvisation. McDermott instructs the performer to play "angrily" and "improvise on chord changes using feedback, screechy high notes and macho posturing." The various boogie-woogie-based compositions also assume such posturing, each with its idiosyncrasies. "The Omnivore," another of the few pieces that specifically call for improvisation, alternates a walking bass with triplets. In "Lithuanian Stomp" ("With that special 'New Orleans Meets the Baltic States' feel"), the walking bass stutters to unexpected starts, stops, and speed changes. "Rebennackin'" follows the barrelhouse style of Mac Rebennack (aka "Dr. John"), the jazz-blues-rock musician who tied together many of the threads of New Orleans piano. "The Thirst" has a more mysterious manner, with sustained right-hand ninths set against a twelve-bar walking bass that outlines not standard chords or scales, but modes comprised of minor and augmented seconds.

The syncopated rhythms of Latin America have always been a presence in New Orleans. "Frumba" filters the rhythms through the style of the legendary Professor Longhair, while "Lost Rio" invokes the composer Ernesto Nazareth. "Choro" suggests Brazil with its samba-like rhythms, and "Dance of the Networkers" combines Afro-Caribbean rhythms with jazz improvisation. Among individual selections that do not easily fit any of the above groupings are "Klezmer Nuthouse," characterized by the augmented second interval, "Frenchified," an homage to Poulenc, and "The Irish Channel: 1850," a tribute to the composer's forebears, who reached American shores by way of New Orleans. Each of the twenty-four pieces in this suite is by itself engaging; together, they point to an active musical imagination seeking to fuse the diverse strands of contemporary music.

McDermott's own recorded performance of this suite (***All the Keys & Then Some***, STR 9601) demonstrates he is no stickler for the printed note. Though few pieces specify improvisation, he rarely follows the score exactly as written, often embellishing (especially on repeats) and modifying rhythms. He occasionally uses the facility of the Yamaha disklavier to superimpose additional layers that would be impossible in a two-hand performance, doing so with great effect in "Grunge Piano" and "Klezmer Nuthouse." He clearly reveals an attitude that music is not only to be played, but to be played *with*.

Filling the balance of the CD are fourteen selections from another keyboard suite, *Some Friends of Mine*, each dedicated to a different associate. Stylistically, these miniatures continue the trains of thought from *All the Keys*. Several are pure piano pieces, such as "Martin's Mambo," the Chopinesque "Antonioverde," or the gospel "Auteur, Auteur." The rollicking blues "Heavy Henry" has a small amount of overdubbing at the end. A few others, such as "Andrew's Antics," "The Elsie Dance," and "Woogied," are blatantly electronic and require synthesizer effects. McDermott demonstrates, once again, a musical thinking that seeks ideas from a broad array of sources.

McDermott's musical world is not occupied just by keyboards. He reveals yet another side of his personality with the New Orleans Nightcrawlers, an eleven-piece brass band that he co-founded. Though grounded in the city's traditional music, this is not another Dixieland revival group. With an instrumentation that includes sousaphone, two trumpets, two trombones, three reeds, two percussion, and McDermott on piano, this driving ensemble blends historic New Orleans jazz styles with the most beguiling elements of more recent R&B and funk. Add exacting arrange-

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Elliott Carter at 90+

At the tender age of ninety Elliott Carter is now in the midst of the most productive period of his career. As if to make up for his relatively slow rate of production in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, Carter has written more than thirty-five new works since 1980 for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal combinations. This tremendous burst of creative activity has substantially enlarged the range of his accomplishments, adding both a host of miniatures (solos, duos, and trios under eight minutes in length) and the most ambitious works of his career, including the forty-five minute orchestral triptych *Symphonia–Sum fluxae pretium spei.* To cap off his first ninety years Carter has recently completed his first opera, *What Next?*, to a libretto by Paul Griffiths, which will premiere in Berlin this fall, and arrive in New York the following March.

Clarity is one hallmark of Carter's recent work. The contrasting layers of his music are more sharply defined than ever, and he has begun to notate the complex rhythmic patterns he has always used in ways that make them much easier for performers to execute, mainly by eliminating the most difficult beat divisions like quintuplets and septuplets from his large ensemble pieces. Carter also has moved away from the complex and often multi-layered formal plans he used in the large-scale works of the 1960s like the String Quartet No. 2 and the Double Concerto. The Violin Concerto, for example, is in the traditional three movements: fast, slow, fast; String Quartet No. 4 echoes a typical four-movement plan: Appassionato, Scherzando, Lento, Presto. In other works, Carter has gone in the opposite direction. In *Night Fantasies* and *Partita*, and many of the shorter pieces, there are few clear sectional divisions and form arises from the accumulation of an astonishing diversity of short fragments and passing moments. Here the model is the life of the mind, the velocity and uncanny juxtapositions that characterize human thought.

The orchestra has featured prominently in Carter's recent work. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s the majority of his large ensemble works were concertos. In the few purely orchestral works, like *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* and *Penthode*, the ensemble is divided into smaller groups that interact in the manner of chamber music, with mass effects reserved for climactic moments. Although he has continued to write concertos, Carter has returned to writing for undivided orchestra without soloist for the first time in more than twenty-five years. This is due in part to the nature of the commissions he has accepted, but it also reflects an approach that has emphasized cooperation over conflict in nearly all of his works since the mid-1980s. The large ensemble works of the 1960s were filled with violent clashes and unreconciled oppositions, such as an isolated piano struggling against a recalcitrant and bullying orchestra, or three opposed orchestras each following its own course. In the recent orchestral music, instruments are less likely to assert their individuality than to join together for a shared expressive purpose. *Anniversary*, the third of the *Three Occasions*, is a counterpoint of three extended melodies that move freely throughout the orchestra. Without ties to a particular instrument or section, they gain a kind of autonomy, and the orchestration is richer and more varied.

Cooperation also has been a recurrent theme in Carter's recent chamber music. In the latest string quartets the contrasting personalities of the instruments contribute to movements of a largely unified character. In the Fifth Quartet, for example, the ensemble fuses into a single onrushing stream in the *Allegro scorrevole* movement, and becomes a kind of super glass harmonica in the ethereal *Adagio sereno*, composed entirely of harmonics. In the amazing coda of String Quartet No. 4 the conflict between sound and silence is enacted by the ensemble as a whole. These works are a far cry from the earlier quartets, in which the conflict among instruments or instrumental groups is the central drama.

The lucidity and vividness of Carter's recent compositions, both large and small, have made them some of the most approachable and popular of his career. This is due in no small part to the quality of performances his music has received. We can be grateful that through the dedication of a small group of gifted performers and Carter enthusiasts, the pace of new recordings has kept up with his output. *Partita*, the first panel of the *Symphonia* triptych, is available on Teldec 4509-99596-2 featuring the Chicago Symphony under Barenboim, and the complete cycle has been recorded by Oliver Knussen with the BBC Symphony to be released this summer by Deutsche Grammophon. The same disc will feature clarinetist Michael Collins playing Carter's new Clarinet Concerto, which has also been recorded by David Robertson and the Ensemble InterContemporain. The Violin Concerto and *Three Occasions for Orchestra* are available in incandescent performances by Ole Böhn and the London Sinfonietta, under Knussen (Virgin Classics VC 7 91503-2). Another excellent disc features the Ensemble InterContemporain, under Boulez, playing the Oboe Concerto (with Heinz Holliger as soloist), *Penthode*, *A Mirror on Which to Dwell*, and *Esprit Rude/Esprit Doux* (Erato 2292-45364-2).

The chamber works are also amply represented. Among the highlights are recordings of the Quintet for Piano and Winds by a group led by Heinz Holliger (Philips 446 095-2), and the String Quartet No. 5 played by the Arditti Quartet (Auvidis Montaigne MO 782091), which also features a sampling of the smaller pieces of the 1980s and 90s and the classic Duo for Violin and Piano of 1974. Also of note are Lucy Shelton and John Constable's recording of the song cycle *Of Challenge and Of Love* (Koch 3-7425-2-H1), to poems by John Hollander, and the Group for Contemporary Music's recording of eight Carter compositions (Bridge BCD 9044).

Carter's ongoing creative whirlwind has been one of the great joys of American music at the end of the twentieth century. As we get set to enter the twenty-first, we wish Elliott Carter many happy returns, and many new journeys.

–John F. Link
William Paterson University

Uncommon Copland

Howard Pollack's ***Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*** (Henry Holt, 1999; $37.50) is a sympathetic and remarkably thorough contribution to American music scholarship. The book connects Copland with the fabric of American culture, stressing the interrelationships between Copland's own varied works and the related arts of dance, theater, film, and literature, and between Copland and the people around him. The first half of this 550-page text favors topical and biographical chapters. Here are detailed accounts of Copland's knowledge of, opinions about, and interactions with American and European composers, both young and old. Choreographers, authors, thinkers, and playwrights figure prominently throughout the book, and Pollack gives clear introductions for influential figures like Gide, Graham, Rolland, Brooks, Stieglitz, Rosenfeld, and Clurman that clarify their influence upon Copland's thought.

Pollack's commitment to context enlivens his treatment of Copland's music, which dominates the book's second half. For every movie score, ballet, and texted work, Pollack provides plots or scenarios, points out salient connections to the musical structure, and often addresses the topic's personal interest to Copland. He has assembled an impressive array of information about compositional genesis, reception, performance and recording history, and traced specific musical links to past and future works. The copious analytical passages, written with a minimum of technical vocabulary, are engaging enough to prompt re-reading with scores in hand. This musician-reader, however, regrets the lack of musical examples and questions whether the "average reader" interested enough to digest nearly 700 pages (including notes and appendix) would be intimidated by the occasional line of musical notation. One has the distinct impression that the author has more insights about the music than the publisher's format has allowed him to divulge.

One of several topics introduced early but revisited often is Copland's homosexuality, first broached in the context of his early friendships. Pollack treats this previously neglected issue in a direct, non-sensationalist manner. Copland's Jewishness is likewise introduced early, then weaves its way throughout the discussion of the music. The subject of Copland's Americanness permeates the book, as does Pollock's convincing assertion that jazz remained a viable influence throughout Copland's career. The composer's liberal political leanings surface frequently, though their context is not as clearly explicated. The closing chapter, "Identity Issues," is somewhat disappointing; rather than drawing up these long-spun threads, it reads as a compilation of pointed remarks by Copland's contemporaries about various aspects of his identity.

Pollack's bibliographic control is impressive, drawing from published sources in a variety of disciplines, recent research and scholarship in progress, unpublished material, and the author's extensive interviews with Copland's relatives, friends, and associates. If there is a weakness, it is that Pollack's own voice is not heard strongly enough. While he argues that received ideas about Copland are simplistic, or that traditional stylistic divisions are misleading, he offers no alternative framework. Yet his avoid-

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Persona non grata: Frank Zappa's Orchestral Subculture

The only thing common to Frank Zappa's many styles in rock, pop, jazz, and "serious" concert music is a conflicted, aesthetically fractured, and unidiomatic quality–a quality matching social critic Dick Hebdige's description of subculture as a way of "contradicting the myth of consensus and inevitability."[1] Subculture, for Hebdige, defines "a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style." One gets the impression that Zappa conceived his styles less as avenues of personal musical expression than as things negatively defined–as reactions to something; as forms of satire, protest, or alienation; as emblems of bitterness and non-participation in the culture and entertainment industries. Subcultural "resistance" is certainly less clumsily applied to Zappa than the -isms paraded by Ben Watson, who has been particularly promiscuous in calling Zappa a dadaist, surrealist, Marxist, situationist, and knight-in-shining-armor enemy to "the 'mildness' that has been noted as a feature of postmodern polystylism."[2] But Watson goes on to show that these labels and approaches, except for the Marxist interpretation (which teaches us a good deal about Zappa and his music), are as much a waste of time as their meanings are now ambiguous.

Frank Zappa, provocateur
Photo by Guido Harari

The idea of a subculture-style in concert music is nothing new, at least if we believe Adorno's account of early twentieth-century modernism. But Zappa's orchestral works are remarkable for several reasons. First, his works in an atonal, academic style stand out for their belated modernism: he chose to re-fight Victorian sexual and musical battles in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. These works are not even informed by the kind of Darmstadtian, hegemonic voice one might expect of progressive music written in the 1950s or early 60s; they are instead imbued with the Ivesian, early-century voice of the modernist as embattled minority. Second, Zappa was a hopelessly conflicted practitioner of absolute-music aesthetics in a world that chose to hear him as a rock star–he was a "serious" composer who made it to the top ten and won a Grammy (for the album *Jazz from Hell*, 1986) at the very point in his career when he found such industry honors most hateful and embarrassing. Third, it is rare for a composer to choose orchestral music as a forum to contradict "the myth of consensus and inevitability," when the test of idiomatic orchestration is usually the very place a composer drops modernist alienation and takes up traditional, centuries-old ideas of orchestral color.

Zappa's subcultural voice is most provocative and puzzling in the six large-ensemble works that he took on tour at least once with his own bands, and also took the trouble to publish separately and in his own orchestration: *Strictly Genteel*, *Dupree's Paradise*, *Sinister Footwear*, *Envelopes*, *The Dog Breath Variations*, and *Penis Dimension*.[3] One might consider these "crossover" pieces the "real" output of this composer, given his own account of his origins: "I didn't write a rock-n-roll song 'til I was in my twenties, and the only reason I put a rock-n-roll band together is because I couldn't get anybody to play any of the chamber music or orchestral music that I had written when I was a teenager."[4] Do we label Zappa as "serious" or pop musician, as electric or acoustic in sound, as critic of symphonic, absolute-music pretension or of the pop-song industry, as descendant of Johnny "Guitar" Watson or of Stravinsky? These various ascriptions are impractical and uninstructive. Zappa used a divisive and irresolvable collision between "symphonic-modern" and "pop-song-commercial" as a point of repartee for a song like "Teenage Prostitute," just as he did for the twenty-five-minute orchestral ballet score *Sinister Footwear*. Both pieces criticize bourgeois ethics and common-practice ideas of musical texture in much the same way. As a song with painstakingly-rehearsed ensemble doublings and ironic lyrics sung in operatic style, "Teenage Prostitute" owes just as much to Rossini, Schoenberg, and Carl Stalling as *Sinister Footwear* owes to rhythm & blues. Someday, listeners will hear as profound an ambivalence in Zappa's relationships with popular song and the concert orchestra as they now hear in Ellington's connections with these same institutions.

Never recorded commercially in its orchestral form, *Sinister Footwear* demonstrates just how resistant to contextualization a Zappa opus can be. This score, premiered in Berkeley in 1984, develops a long transitional passage from the 1977 song "Wild Love" and also includes a painstakingly transcribed and orchestrated version of a guitar improvisation ("Persona non grata") that Zappa played before a New York concert in 1978. It is irrelevant in *Sinister Footwear* to speak of a central or "original" text, for the piece does not relate to its constituent, earlier material the way a pop song relates to its cover or a Ravel orchestration corresponds to the composer's piano original. The replication does not supplant the original, nor does it serve to remind the listener of that original. Nor is the ballet an adaptation of basic material to new circumstances. Finally, there is the question–a common one when it comes to Zappa's orchestral scores–of how idiomatic the music is to the forces at hand. When he orchestrated "Persona non grata," Zappa fetishized the guitar-based events in his material (bends, slides, string-crossings) but the listener does not make these connections because Zappa did not try to recreate a guitar sound. The success of a long score like *Sinister Footwear* will partly depend on the degree to which the listener is willing to accept the texture of bass plus improvisatory leading line as a feasible orchestral texture.

Was Zappa an inexperienced orchestrator, or perhaps simply a bad one? The idea that most of these double-duty pieces represent critiques of standard orchestral sounds and practices finds support in the orchestral skill displayed in a score like *Dupree's Paradise*. Zappa prepared the orchestral version of this work for Boulez in 1984, incorporating all the new and written-out material one would need when revamping an improvisation-heavy chart for a "classical" orchestra that would have little rehearsal time on its hands.[5] Whether because of the auspicious circumstances of its orchestral premiere or the simple need to do so much writing and rewriting, *Dupree's Paradise* contains coloristic touches and nods toward textbook ideas of orchestration not heard in the five previously mentioned scores. Most prominent and also conventional here is Zappa's tendency to write for pairs of instruments in thirds, to set off large sections of music in contrasting instrumentation (the long, chromatic passage for two pianos, for example), and generally to use instruments according to their traditionally-defined roles (mallet instruments for color, low brass for harmonic support). In this way, *Dupree's Paradise* is the exception to Zappa's rule of unidiomatic orchestration and arranging.

Because they represent a reaction against mainstream practices and cultures, those Zappa works serving as both pop and classical music stake out a subculture more than they represent "crossover" in the accepted sense of reaching out to (usually wider) audiences. Zappa would have mistrusted the "subculture" label, calling it halfway to mainstream appropriation and corruption. But there is no other way to describe how he, and musicians like Ellington, Mingus, and Stalling, defined orchestral interests that will always resist any concert performance tradition. It is Zappa's anomalous orchestral work, especially fairly literal "transcriptions" like *Sinister Footwear* and *Envelopes*, that show the Zappa subculture at its most radical. This will certainly be the last part of Zappa's output to find its way into canons or libraries or hundred-best-ever lists. And for this reason, more than reasons of his training or original allegiances, they present the best musical basis for understanding Zappa as eternal provocateur.

–Arved Ashby
Ohio State University

Notes

[1]Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Methuen, 1979).

[2]Ben Watson, *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); "Frank Zappa as Dadaist," *Contemporary Music Review* 1996.

[3]Scores and parts available through Barfko-Swill. Unless otherwise noted, all recordings are available from Rykodisc. Rock band versions: *Strictly Genteel* on *200 Motels* (10513/14), *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore, Vol.6* (10571/72), and *Make a Jazz Noise Here* (10555/56); *Dupree's Paradise* on *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore, Vol.2* (10563/64), and *Make a Jazz Noise Here*; part 2 of *Sinister Footwear* on *Them or Us* (10543) and *Make a Jazz Noise Here*; part 3 of *Sinister Footwear* on *You Are What You Is* (10536) and *Guitar* (10550/51); *Envelopes* on *Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch* (10539); *The Dog Breath Variations* on *Uncle Meat* (10506/07) and *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore, Vol.2*.

Orchestral versions: *Strictly Genteel* on *Orchestral Favorites* (10529) and *London Symphony Orchestra–Zappa* (10540/01); *Dupree's Paradise* on *Boulez Conducts Zappa–The Perfect Stranger* (10542); *Envelopes* on *London Symphony Orchestra–Zappa*; *The Dog Breath Variations* on *Songs and Dances* (Mark MCD-1116); *Penis Dimension* on *200 Motels*.

[4]Interview, NPR Weekend Edition, May 1995.

[5]See Jonathan Bernard, "The Musical World(s) of Frank Zappa: Some Observations of His 'Crossover' Pieces," *Contemporary Music Review* 1999.

McDermott (continued)

ments, blazing hot ensemble playing, complex rhythms, and imaginative, improvised solos, and the Nightcrawlers emerges as a contemporary brass band fully deserving the acclaim already received for its 1997 recording ***Funknicity*** (Rounder CD 2154).

Louisianthology (STR 9803) ties together the disparate strains of McDermott's interests. It contains solo piano and Nightcrawler selections, as well as facets not explored on the two previous CDs. His arrangement of "Stars and Stripes Forever" (included because of the local love for Sousa) draws upon the synthesizer and snare drum for a humorous, microtonal exploration of the American classic. Louis Moreau Gottschalk's "Manchega" emerges from a variety of synthesized timbres, including xylophone, organ, and piano. Unaltered piano and voice (Leigh Harris) return for a highly effective rendition of Jelly Roll Morton's "Whinin' Boy Blues." "The Rather Unlikely Two-Step," for steel guitar, rubboard, violin, bass, and drums, reflects the city's Cajun flavor. The recording closes with a version for synthesizer, tablas, and congas of the New Orleans classic "When the Saints Go Marching In," a suitable ending for a recording that presents, in the words of McDermott, "a mirthful survey of New Orleans music."

McDermott is a working musician who, by necessity as well as inclination, has become comfortable with a wide variety of styles. For his composing, he draws upon this broad experience to create music that, in reflecting many traditions, is conspicuously American. In this respect, he typifies a growing number of non-academic composers who have traveled the same road.

Popular commercial outlets carry *Funknicity*. One can most easily obtain the folio and the other CDs directly from McDermott: 336 N. Bernadotte, New Orleans, LA 70119; email: tmcd@ix.netcom.com.

–Edward A. Berlin
Brooklyn College

Copland (continued)

ance of polemics is welcome. In light of the reserved tone of the book's most recent, still invaluable predecessor, co-authored by Copland and Vivian Perlis, the temptation might have been to dismantle the laudatory image of this revered public figure. Though Pollack's book treats sensitive issues without flinching–including Copland's sometimes difficult romantic relationships, and his later years of failing health–his respect for the man and his deep appreciation of the music predominate. The result is an intimate portrait that makes the composer seem all the more admirable.

–Jennifer DeLapp
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composers . . . When this has been accomplished, self-conscious nationalism will no longer be necessary."[6] Here as elsewhere, Cowell was the first to take his own advice, though one wonders whether he entirely foresaw the result of doing so. Later in 1933, in *Modern Music*, he argued that composers should "draw on those materials common to the music of all the peoples of the world, to build a new music particularly related to our own century."[7] For the remaining thirty years of his life, Cowell did just that, albeit inconsistently; the most immediate results can be found in a group of 1930s works that are so radical as to appear almost reactionary. *Ostinato Pianissimo*, the *United Quartet*, *Pulse*, and *Return* make extensive use of ostinato patterns; the apparent simplicity of their rhythmic material conceals a surprising degree of sophistication, not least in the relation between surface detail and overall structure. Three of the four pieces are written for percussion and utilize a plethora of unusual instruments, both invented and imported. Pitched material, where it occurs, tends to be consonant but nondiatonic, and includes artificial modes constructed along Asian and African lines. Drone accompaniments are the norm. Cowell's remarks concerning the *United Quartet* apply to all four pieces: "[their] simplicity is drawn from the whole world, instead of from the European tradition or any other single tradition."[8]

Cowell was not the only American composer of the 1930s to adopt such a stance. Indeed, Harry Partch had, by this time, "tentatively rejected both the intonational system of modern Europe and its concert system."[9] Partch's major creative accomplishments of the decade–including the *Seventeen Lyrics by Li Po* and the journal *Bitter Music*–exemplify his radicalism. Subsequently, he devised a new and comprehensive intonational system, built a unique ensemble of instruments capable of performing in that system, and created an all-embracing aesthetic for his work: corporeality. His frame of cultural reference ranged from hitchhiker inscriptions to Greek tragedy. More recent figures to follow in similar footsteps include Lou Harrison, Peter Garland, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and–arguably–John Cage.

That Partch, Cowell, and the others just named are American composers is unquestionable; but is their music American? Certainly none of them achieves "Americanness" through the superficial use of "American" ethnic material, by conforming to American generic stereotypes, or through association–retrospective or otherwise–with American subject matter. To *my* mind their music–and that of many other so-called American experimentalists–is profoundly American, for it possesses at a compositional and aesthetic level the same qualities that were identified earlier in connection with the books by Cowell and Howard: those of inclusivity, open-mindedness, egalitarianism, and (in more technical terms) the hybridic synthesis of disparate elements into a cohesive and coherent whole. Given America's official motto, "*e pluribus unum*," the nation should be deeply proud of this music–but it isn't. On the contrary, America has often shunned Cowell, Partch, and the other experimentalists I would identify as its most American composers. For while Harris, Sessions and Schuman saw the majority of their symphonies premiered by America's foremost orchestras and conductors, only a fraction of Cowell's twenty symphonies were afforded such treatment. Partch received little institutional support, and even in 1966, at the height of his artistic accomplishments, could complain with justifiable bitterness that "I went to the social security offices yesterday, and learned that the $538.20 check from the U.S. Treasurer is valid. It is my reward for having endured this society for 65 years."[10] In 1998, Peter Garland moved into self-imposed exile in Mexico, as a result of "the effects of two decades of conservatism [that] have left people like me marginalized, probably permanently."[11]

The problem, I believe, has to do with the continuing dominance of American music and its institutions by outdated Eurocentric attitudes and values, which still equate nationalism with folk music of one sort or another. (And let's remember that it was Gershwin, on page 187 of *American Composers on American Music*, who wrote that "Jazz I regard as an American folk-music; not the only one, but a very powerful one.") These radical composers have failed–literally and metaphorically–to wave the American folk music flag, either at home or on territory appropriated from others. As a consequence, and like some weird cult, their profound Americanism has moved them beyond nationalism into conflict with the nation.

While the term "American music"–not least as it came to be understood in the 1930s–is of necessity synonymous with inclusivity and plurality, this need not limit its manifestations to an infinite variety of self-contained musics, whose only common point is their creation by Americans, usually in America. For as the work of Cowell, Partch, and their successors demonstrates, it can also define a music so rooted in inclusivity and plurality that it becomes universal rather than national, a music that–as Cowell suggested–is "particularly related to our own century." That the greatest musical legacy of the most self-consciously nationalistic country in the world should be a music unacceptable to its own musical establishment, is supremely (and tragically) ironic.

–Keele University

Notes

[1]The sources of this and the following quotations are reproduced in John C. Tibbetts, ed. *Dvorák in America, 1892-1895* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993): 355-84.

[2]See Arthur Farwell, "Pioneering for American Music," *Modern Music* 12 (1934): 116-22; Adrienne Fried Block, "Boston Talks Back to Dvorák," *I.S.A.M. Newsletter* 18/2 (May 1989): 10-11; Block, "Dvorák's Long American Reach," in *Dvorák in America*: 157-81.

[3]Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London: Faber, 1934).

[4]Henry Cowell, ed., *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1933; reprint New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962); John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music: Three Hundred Years of It* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1931).

[5]Richard Crawford (quoting Gilbert Chase), "Foreword," *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, rev. 3d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987): xv.

[6]Henry Cowell, "Trends in American Music," *American Composers on American Music*: 13.

[7]Henry Cowell, "Towards Neo-Primitivism," *Modern Music* 10/3 (1933): 149-53.

[8]Henry Cowell, [introductory remarks], *United Quartet* [String Quartet No. 4] (San Francisco: New Music Edition, 1937): [1].

[9]Harry Partch, *Genesis of a Music*, 2d ed. enlarged (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979): vi-vii.

[10]Letter from Harry Partch to Lou Harrison, 23 August 1966, *A Lou Harrison Reader*, ed. Peter Garland (Santa Fe: Soundings Press, 1987): 60.

[11]Letter from Peter Garland to David Nicholls, 9 June 1998.

Ellington (continued)

works like Liszt's *Second Hungarian Rhapsody* and suites by Tchaikovsky and Grieg. **Recollections of the Big Band Era** (Atlantic Jazz) gives a solid sampling of Ellington's and Strayhorn's arranging abilities and wit. If you've never heard the Ellington band cover songs by Guy Lombardo, Fred Waring, and waltz-*Meister* Wayne King, this is your chance.

Ellington also displayed creative arranging talents in revisiting his own earlier pieces. "The New East St. Louis Toodle-Oo" and "The New Black and Tan Fantasy" (both on **Duke Ellington–Reminiscing in Tempo**, Columbia/Legacy) offer instructive examples of this updating process at work, as does the album **Masterpieces by Ellington** (Columbia), featuring extended treatments (by Ellington and Strayhorn) of the song hits "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Lady," and "Solitude."

The Popular Songwriter: Songs hold a prominent place in Ellington's output. In recent writing on Ellington, they're often passed over or treated as secondary in importance to his instrumental compositions. But they certainly weren't secondary to Ellington's audiences, and he featured them nightly for their listening and dancing pleasure. Beyond the Ellington evergreens everyone knows and plays, there are many others that show his melodic gifts and mood-painting abilities. Some of my favorites are "I'm So In Love with You" (1930) from the Cotton Club period, "I Never Felt That Way Before" (1940), "Jump for Joy" (1941) from the musical of the same name, "I'm Just a Lucky So-and-So" (1946), and "Brown Penny" from the musical *Beggar's Holiday* (1947). There's no need to make inflated claims for these songs as great works of art. They're simply engaging, attractive pieces that deserve consideration in any discussion of Ellington's contributions to American music.

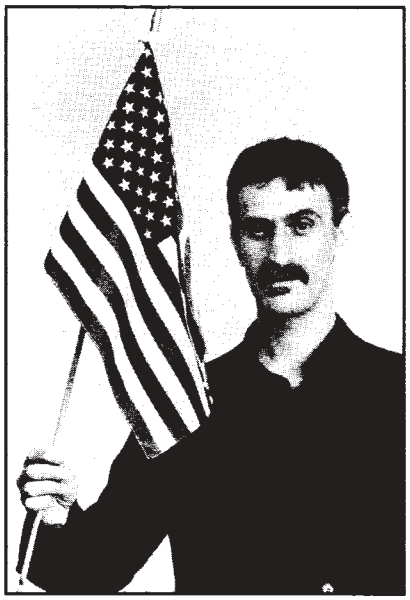
How should we pay homage to Ellington this centennial year? Let's recognize the immense scope of his artistic vision and marvel at the full range of his talents. He left an extraordinary musical legacy. Taking the broadest possible measure of its dimensions is the best birthday gift we can offer in return.

–Mark Tucker
College of William and Mary

Cage (continued)

cause of Fetterman's self-restraint in interpreting or defending Cage's works or methods. He explicates the details of the development and elements of Cage's scores as well as their realizations in a variety of performances. As an empirically-based attempt at presenting material and explaining in detail how scores work, it allows others to note the various contradictions between Cage's aesthetic claims and his practices, and to explore what is both intriguing and problematic about the relation of notation to performance in Cage's work. Out of this, Cage's radicalizing of the notation-performance situation could be theoretically applied to questions about any realization of a composition.

–Jon Erickson
Ohio State University



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