

# AMERICAN MUSIC REVIEW

The H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music

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

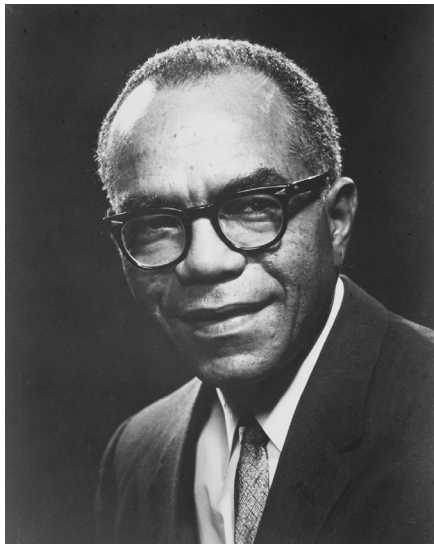
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## Rediscovering an American Master: The Ulysses Kay Papers

Elliott S. Cairns, Columbia University

It is not often that one is given the opportunity to rifle through a stranger's belongings, especially with the aim of cataloging and arranging them. Indeed, it can at times feel intrusive, as one stumbles across old medical bills, records of tax returns, and holiday greetings; even more unsettling is the feeling that accompanies the opening of a box filled with condolence letters addressed to the family after that stranger's death. At the same time, the experience is much like exploring a treasure trove, for each unopened box and each unopened envelope is laden with potential—one never knows what they contain, and discovery feels always imminent.



*Ulysses Kay, ca. 1975*

*Ulysses Kay Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University*

It is this kind of opportunity I was granted from 2010–11, when I became one of the first to filter through the recently deposited papers of the late African-American composer Ulysses Kay (1917–95). Kay's papers arrived at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) in 2009, when Kay and his wife Barbara's survivors—Barbara had herself died in 1997—selected it as the repository for their parents' personal archive. In a brief essay recently published in *Current Musicology*, the RBML's Curator for Performing Arts Collections Jennifer B. Lee offered a short guide to the collection, which at the time of its writing was only partially processed, and consequently, only a few items were available to researchers.<sup>1</sup> It is exciting for me to report that the collection has been fully processed and the finding aid is complete, so it is now available in its entirety for public use with no access restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

To date, the most comprehensive resource available to scholars interested in Ulysses Kay has been Constance Tibbs Hobson and Deborra A. Richardson's *Ulysses Kay: A Bio-Bibliography*, published just before Kay's death.<sup>3</sup> It was an invaluable tool during my time in the archive, but it quickly became apparent that this volume is only a starting point: time spent with his papers still has much to offer. Indeed, during my research for this article, I found sources that invalidate parts of the initial chronology of works I prepared while organizing the collection and working on the finding aid, so the information included here is as much a corrective for the finding aid as the finding aid was for the list of works in Hobson and Richardson's *Bio-Bibliography*. The purpose of this article is not to reassess the state of scholarship on Kay, nor is it meant to rewrite his biography (it is enough for me to say that the former could benefit significantly from some scholarly attention); instead, it is my hope that this piece will serve as an

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## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

introduction to this newly-available collection and reinvigorate interest in this largely overlooked African-American composer. At the same time, I aim to share some of my own findings—especially with regard to the years that predate Kay’s diaries—afforded me by the extended and untypically intimate relationship I have formed with the Ulysses Kay Papers.

Born and raised in Tucson, Arizona, Ulysses Kay practiced music from a young age.<sup>4</sup> Encouraged by both his mother and uncle—the renowned jazz musician Joe “King” Oliver—Kay studied piano, violin, and saxophone. He entered the University of Arizona in 1934, initially intending to pursue a Bachelor of Arts. He eventually switched to a Bachelor of Music during his sophomore year, studying piano with Julia Rebeil and music theory with John L. Lowell, two professors “who not only gave to [Kay] new musical insights, but also, through personal concern, helped open up a new world for this gifted young black man from the South.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, during the summers of 1936 and 1937, Kay met with William Grant Still, who “both inspired him and encouraged him to become a composer.”<sup>6</sup> Upon graduating in 1938, Kay enrolled at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied composition with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson. In the spring of 1939, Hanson conducted the Rochester Civic Orchestra for the premiere performance of Kay’s *Sinfonietta for Orchestra*. Kay received his Master of Music from Eastman in 1940, after which he was awarded scholarships to study with Paul Hindemith first at Tanglewood during the summer of 1941, and then at Yale University from 1941–42.

Following the United States’ entry into World War Two, Kay enlisted in the United States Navy in 1942, and was assigned to a band at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, with the rank of “Musician, Second Class.”<sup>7</sup> While serving in the U.S. Naval Reserves, Kay continued to compose, although much of his efforts were dedicated to arranging music for naval ensembles.<sup>8</sup> After he was honorably discharged from the Navy in 1946, Kay was awarded the Alice M. Ditson Fellowship at Columbia University, allowing him to spend the 1946–47 academic year studying composition with Otto Luening. During the summers, Kay would spend time working at Yaddo, the artists’ community in Saratoga Springs, New York, and in 1949, he relocated to Rome,

Italy, with his new wife Barbara, after winning the prestigious *Prix de Rome*. Kay won a second *Prix de Rome* as well as a Fulbright Scholarship in 1951, which allowed Kay and Barbara to remain at the American Academy in Rome until 1952.

After he returned from Rome, Kay began working as an editorial advisor for Broadcast Music, Inc., a position he would hold until 1968. During the autumn of 1958, Kay, along with fellow composers Roy Harris, Peter Mennin, and Roger Sessions, was invited to travel to the Soviet Union as part of the first American delegation of composers under the new cultural exchange agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. (The United States welcomed a similar delegation from the USSR in the autumn of 1959, which consisted of Dmitri Shostakovich, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Konstantin Dankevich, Fikret Amirov, and Tikhon Khrennikov.) During a farewell event hosted at the United Nations just before they left for their thirty-day trip, Kay expressed his wish “to see how the [Soviet] composers produce, in terms of what



Barbara and Ulysses Kay  
at the American Academy in Rome, ca. 1949–52  
*Ulysses Kay Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library,  
Columbia University*

is expected of them.”<sup>9</sup> Further, in a brief discussion of what Harold C. Schonberg, the *New York Times* reporter covering the occasion, evasively refers to as the “one problem the others will not directly face ... summed up in two words: Little Rock”—viz. racism—Kay reportedly said:

“The State Department told me to speak freely and say what I think ... They told

## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

me that if I speak honestly and frankly I will get further. What will I say? I will say—" and Mr. Kay stopped. "I don't know for sure what I am going to say. Prejudice is encountered in some sections of America, not encountered in others. I worked and I studied, and I got scholarships and performances, and I'm an example. I'll just try to explain things as I see them."<sup>10</sup>



*American Composer Delegation in the U.S.S.R., 1958.  
From left to right: Ulysses Kay, Peter Mennin,  
Roy Harris, and Roger Sessions  
Ulysses Kay Papers, Rare Book  
and Manuscript Library, Columbia University*

The visit built to a climactic concert of works by the American composers performed by the Moscow State Radio Orchestra in Tchaikovsky Hall on October 15. Approximately fifteen hundred people filled the sold-out concert hall, among them the United States Ambassador and his wife. While abroad, Kay reached out to the USSR's Union of Composers, leaving a few of his scores behind for the perusal of its membership. The following summer, Kay received a letter from a Mr. S. Aksyuk writing on behalf of the Union of Composers, which speaks to the admiration "a number of Soviet composers and musicologists" had for Kay's music:

In the unanimous opinion of our colleagues your works are characterized by great mastery. Especially noticeable is the wonderful use of polyphony and the various ways in which you employ it

originally and inventively. In particular, the fugue fragments in the second part of the Symphony [in E] leave no doubts that in this area of composition you are an original master.

In several selections with the general keenness of the sound, the separate themes are distinguished by clarity and even lyricism, e.g., in the third movement of the symphony.

We are very sorry that we did not have the opportunity to hear your works in orchestration. Acquaintance with the parts, however, already permits judging the inventiveness of the orchestration, imparting brightness and keenness of sound to the complex polyphonic fabric.<sup>11</sup>

Kay's teaching career began in the summer of 1965, when he accepted visiting professor positions at first Boston University, and then at the University of California at Los Angeles. Kay left his position at BMI in 1968—he continued to act as a music consultant—in order to join the faculty of Lehman College of the City University of New York. He was appointed a Distinguished Professor of Music there in 1973, and held that position until his retirement in 1989. A number of congratulatory letters on the occasion of his retirement are held in the Kay Papers, chief among them letters from Milton Babbitt, Leonard Bernstein, John Corigliano, George Crumb, Lukas Foss, Jessye Norman, William Schuman, and Otto Luening.<sup>12</sup>

One of Kay's earliest compositional successes was *Of New Horizons*, a work commissioned by the American conductor Thor Johnson, whom he had met during his time at Quonset Point. As the biographical note from a program for a later performance of the work informs us, Johnson asked Kay "to write a 'lively and optimistic piece' for the young people of the National High School Orchestra at Interlochen [Michigan]. The resulting composition was *Of New Horizons*, the title of which was suggested by Mr. Johnson and which was accepted by Mr. Kay because it was 'in keeping with the "spirit" of the music.'"<sup>13</sup> This performance never came to pass, and instead, the work received its premiere by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra with Johnson at the podium on 28 July 1944 in the

## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

Lewisohn Stadium, which then stood on the grounds of the City College of New York. Almost two years later, the work was awarded First Prize in the orchestral division at the First Congress of the Fellowship of American Composers, where it was performed on 10 May 1946 by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Valter Poole.<sup>14</sup> The following year, a performance of *Of New Horizons* by the Juilliard Orchestra again with Thor Johnson marked Kay's Carnegie Hall debut, the work included on a program along with the New York premiere of Aaron Copland's *Letter From Home*.

On 29 January 1947, an unsigned article in the *New York Times* announced Kay's receipt of First Prize in the Third Annual George Gershwin Memorial Composition Contest for his *A Short Overture*, an award he shared that year with Earl George. In addition to the joint \$1000 prize, the co-winners had their music performed at a concert on 31 March 1947 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, with Leonard Bernstein leading the New York City Symphony Orchestra.<sup>15</sup> "Music is non-sectarian," the mission statement of the Gershwin Memorial Contests and Concerts reads. "Its appeal and creation is not the property of any one race or religion or nationality. So this contest is open to all young men and women, whatever their religion or circumstance in life. When the manuscripts are judged it is the music alone which is searched; not the name or the antecedents of the composer."<sup>16</sup> The 1947 contest was judged by Leonard Bernstein, chairman, Marc Blitzstein, Aaron Copland, and William Schuman, with Serge Koussevitzky as honorary chairman, and Rabbi Judah Cahn as judge ex-officio.

In November of the same year, Kay's music would feature in the first concert of the Cosmopolitan Symphony Society of New York, an "interracial instrumental ensemble ... including several women players" established by Everett Lee in 1947,<sup>17</sup> and recently

discussed in these pages by Carol J. Oja.<sup>18</sup> Kay's *Five Mosaics* (1940) was heard alongside works by Rossini, Beethoven, Verdi, Schumann, and Kabalevsky—notably, his was the only piece performed by a black or American composer.<sup>19</sup> It is fitting that this first performance at City College's Great Hall—even if not the symphony's "formal" debut—was presented by the Grace Congregational Church in Harlem, a church that "tolerates, by stated policy, no barriers between people."<sup>20</sup> "It is therefore a privilege and an honor to us," states a note on the rear of the concert program, "to be

able to present this Symphonic Society, this one harmonious orchestra of many races. Their non-racial character bespeaks that way of life which, in public endeavors and in institutional life, will dispel our pagan and insane national divisiveness, our immoral ghettoism, our psychological estrangements and fears."<sup>21</sup> Lee programmed a second work by Kay for the formal debut of the Cosmopolitan Symphony on 21 May 1948 at Town Hall, a concert venue in midtown "noted," as Oja writes, "for its egalitarian policies."<sup>22</sup> Again, Kay was the only non-European composer to appear on the program, this time represented by his *Brief Elegy* for solo oboe and string orchestra, which Noel Straus, in his coverage for the *New York Times*, described as "likeable, and immediate in its appeal, having a well-sustained mood of tender melancholy and a prevailing poetry in its favor."<sup>23</sup>



*Ulysses Kay Welcoming Delegation from the U.S.S.R., 1959. From left to right: Ulysses Kay, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Tikhon Khrennikov, Dmitri Shostakovich, Boris Yarustovsky, Konstantin Dankevich, and Fikret Amirov*  
*Ulysses Kay Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University*

Although accounting for only a few folders, another fascinating inclusion in the collection are the personal papers of Ulysses' wife Barbara. While Ulysses occupied himself with composition and working for BMI, Barbara became involved in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Although she would spend much of her time advocating for racial equality in the Kays' hometown of Englewood, New Jersey, Barbara made a number of trips to the American South, including one to participate in the Mississippi Freedom

## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

Rides during the summer of 1961. While there, she was arrested, and ultimately sentenced to a \$200 fine and four months in prison for “Breach of the Peace.”<sup>24</sup> A newspaper article explains that Barbara “was among five persons arrested here [in Jackson] for challenging segregation in a bus station after a ride from Montgomery, Ala.”<sup>25</sup> However, it is in the first of the two letters she sent to Ulysses after being arrested—this one while she was awaiting transfer from Hind’s County Jail to the maximum security unit of the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman—that offers a more telling account of events:

There were five of us, three white male students, two from the U[niversity] of Chi[cago], ... and one from Duke Univ[ersity] a negro male student, and myself.

We met in Montgomery, Alabama, and left on the bus for Jackson. We changed buses in Meridian. Police cars escorted us into and out of each city.

Our bus was almost empty, the other passengers being routed on newer Trailways buses, with toilets, although we had bought tickets in Montgomery which were to take us non-stop (eight hour ride) to Jackson.

Upon entering the bus terminal at Jackson we were immediately arrested, after we refused to leave. It took 5 minutes[.] Police were everywhere. The paddy wagon was waiting.<sup>26</sup>

Following her release, Barbara participated in the Englewood Movement—the first “sit-in” in the North in which “Englewood residents took over city hall to protest racial segregation in the school”—and led a “Freedom School” in the basement of the Kay home during the subsequent boycott of Englewood schools.<sup>27</sup> She returned to Mississippi in 1966 to participate in James Meredith’s March Against Fear, all the while working with the New Jersey chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). She recounted much of her experience during an oral history interview in 1979, which is held by Columbia University’s Center for Oral History and is available for consultation.<sup>28</sup>

Ulysses Kay attracted scholarly attention as early as 1957, when musicologist and conductor Nicolas

Slonimsky penned a brief, but extremely detailed, assessment of Kay’s then two-decade-long compositional career for the *American Composers Alliance Bulletin*. In the opening paragraph of the article Slonimsky notes:

[Kay] is not automatically satisfied with every piece [of music] he writes, simply because it is his. Some of his music causes him acute embarrassment for no more specific reason than his detachment from that particular phase of his work. Some of the material he rejects is of excellent quality and it would be a pity if he would physically destroy the manuscripts. He has not been driven to that yet but he keeps such compositions unpublished and does not offer them for publication.<sup>29</sup>

It is indeed fortuitous that Kay would continue the practice of holding on to his compositions, published or no, for they now stand together as what is perhaps the “gem” in his Papers, in the form of a nearly-comprehensive collection of his scores and sketches. These documents account for his output between 1939 and 1988, with the bulk representing those years after the end of the Second World War. Evidence of his compositional process is wonderfully preserved: Kay was an adamant sketcher—sometimes completing a number of sketch drafts before beginning to orchestrate—and with few exceptions, these materials are all housed at the RBML, his diaries functioning as a very detailed guide.

While processing his scores, I uncovered a number of manuscripts and sketches for compositions that were documented neither in his diaries (mostly because they predated them), nor in Hobson and Richardson’s *Bio-Bibliography*, which itself relies heavily on Slonimsky’s list of works for those composed in 1956 or before.<sup>30</sup> As a result, I have created a corrected list of works to serve as an appendix to this article, in which I have established a revised chronology as well as a comprehensive representation of his total output known to date. It should be consulted in union with Hobson and Richardson’s text, as much supplementary information is contained there.

A mere glimpse at the finding aid or any secondary literature about Ulysses Kay—especially the

## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

entry about him on *Grove Music Online*—will reveal that there is still much to be done if the story of this man, “one of the important American composers of his generation and . . . the leading black composer of his time,” is to be rightly told.<sup>31</sup> In celebration of the collection coming to Columbia University, Jennifer B. Lee has curated an online exhibition, in which visitors may examine many of the documents that comprise the Ulysses Kay Papers—including some referenced here—and I encourage all to explore it.<sup>32</sup> Of course, much is absent from the exhibition and there is still much to uncover,<sup>33</sup> but it is my sincerest hope that now his Papers are available for consultation, scholars will seek to incorporate Kay and his music much more into our account of twentieth-century American music, one that will be inevitably enriched by doing so.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Jennifer B. Lee, “Ulysses Kay Special Collection: Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University,” *Current Musicology* 93 (Spring 2012): 141–45.

<sup>2</sup> Consult the finding aid for the Ulysses Kay Papers (UKP) online at: [http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd\\_7341105/](http://findingaids.cul.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_7341105/).

<sup>3</sup> Constance Tibbs Hobson and Deborra A. Richardson, *Ulysses Kay: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Much of the following biographical information is indebted to Hobson and Richardson, *Ulysses Kay*; and Nicolas Slonimsky, “Ulysses Kay,” *American Composers Alliance Bulletin* 7/1 (Fall, 1957): 3–11.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Herrema, “The Choral Works of Ulysses Kay,” *Choral Journal* 11 (December, 1970): 5.

<sup>6</sup> Eileen Southern, *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 226.

<sup>7</sup> Naval Service Records; 1942–1946. Ulysses Kay Papers, Box 84/Folder 5, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML), Columbia University Library.

<sup>8</sup> A number of previously undocumented arrangements and compositions from this time surfaced during my time processing the UKP. See the appendix to this article for a complete list of Kay’s musical output.

<sup>9</sup> Harold C. Schonberg, “Exchange Composers: Harris, Sessions and Kay Discuss Their Forthcoming Trip to Soviet Union,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1958.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Translation of a letter from S. Aksyuk; 30 June 1959. UKP, Box 84/Folder 15, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>12</sup> Congratulatory Letters; 1989. UKP, Box 94/Folder 13, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>13</sup> Program for concert of Columbus Philharmonic Orchestra; 4 March 1947. UKP, Box 4/Folder 60, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>14</sup> Program of the First Congress, Fellowship of American Composers 6–10 May 1946. UKP, Box 4/Folder 59, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>15</sup> This was not the first encounter Kay had had with Bernstein. Bernstein played the piano part during the premier performance of Kay’s *Sonatina for Violin and Piano* on 24 January 1943 at a concert of the League of Composers, with Stefan Frenkel on violin.

<sup>16</sup> Program for the Third Annual Gershwin Memorial Concert, 31 March 1947. UKP, Box 4/Folder 60, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>17</sup> N.S. [Noel Straus], “Symphony Group in Formal Debut,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Carol J. Oja, “Everett Lee and the Racial Politics of Orchestral Conducting,” *American Music Review* 43 (Fall 2013): 1–7.

<sup>19</sup> This was in fact not the premiere of *Five Mosaics*, as Oja states on page 4 of her article; *Five Mosaics* was first performed by the Cleveland Philharmonic Orchestra on 28 December 1940, conducted by F. Karl Grossman. As such, the program for the 9 November 1947 concert is incorrect in referring to the performance as the “World Premiere.” See Slonimsky, “Ulysses Kay,” 7.

<sup>20</sup> Program for concert of the Cosmopolitan Symphony Society of New York, 9 November 1947. UKP, Box 4/Folder 60, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Oja, “Everett Lee,” 4.

<sup>23</sup> N.S. [Noel Straus], “Symphony Group.” Straus is incorrect when he writes that this was the “first hearing” of *Brief Elegy*, as it was premiered just twelve days prior by the National Gallery Orchestra at the National Gallery of Art under the direction of Richard Bales. The program for the evening’s concert is likewise inaccurate. See Slonimsky, “Ulysses Kay,” 8.

<sup>24</sup> See Barbara Kay’s sentencing receipt from Hinds County Jail in Jackson, MS, 1961. UKP, Box 82/Folder 2, RBML, Columbia University Library.

## The Ulysses Kay Papers (cont.)

<sup>25</sup>“Bergen Woman Jailed in Ride,” 3 July 1961. UKP, Box 82/ Folder 2, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>26</sup>Letter from Barbara Kay to Ulysses Kay, 7 July 1961. UKP, Box 85/Folder 9, RBML, Columbia University Library.

<sup>27</sup>Lee, “*Ulysses Kay*,” 143.

<sup>28</sup>Consult the record for Barbara Kay’s interview at: [http://oral-historyportal.cul.columbia.edu/document.php?id=ldpd\\_4076977](http://oral-historyportal.cul.columbia.edu/document.php?id=ldpd_4076977).

<sup>29</sup>Slonimsky, “Ulysses Kay,” 3.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 7–11.

<sup>31</sup>Southern, *Biographical Dictionary*, 227.

<sup>32</sup>Consult the online exhibition at: <https://exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/kay>.

<sup>33</sup>Contained in the Papers are, for instance, Kay’s correspondence with Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Ralph Ellison, Howard Hanson, Paul Hindemith, Langston Hughes, Otto Luening, Nicolas Slonimsky, William Grant Still, and Virgil Thomson.

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## Institute News

Jeffrey Taylor, Brooklyn College & The Graduate Center: CUNY

In his first major policy address since his appointment as CUNY Chancellor, James B. Milliken recently claimed “a Global University” as a primary goal of his tenure. “Every major university must be global in outlook and scope,” he stated, “and few universities are better positioned than CUNY. We have an enormous advantage: a student body with forty percent born outside this country and students who speak almost 200 languages.” Not long ago The Society of American Music voted to include music from *all* the Americas under its purview, and here at the Institute we have considered more far-reaching ways in which HISAM can celebrate American music as a global phenomenon. American music has always had a worldwide scope, enriched by centuries of immigration and, now, almost limitless opportunities for rich cultural exchange across the globe. In the coming months and years we will work in our publications and programming to stress the global nature of the Institute’s mission, relying as we do on the immense diversity of CUNY as our most important resource.

We are particularly excited by the recent hire at Brooklyn College of Grammy-winning pianist, composer, and bandleader **Arturo O’Farrill**, and his new status as Research Associate at HISAM.

Professor O’Farrill is perhaps best known for championing the jazz legacy of his father’s native Cuba, and recent easing of relations between that country and the United States promises a new chapter in the cultural interchange between the two nations. Yet, O’Farrill maintains wide interests in the global reach of jazz, as well the infusion of new ideas to the art from cultures throughout the world. These interests, shared by our Institute’s staff, were highlighted in our May 2014 concert devoted to the Latin/Jewish jazz connection, with Israeli-born musicians Anat Cohen and Rafi Mal-kiel. We look forward to many future events that

celebrate the vigor of our “Global University,” as well as an evolving redefinition of American music at large as a truly international phenomenon.

In other news, this past September Institute Director **Jeffrey Taylor** joined a panel on “Rethinking Jazz Piano” at the *Jazz Beyond Borders* conference in Amsterdam, presenting work on the connections between early jazz piano and player piano rolls. Senior Research Associate **Ray Allen** read a paper at the November 2014 annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology on his Brooklyn soca research. An expanded version of the piece appears in this issue. At the November 2014 national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Research Associate **Stephanie Jensen-Moulton** gave a paper entitled “American Opera and Disability: The Case of *Moby-Dick*,” which dealt with Jake Heggie’s 2010 opera. She

continues her work on the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*. Graduate Assistant **Whitney George** pursued a busy schedule of composition and conducting, working with her own group The Curiosity Cabinet as well as a variety of New York ensembles. She was guest conductor at the Outreach Jazz Festival (Germany) for *Sounds After the Oil*

*War* with soloist David Taylor, and in September named new Managing Director of New York’s American Modern Ensemble.



*Arturo O’Farrill at the piano  
Photo courtesy of Lena Adasheva*



# The Brooklyn Soca Connection: Frankie McIntosh and Straker Records

Ray Allen, Brooklyn College: CUNY

The emergence of soca (soul/calypso) music in the 1970s was the result of musical innovations that occurred concurrently with a conscious attempt by the Trinidadian record industry to penetrate the burgeoning world music market. The latter move was prompted in part by the early-1970s international success of Jamaican reggae and coincided with the rapid growth of diasporic English-speaking Caribbean communities in North America and Europe—sites which promised new production and marketing possibilities for the music. Brooklyn's Caribbean neighborhoods, which had rapidly expanded in the wake of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, became popular destinations for singers, musicians, arrangers, and record producers. Some lay down roots while other became transnational migrants, cycling back and forth between Brooklyn and their Caribbean homelands to perform and record the new soca sound. Frankie McIntosh, music director and arranger for the Brooklyn-based Straker Records label, was a key player in the transformation of Trinidadian calypso to modern soca during this period.

Before turning to the story of McIntosh and Straker Records a brief review of the stylistic characteristics of soca and the critical reception the new music received is in order. By the late 1970s the term “soca” (“so” from soul music, “ca” from calypso) was used in reference to a new style of Caribbean music that blended Trinidadian calypso with elements of African-American soul, funk, disco, R&B, and jazz.<sup>1</sup> According to ethnomusicologist Shannon Dudley, soca is differentiated from calypso by its strong, 4/4 rhythmic structure with accents on the second and fourth beats of each measure; emphasis on a syncopated bass line that often incorporates melodic figures; and fast, often frenetic, tempos. In contrast calypso pieces are based on a two-beat structure that emphasizes a steady bass line and generally exhibit slower tempos. In soca the voice and instruments tend to interlock to form

a repetitive rhythmic groove, while in calypso the vocal line is more melodic and prone to improvisation as the text unfolds in a linear, verse-chorus form. Soca lyrics tend to be party oriented, with short, repetitive phrases exhorting listeners to engage in provocative, playful dance, while traditional calypso songs feature text-dense lyrics filled with witty and occasionally ribald social commentary. And finally soca arrangements often feature synthesizers, electric guitars, and additional electronic sounds for timbral effects which were considered highly inventive in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

Not all Trinidadian musicians and critics were enamored by this new soca sound or its means of production and distribution. Some worried publically that the commercialization of traditional calypso through the incorporation of what they identified as “foreign” popular styles—specifically elements of American soul, funk, and R&B, and Jamaican reggae—would compromise the integrity of Trinidad's most distinctive musical expression. Moreover, production and distribution of the music might fall to North American and British

record companies who would reap the lion's share of the profits. Distinguished Trinidadian literary critic Gordon Rohlehr, while stressing calypso's long history of self-reinvention, captured the concerns of many when he warned that the new soca ran the danger of embracing the “ethos of popular music” and becoming “a kind of fast food, mass-produced, slickly packaged and meant for rapid consumption and swift obsolescence.”<sup>3</sup> The venerated calypsonian Hollis “Chalk Dust” Liverpool, known for his biting satirical calypsos, decried the commercialization and degradation of the art form. In his 1979 song “Calypso Versus Soca” he exhorted his fellow calypsonians to beware of foreign markets and to hold on to their native culture:



*Granville Straker in his store in Brooklyn, 1975*

## The Brooklyn Soca Connection (cont.)

If you want to make plenty money and sell  
records plenty here  
and overseas.  
Yes, well plan brother for de foreigner,  
compose soul songs and soca doh half lease.  
But if you are concerned about your roots,  
anxious to pass on your truths to the young  
shoots dem youths,  
and learn of the struggle of West Indian  
Evil.  
If so, yuh got to sing calypso.

Several years later the calypsonian Willard “Lord Relator” Harris raised the specter of cultural imperialism, grouching over the expansion of overseas soca record production in a song aptly titled “Importation of Calypso”:

The music that you jump to and play mas  
today,  
is now mass produced in the USA.  
It is a bad blow,  
for Trinidad and Tobago.  
The records will show,  
we are now importing our own calypso.

Rohlehr, Liverpool, and Relator’s concerns were, on one hand, well founded, given the way the so-called “calypso craze” had played out in in the 1950s under the control of United States recording companies that favored watered-down, pop arrangements by American singers over songs performed by native Caribbean calypsonians.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, this perspective does not adequately take into account developments in the growing Caribbean overseas communities, particularly those in Brooklyn that in the 1970s spurred the growth of soca. In contrast to the situation in the 1950s, the soca singers, musicians, and arrangers of the 1970s and 1980s were originally from Trinidad (or adjacent islands), not North America. Equally important, the influential Brooklyn-based record companies were owned and operated by Caribbean migrants and the core audience for the music consisted almost exclusively of Caribbean people living in Brooklyn, in other overseas communities such as Toronto or London, or in the Caribbean homelands.

One of these pioneering record producers was Granville Straker (b. 1939), a native of St. Vincent,

who migrated to Brooklyn via Trinidad in 1959. After renting a storefront and opening up a car service at 613 Nostrand Avenue in the heart of Brooklyn’s Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood, he pursued his dream of selling records. In addition to his mainstay of American R&B and soul music he began to import Caribbean music from the Samaroo and Telco companies in Trinidad and the WIRL label in Barbados. As Brooklyn’s Caribbean community grew so did demand for calypso, and by the early 1970s Straker had three stores in central Brooklyn. In 1971 he began releasing 45s on his own Straker’s Records label, and over the next two decades built an impressive catalogue that included such calypso/soca luminaries as Shadow, Chalk Dust, Calypso Rose, Lord Melody, Black Stalin, Winston Soso, Singing Francine, Lord Nelson, and Machel Montano. Straker became a veritable one-man operation—talent scout, recording/mixing engineer, record distributor, and concert promoter.<sup>5</sup>



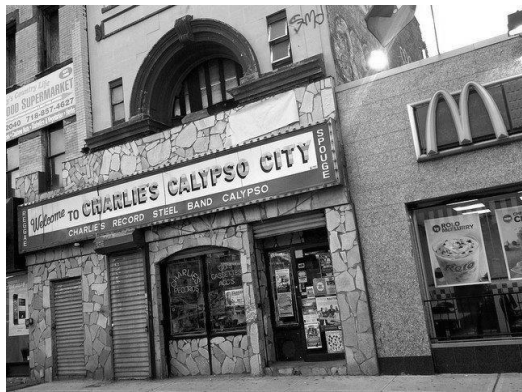
*Frankie McIntosh at work,  
Brooklyn, NY*

Straker’s recording and production process quickly evolved into a transnational project. In addition to befriending expatriate calypsonians in Brooklyn he travelled to Trinidad in search of talent in the calypso tents during Carnival season, eventually opening up two record stores in Port of Spain. He would record in either Brooklyn or Trinidad, depending on where a calypsonian was based, or when a particular artist might be visiting New York. With the advent of multi-tracking, sections of a single recording were often done at both locations (for example the horns and rhythm section in a Trinidad studio, the final vocals in a Brooklyn studio). The final mix was almost always completed in a Brooklyn or New York City studio, which, by the

## The Brooklyn Soca Connection (cont.)

early 1980s, offered more sophisticated mixing boards with twenty-four track capability. As word of New York's superior recording and mixing facilities spread, more singers and musicians came north to record.

A second important Brooklyn-based record producer and Straker's main rival was Rawlston Charles (b. 1946), a native Tobagonian who arrived in New York in 1967 with a suitcase under one arm and a Lord Kitchener album under the other. In 1972 he opened a record shop at 1265 Fulton Street in Brooklyn, and the following year began to issue records on his own Charlie's Records label. Over the next decade Charles helped produce and distribute some of the most important early soca recordings including Calypso Rose's "Give me Tempo (1977, arranged by Pelham Goddard,



*Charlie's Calypso City  
1241 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, NY*

recorded in Trinidad and New York, mixed in New York), Lord Kitchener's landmark "Sugar Bum Bum" (1978, arranged by Ed Watson, recorded in Trinidad and mixed in New York) and Arrow's international super hit "Hot, Hot, Hot" (1983, arranged by Leston Paul, recorded/mixed in New York). His catalogue would grow to be a who's-who of calypso and soca in the late 1970s and 1980s, including recordings by the aforementioned Rose, Kitchener, and Arrow, as well as those by Sparrow, Shadow, Melody, Duke, David Rudder, and many others. In 1984 he built his own recording studio above his Fulton Street record shop which became a hub of activity for Caribbean musicians visiting Brooklyn. Like Straker, Charles possessed an exceptional ear for talent and a willingness to embrace the emerging soca sound in hopes of appealing to a broader international audience without losing his core Caribbean followers.<sup>6</sup>

Straker and Charles worked with a number of prominent Trinidadian music arrangers, including Art de Coteau, Ed Watson, Pelham Goddard, and Leston

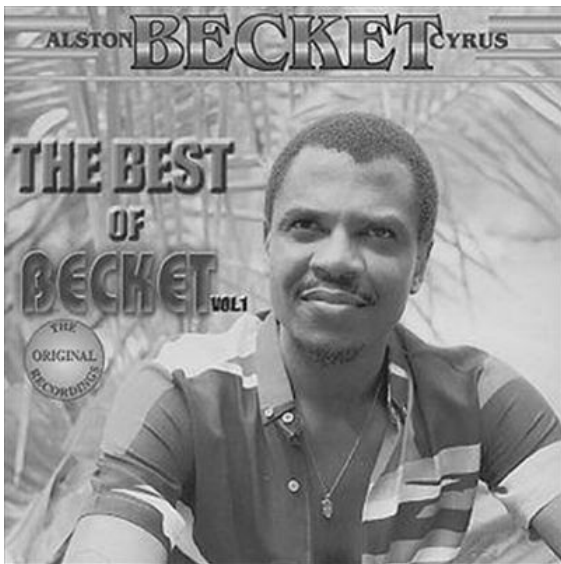
Paul, all of whom spent considerable time in New York. But pianist and arranger Frankie McIntosh, who in 1978 became Straker's musical director, left the most distinctive stamp on Brooklyn's soca sound. Born in Kingstown, St Vincent in 1946, McIntosh had the benefit of piano lessons and as a young boy played in his father Arthur McIntosh's dance orchestra, the Melotones. The band played primarily instrumental dance orchestrations of calypso, Latin, and American standards, but members gathered at the McIntosh home on Sunday afternoons for jazz jam sessions. The Senior McIntosh, a saxophonist, idolized Illinois Jacquet, Charlie Parker, and Lester Young. After graduating high school and teaching in Antigua for two years, McIntosh migrated to New York and began studying music at Brooklyn College in 1968. While earning a bachelor's degree in music at Brooklyn and an MA in music at New York University, he played keyboards with several Caribbean and American R&B groups, and jammed with NYC jazz musicians Jimmy Tyler, Donald Maynard, Snug Mosely, Jean Jefferson, and others.<sup>7</sup>

In the summer of 1976 Alston Cyrus, a St. Vincent calypsonian with the stage name Becket, approached McIntosh about tightening up some of his calypso arrangements for an upcoming Manhattan boat-ride engagement. By the 1970s most calypsonians (or their record producers) employed arrangers to compose and score out horn and bass lines as well as the basic chordal progressions for guitar and keyboard. Musicians were expected to sight read charts that were passed out at recording sessions and live performances. The horn lines were deemed central to the arranger's craft and an essential component of a song's potential popularity.

The two Vincentians hit it off, and shortly after McIntosh arranged his first calypso recordings for Becket's *Disco Calypso* album. Recorded in 1976 and released the following year on the American Casablanca label, the album did not sell well in North America, but one song, "Coming High," was popular in Trinidad, St. Vincent, and Brooklyn. The song was originally titled "Marijuana," but producer Buddy Scott insisted that the title be changed to "Coming High" and that Becket alter the phrase "Marijuana" to the non-drug but sexually suggestive line "Mary do you wanna"?

## The Brooklyn Soca Connection (cont.)

Musically “Coming High” demonstrates key characteristics of early soca: the foregrounded melodic bass line that occasionally doubles the vocal; the prominence of the synthesizer; the compact, repetitive text; and the lengthy break/groove sections in the middle and end of the piece. These rhythmic break sections (3:25-4:00; 7:22-end), built around the breaking down and rebuilding of the instruments and fundamental riffs, were similar to those heard on popular African American funk, soul, and disco recordings of the period. Their inclusion extends the piece to dance-friendly 8:22 length. In addition McIntosh introduces innovations seldom heard in calypso or early soca. Following the initial two verses and choruses he modulates up a half step (from B Flat to B) into a jazzy sounding bridge with the synthesizer trading riffs with the double-voiced horns and bass (1:55) before cycling back down to the original key of B flat. Later in the piece he brings in a bluesy guitar solo (5:35-6:15) by Victor Collins which flows into another set of horn riffs and a final modulation and bridge. [See YouTube links at the end of the article.]



*Becket LP Cover*

The following year, 1978, Becket and McIntosh teamed up for a second recording. The LP *Coming Higher* included the song “Wine Down Kingstown,” a reference to Carnival festivities in the St. Vincent capital. The prominent bass and synthesizer lines, the rapid tempo, the extended percussion break/groove sections, and Becket’s exhortation for listeners to “wine down”

(dance) place the piece squarely in a soca vein. But as in “Coming High,” jazz and blues elements are clearly evident. The piece opens with a syncopated, choppy horn line alternating between the reeds and the brass. The vocal chorus (0:40) ends with a cycle of fourths moving from C back to the tonic F# chord—a common jazz progression but unusual for calypso or soca. The arrangement is further enlivened by a bop-inflected twenty-four-bar solo played by African American trumpeter Ron Taylor (2:58) and McIntosh’s semi-improvised synthesizer figures over punchy horn riffs (3:20). The piece ends on an extended groove section with the horns blasting out a dominant-seven-sharp-nine chord (6:30), a dissonant voicing associated more with Latin jazz or rock than calypso.

In 1978 Straker approached McIntosh about arranging for his label, and the two would go on to forge a musical alliance that would last for decades. McIntosh became musical director for Straker’s Records, organizing the studio band (often under the name of the Equitables) and arranging for dozens of Straker’s calypsonians, including Chalk Dust, Shadow, Calypso Rose, Winston Soso, Poser, Lord Nelson, Singing Francine, Duke, and King Wellington.

As the music moved into the 1980s he distinguished himself through his innovative horn lines and synthesizer figures, although few of his arrangements reached the harmonic sophistication of the earlier pieces done in collaboration with Becket. McIntosh admits that there was pressure from the market to stick to more standard one-four-five triadic chord progressions and simplified melodies with less improvisation and more emphasis on repetitive dance loops:

Everyone wanted a hit like Kitchener’s “Sugar Bum Bum” (1978). And in order to sound like “Sugar Bum Bum” you had to leave out the sevenths and raised ninth chords. You just played simpler things, more accessible to the ear. Harmonies were in decline, in a sort of state of attrition.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these trends McIntosh continued to produce imaginative arrangements that maintained a degree of spontaneity. For example, Hollis “Chalk Dust” Liverpool’s 1983 recording for Straker Records,

## The Brooklyn Soca Connection (cont.)

“Ash Wednesday Jail,” is an up-tempo soca romp with forceful horns, slinky synthesizer fills, and a melodic bass figure that occasionally doubles the horns lines and vocals. Halfway through the piece McIntosh enters with a sixteen-bar improvised solo (3:08) using a steel pan sound programmed through his Prophet 5 synthesizer. He recalls having to convince Liverpool to increase the tempo of his original song to create a stronger soca groove. Though skeptical at first, the singer was quite satisfied with the final arrangement which turned out to be one of his most popular recordings. His earlier misgivings regarding soca notwithstanding, Liverpool was willing to embrace elements of the new music as long as his lyrical text remained intact.

Liverpool remembers McIntosh being much freer in the studio than older arrangers like Art De Coteau. He allowed musicians and singers more input, modifying arrangements on the spot during sessions, and in general leaving room for modest embellishments and improvisation.<sup>9</sup> McIntosh echoed this assessment:

Oh yes, even when I go to a full score, it's never like this is written in stone and we must stick to this. From the first date, if we are playing the rhythm section and I don't think a chord works I will change it. Or I would change the horn line or the bass line in a flash ... I was quite open to ideas, as long as they worked. So in the studio we might be playing a chart, and someone like (trumpeter) Errol Ince might say “Frankie, do you mind if we do this instead?” I'd say play it and let me hear it. And if I liked it I'd say “bang, go for it!” Then I'd change the music.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, McIntosh brought a more flexible, jazz-influenced sensibility to the studio. The Equitables were cosmopolitan in make-up, composed of musicians from Trinidad, St. Vincent, Barbados, Panama, Puerto Rico, and the United States. Many had diverse musical backgrounds that included experience playing jazz, Latin, R&B, soul, and funk.

When asked if there was a distinct Brooklyn soca sound in the late 1970s and 1980s McIntosh answered cautiously:

In Brooklyn we never set out to create a New York or Brooklyn sound, we just played from whatever experiences we had as Caribbean people here in New York, as an artistic expression. But listening back to it now I do hear some subtle differences. I would say the calypso up here would have been more influenced by jazz and R&B. In Trinidad and St. Vincent and Grenada it was more what they would call rootsy ... Because of the experience and the musical background of the people here in Brooklyn ... the recordings in Brooklyn were different from the recordings in Trinidad. It was a natural consequence of artistic expression, based on experience.<sup>11</sup>

The rise of soca in Brooklyn's Caribbean community, like many forms of diasporic expression, was the result of a complex entanglement of demographic, economic, artistic, and cultural/political factors. It was a movement made possible by the collective efforts of dozens of musicians, producers, and arrangers, as well as thousands of music fans, who settled in Brooklyn but who continued to travel regularly back and forth between New York and their Caribbean homelands. But it also required the energies of individual visionary cultural entrepreneurs like Straker and Charles, and forward-thinking arrangers like McIntosh, who harnessed New York's diverse Caribbean musical currents at a moment when older calypso forms were ripe for stylistic transformation. They remained in close contact with their home cultures, and in terms of agency and aesthetics maintained a core allegiance to calypso, the essential form of Trinidadian Carnival music. At the same time they demonstrated an openness to outside musical influences, particularly African American R&B, funk, soul, disco, and jazz, and a willingness to embrace, and even encourage, stylistic innovation. Although they never achieved the international success of their reggae competitors, they did manage to keep the production and distribution of their music within a Caribbean network, a stark contrast to the North American hegemonic domination of the industry during the 1950s calypso craze. Lord Relator was correct when he asserted in 1983 that much calypso was produced in North America, but the

## The Brooklyn Soca Connection (cont.)

profits—meager as they may have been—remained largely within the transnational Caribbean community.

All this is not to suggest that soca would not have happened had there been no Caribbean diaspora, or that musical activity in Brooklyn superseded that in Trinidad. Indeed further comparative work will be necessary to define the distinct nuances of the Brooklyn-style soca that McIntosh, Straker, and Charles helped nurture in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it is safe to conclude that the stylistic development and economic viability of soca was notably enhanced by activity in the diaspora, particularly by developments in Brooklyn. Evolving in the context of an ongoing two-way cultural interchange, soca is best understood as a transnational expression anchored in Trinidadian tradition but indelibly shaped by overseas musical influences.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For more on the origins of soca see Jocelyn Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 172-177.

<sup>2</sup>Shannon Dudley, "Judging 'By the Beat': Calypso versus Soca." *Ethnomusicology* 40 (Spring/Summer 1996): 269-298.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon Rohlehr, *A Scuffling of Islands: Essays on Calypso* (San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon Trinidad, 2004), 11.

<sup>4</sup>Harry Belafonte was at the forefront of the rise of popularity of calypso music in the United States in the 1950s, a phenomenon journalists labelled "the Calypso Craze." Belafonte was born in New York of Jamaican parentage, but had little direct experience with Trinidadian-style calypso or other forms of Carnival music (Jamaica, at that time, had no Carnival tradition, and calypso was the providence of Trinidad and the adjacent Lesser Antilles islands). Belafonte, whose most popular songs were recorded for RCA Victor, was not considered a genuine calypsonian by most Trinidadians. Although handful of Trinidadian calypsonians who spent time in New York during the 1950s did benefit indirectly from Belafonte's rising star, it was North American performers, ranging from jazz singers Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole to pop singers Rosemary Clooney and the Mills Brothers to popular folk acts like the Tarriers, the Easy Riders, and the Kingston Trio, who received the most attention from American records companies. For more on the Calypso Craze see Ray Funk and Donald

Hill, "Will Calypso Doom Rock'n'Roll?: The U.S. Calypso Craze of 1957" in *Trinidad Carnival: The Cultural Politics of a Transnational Festival*, edited by Garth Green and Philip Scher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 178-197; and *Calypso Craze, 1956-1957 and Beyond*, CD/DVD set and booklet, edited by Ray Funk and Michael Eldridge (Bear Family Records, 2014).

<sup>5</sup>Granville Straker, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 18 July 2013.

<sup>6</sup>Rawlston Charles, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 17 September 2013.

<sup>7</sup>Frankie McIntosh, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 23 July 2013.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Hollis Liverpool, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 5 October 2014.

<sup>10</sup>Frankie McIntosh, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 24 October 2014.

<sup>11</sup>Frankie McIntosh, interview by the author, Brooklyn, NY, 23 July 2013.

### YouTube Links

"Coming High" by Becket

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gbG2eaHkl4&index=2&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly\\_Kwn0e-TjE0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gbG2eaHkl4&index=2&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly_Kwn0e-TjE0)

"Wine Down Kingstown" by Becket

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dk-4lId73GU&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly\\_Kwn0e-TjE0&index=80](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dk-4lId73GU&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly_Kwn0e-TjE0&index=80)

"Ash Wednesday Jail" by Hollis "Chalk Dust" Liverpool

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG2UP\\_RACXU&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly\\_Kwn0e-TjE0&index=75](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG2UP_RACXU&list=PLv9QR3fBRyM-t-v93yn7Ly_Kwn0e-TjE0&index=75)

## Harry Partch's Legacy

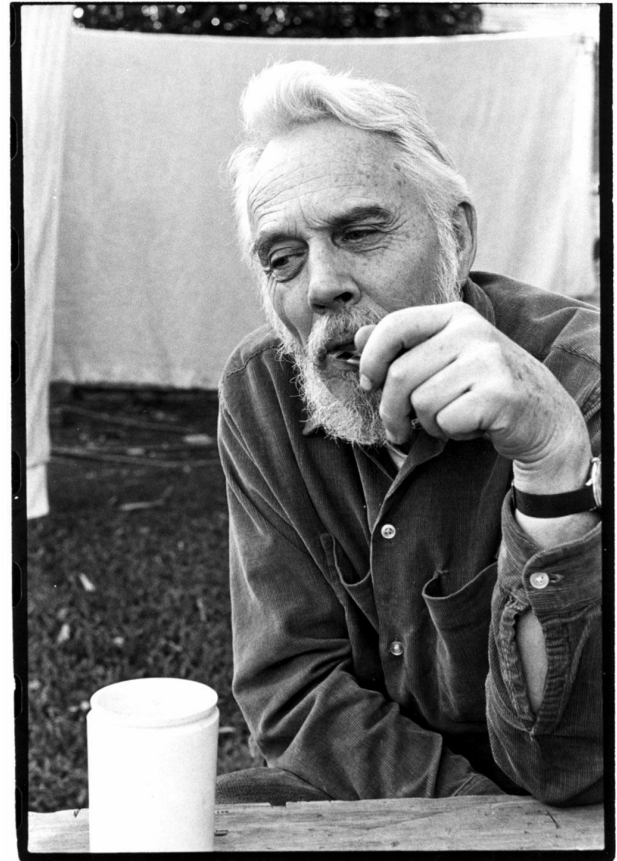
Michael Levine, CUNY Brooklyn College

*Harry Partch, Hobo Composer*, by S. Andrew Granade (University of Rochester Press, 2014) documents the offbeat music pioneer as ceaselessly looking for the hidden music of hobos, while attempting throughout his career not to be labeled a hobo composer himself. Granade documents Partch's journey chronologically, from young and itinerant traveler discovering Depression-era America's vernacular landscape, to his eventual mastery of the hobo's lingua franca in large-scale works like the stage production *Delusion of the Fury*, and his documentation of hitchhiker inscriptions in *Barstow*. To better understand Partch's influences, the book documents the cultural and musical history of the American hobo from the late 19th century to the 1940s, exploring how the composer's music engaged and frustrated popular notions of their character. Partch "became a hobo out of necessity and remained one for its freedoms ... this is the story of a composer who rejected the tenets of music as he found them and sought to return music to its roots" (110).

Seeking to characterize hobo voices carefully, claims Granade, Partch developed his alternate tunings and instruments not as mere eccentricity, but as a mission to better communicate the idiosyncratic nature of hobo hymns to the Classical music world. This mission resulted in Partch's extensive use of just intonation, a sizable collection of custom-made instruments, and the entrenched label of America's "hobo composer" that haunted him throughout his career. The latter half of Partch's career was, according to Granade, an attempt to cast off this outsider image in favor of representations more palatable to would-be donors and University faculty. "... he altered how he presented his music and theories based on his sense of the prevailing winds of artistic taste" (258).

Juxtaposed against popular representations of the composer, such as Richard Wenick's review of Partch's "Genesis of a Music" and Philip Blackburn's essays on Partch's writing style, Granade attempts to widen Partch's critical scope beyond the composer's usual characterization as outsider artist. Granade's Partch is portrayed as a man in constant

conflict between ambitious compositional aims and the poor reception his music frequently encountered in concerts and reviews. The aim here is to reconsider Partch's legacy, and reexamine our experience when listening to this unique music.



*Harry Partch*  
Photo courtesy of William Gedney

Told with an immense appreciation for a well-regarded but often misunderstood figure in America's music canon, the book is a needed addition to the limited body of work thus far published on the composer. The hope here is that Granade's text will allow reconsideration of Harry Partch's legacy, a composer too often marginalized for his perceived eccentricities, and too often ignored for his significant contributions to America's art music canon.

# Improvisation, Identity, Analysis, Performance

Paul Steinbeck, Washington University in St. Louis

In his classic article “Improvised Music after 1950,” George E. Lewis writes: “the development of the improviser ... is regarded as encompassing not only the formation of individual musical personality but the harmonization of one’s musical personality with social environments, both actual and possible.”<sup>1</sup> What Lewis’s assertion means, first of all, is that an improviser’s sense of identity takes shape within a social matrix, and that ensemble performance offers improvisers a space where the personal and the social can intersect, interact, and integrate. Furthermore, his term “musical personality” underscores the numerous ways in which improvisers use sound to cultivate their own identities and negotiate identity with their fellow performers. The implications of Lewis’s words are worth exploring at some length before I turn to this essay’s main topic: musical analysis.

Improvisers, especially those influenced by what Lewis describes as Afrological approaches to music-making, devote considerable time and effort to finding a crucial component of their identities: namely, their “personal sound[s].”<sup>2</sup> This process starts with the first decision any would-be musician makes—

choosing to play an instrument or become a vocalist—and continues for years, perhaps decades. Instrumentalists search for the perfect mouthpiece, reed, mute, string, stick, skin, cymbal, pickup, microphone, or amplifier, and some even become skilled at making their own instruments and accessories. What primarily determines an improviser’s personal sound, however, is not an instrument but the singular interface between one’s instrument and body. Practicing an instrument (or the voice, one’s internal instrument) will refine an improviser’s technique, but it also changes the body, and ultimately the two are inseparable. To become a musician is to inscribe upon oneself a personal history, an autobiography of one’s daily engagement with music that is audible in every performance, every note. As Lewis explains, “[n]otions of personhood are trans-

mitted via sounds, and sounds become signs for deeper levels of meaning beyond pitches and intervals.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, this narrative about sonic identity is not restricted to the musical experiences of improvisers. All musicians, improvisers or not, possess personal sounds defined by their instruments, bodies, techniques, and musical formations—although improvisers may place a higher value on attaining personal sounds that are especially unique and immediately identifiable. What, then, distinguishes an improviser’s sense of identity from that of a musician who does not improvise? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the social context in which improvisation occurs. As I have already noted, Lewis characterizes “the development of the improviser” as involving “the

harmonization of one’s musical personality with social environments, both actual and possible.”<sup>4</sup>

For Lewis, the operative concept is socialization: improvisers building their skills and forming their musical identities in dialogue with fellow musicians.<sup>5</sup> For example, novice improvisers in pursuit of their personal sounds may begin by emulating a teacher or a well-known

musician encountered through recordings. Then, during rehearsals and concerts, they can refine these personal sounds in real time as they “harmonize” their own identities with those of their co-performers. The same socialization process is at work when improvisers develop other aspects of their personal sounds: when they absorb the idioms of a particular musical style, when they internalize the performance practices of an ensemble, and when they discover how to contribute an unexpected musical idea at just the right moment in a performance—for improvisation thrives on what is “both actual and possible,” indeed on actualizing the impossible.

If a personal sound is at the very center of an improviser’s musical identity, then the other pillar of his/her identity is the ability to analyze. Now I am diverg-



George Lewis, 2004  
Photo courtesy of Oskar Henn



## Improvisation, Identity, Analysis, Performance (cont.)

ing from Lewis's take on the matter. In "Improvised Music after 1950," he portrays "analytic skill" as one piece of an improviser's personal sound, but I prefer to regard a musician's sound and analytical approach as two sides of the same coin, two complementary ways of conceptualizing improvisation.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the real-time nature of improvisational performance makes it difficult to separate the sonic and analytical components of an improviser's musical identity, but this is exactly the point. Sound and analysis are multifaceted, and both act upon each other in the course of performance. An improviser's personal sound comprises tone, timbre, and technique; a body of knowledge about music and musicians; as well as the tendencies and possibilities that spontaneously emerge in performance when an improviser confronts the known and unknown, the somewhat anticipated and completely unanticipated. In other words, these sonic tendencies and possibilities are audible expressions of his/her *thinking*—which I might define, following the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, as "the engaging of partly trained wits in a partly fresh situation."<sup>7</sup> And, to return to the specific context of musical improvisation, what is thinking-in-performance but analysis?

Whether practiced by improvisers in real time or by music scholars in a stop-and-start fashion, analysis is founded on listening. Analysts hear, and then they think about what they hear, carefully deliberating on or mentally manipulating some of the sounds they perceive. Still more of what analysts hear is also processed, if not in a manner that leads to immediate reflection, and these sounds can inspire musical responses as well, just like the sounds to which they devote conscious attention. It is the nature of these responses that distinguishes the analytical work of improvisers. Scholars and other individuals listening analytically can react to the sounds they hear in many ways, from imagining other sounds to writing essays, but these responses inevitably stand outside the music. Improvisers' analyses, in contrast, quickly return to the arena where they originate: the domain of musical sound. Analysis is always oriented toward action, and during improvisation the appropriate action is performance. The musicians' sounding analyses *become* the music, prompting further analytical responses from their co-performers. To hear improvisation as analysis-performed—hundreds of successive and

simultaneous cycles of listening, thinking, and acting—is to hear music like an improviser.

The analytical strategies employed by improvisers rely heavily on perceptions and performances of identity. Certainly each improviser projects a unique analytical identity, a way of thinking-in-performance that is just as personal as his/her sonic identity. In ensemble settings, improvisers also attend closely to other musicians' analytical approaches, intuiting their co-performers' hearings and creative intentions as a way of refining their own analyses.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the social matrix that influences improvisers' personal sounds has an equally profound effect on how improvisers practice analysis. This point is illustrated in another of George E. Lewis's writings, a retrospective of the time he spent as a guest performer with the Art Ensemble of Chicago. This took place in July 1977, during a weeklong gig at Storyville in New York.<sup>9</sup> Lewis was substituting for the Art Ensemble trumpeter Lester Bowie, who spent the summer in Lagos, Nigeria, working with Fela Kuti.<sup>10</sup> Lewis's account focuses on how he attempted to bring his real-time analyses into alignment with the ways his co-performers were hearing the music:

As might be imagined, the Art Ensemble of Chicago is a very finely tuned and delicately balanced organism. Over the course of the five nights and fifteen sets at Storyville, I found that at certain times sound complexes arose in the shape of "calls" that seemed to arouse a collective expectation of the kind of contrasting ironic, ejaculatory brass witnessing that Bowie often employed. Already in such important Art Ensemble recordings as *Live at Mandel Hall* ... one clearly hears Bowie's "commentary" as a kind of signifying punditry. As I discovered that the group members hadn't quite adjusted to the gaps left by Bowie's absence, I realized that part of my structural task would involve negotiating between exploring the dimensions of these lacunae and developing my own formal methodologies. This was not always successful at first. ... After one such set I kept the tape on as we moved from the stage to the dressing

## Improvisation, Identity, Analysis, Performance (cont.)

room; the recording captured Malachi Favors' giving me a gentle dressing-down: "When we played that thing I thought you were going to do something"—that is, sonic signals were proffered that demanded the construction of a response.<sup>11</sup>

Lewis's experience with the Art Ensemble provides a model for music scholars who analyze improvisation. First, scholars should prepare themselves through virtual rehearsals, listening closely and even playing along with recordings in order to gain familiarity with the repertoire and performance practices that they will encounter in analysis. Through this process, scholars can gain insight into the musicians' knowledge bases and listening strategies: "what [they] know, hear and imagine, and share."<sup>12</sup> Additionally, music scholars must consciously *identify with* the individual performers while analyzing, as Lewis did while taking Bowie's place in the Art Ensemble. Of course, Lewis did not abandon his own musical identity at Storyville—an impossibility, at any rate. He instead tried to

hear the "calls" and "gaps" in the music as Bowie would have, adjusting his listening approach by adopting certain aspects of Bowie's analytical identity. Lewis also learned to project Bowie's sonic identity during crucial moments in the performance, thereby fulfilling what the members of the Art Ensemble expected from Bowie's replacement. Although Bowie was some five thousand miles away in Lagos, his composite musical identity was very much present on the Storyville stage.

An analytical method that emulates improvisation would require that music scholars cultivate a deep sense of "personal involvement" with performance.<sup>13</sup> Marion A. Guck observes, in her influential article "Analytical Fictions," that written musical analyses "typically—necessarily—tell stories of the analyst's involvement with the work she or he analyzes," but

what I am now envisioning differs from Guck's idea in one crucial respect.<sup>14</sup> In the case of improvisation, analysts properly involve themselves with the *performers*, identifying with the music's co-creators rather than what is created. When analyzing improvisation, scholars must enter into what improvisers experience: music, created in real time, emergent from the performers' personal sounds and sounding analyses, and continuously shaped by social relations.

Real-time creation, emergence, and sociability: does this scenario describe only improvisation? Or is it also applicable to other musical practices, such as performing composed music? The philosopher Bruce Ellis Benson

argues that all musical practices are "essentially improvisational in nature, even though improvisation takes many different forms in each activity."<sup>15</sup> Benson asks scholars to experience music as improvisational, as a space where composers, performers, and even listeners participate in dialogue and co-creation.<sup>16</sup> Benson's aesthetic position is closely related to a theory developed by Nicholas Cook. In his book *Beyond the Score*, Cook (re)frames



*Art Ensemble of Chicago : Bergamo, 1974*  
*Joseph Jarman (sax, left), Lester Bowie (trumpet), Roscoe Mitchell (sax, right), Malachi Favors (bass), Don Moye (drums).*  
*Photo courtesy of Roberto Masotti*

music as performance, drawing on interdisciplinary performance theory as well as the familiar philosophical distinction between process and product. By focusing on performance, Cook is able to move beyond "literary" conceptions of "music as writing," thereby opening up new analytical perspectives on music-making.<sup>17</sup> According to Cook, musical meaning is fundamentally social—created between performers and other experiencers—and it matters not whether the performers are working from a through-composed score, engaging in free improvisation, or doing anything else. However, Cook does not ask music scholars to simply erase the conceptual categories of "composition" and "improvisation," as some have lately been tempted to do.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, he urges scholars to consider the connections between musical structures and social structures, between the particular features of a musical practice or piece and the social interactions that

# Improvisation, Identity, Analysis, Performance (cont.)

emerge in performance.

With Cook's performance theory, I have returned to where this essay began. Improvisation is a social practice, as is performance. Because both phenomena are social in nature, any understanding of improvisation (and performance in general) must be informed by the study of musical identity. Indeed, without a certain grasp of the sonic and analytical identities that musicians bring to the space of performance, scholars cannot productively analyze any form of real-time music making.

This means that ethnography is indispensable to musical analysis. Listening exercises and virtual rehearsals will provide some insight into how sonic and analytical identities operate during performance, but if scholars complement these approaches with ethnographic findings, they can create more accurate portrayals of musicians' actions and interactions. Furthermore, collaborative ethnography with performers and other participants allows scholars to incorporate multiple perspectives into their analyses, moving closer to an ethical practice of analysis. These conclusions about the utility—and necessity—of ethnography bring to mind Nicholas Cook's declaration to his fellow music scholars that “we are all ethnomusicologists now.”<sup>19</sup> To those who are familiar with the inner workings of most American music departments, Cook's assertion may seem premature. But it is nonetheless clear that musicologists and theorists must *become* ethnographers, if they want to fully comprehend improvisation, performance, and real-time musical experience.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> George E. Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16/1 (Spring 1996): 110–111.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950,” 110–111.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the socialization of improvisers, see Edward T. Hall, “Improvisation as an Acquired, Multilevel Process,” *Ethnomusicology* 36/2 (Spring-Summer 1992): 225–7.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950,” 117.

<sup>7</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *On Thinking*, ed. Konstantin Kolenda (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 129.

<sup>8</sup> For a formal model of how improvisers assess each other's intentions, see Clément Cannone and Nicolas Garnier, “A Model for Collective Free Improvisation,” in *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Mathematics and Computation in Music*, ed. Carlos Agon et al. (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2011), 32–40.

<sup>9</sup> George E. Lewis, “Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music,” *Lenox Avenue* 4 (1998): 74.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Steinbeck, “‘Area by Area the Machine Unfolds’: The Improvisational Performance Practice of the Art Ensemble of Chicago,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2/3 (August 2008): 406.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, “Singing Omar's Song,” 76. The recording mentioned by Lewis is Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Live at Mandel Hall*, Delmark DS 432/433, 1974, LP.

<sup>12</sup> George E. Lewis, “Critical Responses to ‘Improvisation: Object of Study and Critical Paradigm,’” *Music Theory Online* 19/2 (June 2013): [17].

<sup>13</sup> Marion A. Guck, “Analytical Fictions,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 16/2 (Fall 1994): 218.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Bruno Nettl, “Contemplating the Concept of Improvisation and Its History in Scholarship,” *Music Theory Online* 19/2 (June 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Cook, “We Are All Ethnomusicologists Now,” in *Musicology and Globalization: Proceedings of the International Congress in Shizuoka 2002*, ed. Yoshio Tozawa and Nihon Ongaku Gakkai (Tokyo: Musicological Society of Japan, 2004), 52–55.

# *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War*

Michael Weinstein-Reiman, Columbia University

It is impossible for me to make an exclusive choice among the various activities of conducting, symphonic composition, writing for the theater, or playing the piano. . . . What seems right for me at any given moment is what I must do.<sup>1</sup>

I am so easily assimilated.  
It's easy, it's ever so easy!  
I'm Spanish, I'm suddenly Spanish!  
And you must be Spanish, too.  
Do like the natives do.  
These days you have to be  
In the majority. . . .<sup>2</sup>

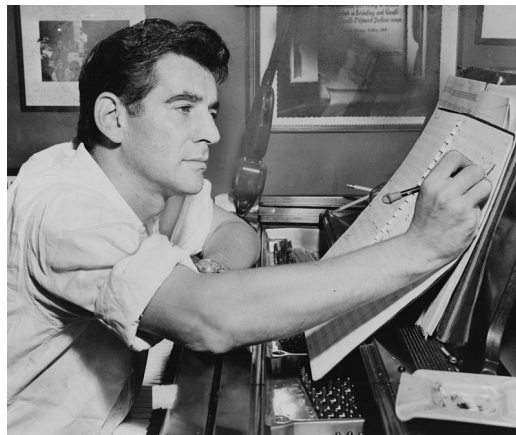
Carol J. Oja's captivating monograph, *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War*, is an expert synthesis of traditionally disparate musicological frameworks. Her text is at once a superlative narrative—one that weaves together the untold stories and broad cultural contexts of a seminal work of American musical theatre, *On the Town*, and its antecedent, the ballet, *Fancy Free*—and a thoroughgoing analytical study in American history, informed by extensive ethnography, archival research, and the author's keen music-theoretical sensibility. As such, Oja's book is ecumenical in methodology but singular in its historiographical pursuit; it shines a spotlight on an exceptional artistic creation, told in interlaced tales of groundbreaking visionaries, their collaborations, and their impact.

Throughout his life, Leonard Bernstein, like the thread of Oja's monograph, deftly connected a host of musical and cultural worlds with extraordinary expertise. A ubiquitous and eclectic public figure, Bernstein had a hand in nearly every artistic milieu of the twentieth century, shaping it to fit his needs at the time. As Oja notes, with Bernstein "at the center of the action" of *On the Town*, he became a collaborator *par excellence*. However, Bernstein's collaborative efforts frequently smacked of assimilative tendencies; he could, just as a conductor would accentuate a particular

melody or motif, mold the medium and the discourse to suit his aesthetic.<sup>3</sup>

Assimilation rather than collaboration might be a more charged rubric under which we might subsume all the themes of Oja's book, among them questions of genre, sex, race, and politics. As she demonstrates, from its understated diverse casting to its bald appropriation of musical styles, *On the Town* is an aspirational fusion born of a democratic impulse—an impulse that nevertheless could not be described as pluralist. In what follows, I highlight some of the overarching questions Oja seeks to illuminate in *Bernstein Meets Broadway*, but I do so paying special attention to assimilation as an artistic and social practice.

Oja's book is divided into three large sections; in the first of these, titled "Ballets and Nightclubs," the author focuses primarily on an earlier collaboration between Bernstein and Jerome Robbins, the ballet *Fancy Free*. She writes: "[*Fancy Free*] is about transience, risk taking, and the sheer fun of popular culture. It focused on New York City, balancing high art with popular entertainment to produce a here-and-now aesthetic."<sup>4</sup> This balance between high and low would characterize the careers of Bernstein and Robbins, who indeed thrived on the here-and-now. In *Fancy Free*, the two limned the



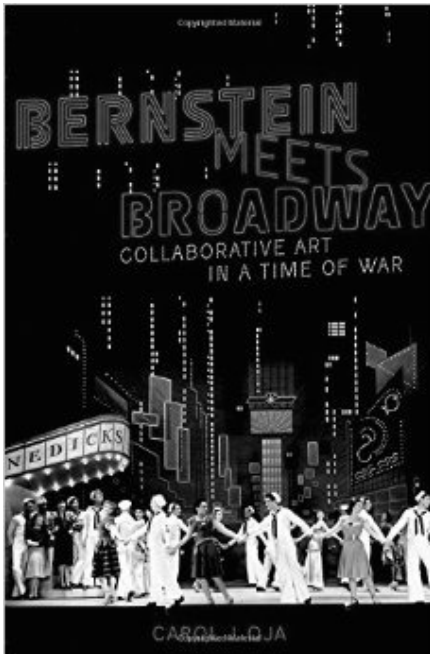
Leonard Bernstein, 1955  
Al Ravenna, *World Telegram*  
Staff Photographer - Library of Congress.  
*New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection.*

space between the charmingly banal and the fiercely forward-thinking, incorporating dance-hall moves and jazz idioms across a "remarkably broad spectrum of cultural and artistic references."<sup>5</sup> Crucially, in a maneuver that was partly autobiographical and distinctly modern, Bernstein and Robbins folded into *Fancy Free* a queer subtext, "with a primary story of boy meets girl that addressed a broad audience and a gay narrative directed to those who knew the signals."<sup>6</sup> Oja interfaces the details of Robbins and Bernstein's respective romances with skillful musical analysis. For example, she connects Bernstein's assimilation of Afro-Cuban traditions in the "Danzón" section of *Fancy Free* to *El Salón México*, the Latin-inspired "light"

## Bernstein Meets Broadway (cont.)

piece of Aaron Copland, Bernstein's one-time mentor and lover.<sup>7</sup> By positioning *Fancy Free* as a subtextual homage to the same-sex entanglements of their youth, in conjunction with its jazz-inspired montage,<sup>8</sup> Oja situates the work's eclecticism as a vital outgrowth of Bernstein and Robbins's collaborative ethos.

*On the Town* grew out of this initial collaboration between Bernstein and Robbins, expanded to include Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who would come on board in 1944 as the show's book writers and two of its principal cast. In the second large section of her mono-



Bernstein Meets Broadway:  
Collaborative Art in the Time of War  
Carol Oja, 2014

graph, "Broadway and Racial Politics," Oja traces the genesis of *On the Town*, including an in-depth look at the career of Sono Osato, a Japanese-American woman who originated the role of Ivy Smith. "By the time of *On the Town*'s premiere," Oja writes, "Sono personified the ways in which the show positioned itself in relation to the politics of war, yet largely stayed under the radar in doing so."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, born in Nebraska to a Japanese father and Irish-French Canadian mother, raised in Chicago and Europe, and trained in the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Sono naturally crossed cultural and generic boundaries, "moving from the world of ballet to that of Broadway in a prolonged by high-flying leap."<sup>10</sup> Sono's *jeté*, however, was not accomplished without fanfare; as she was incorporated into the young, diverse, and dynamic cast of *On the Town*, her father, Shoji, was placed under house arrest in Chicago as part of the United States's Japanese internment program. As Sono pirouetted across the stage each night as the "exotic Miss Turnstiles"—the All-American, though compulsively re-racialized beauty queen next-door—her father became the victim of wartime militancy and midcentury xenophobia.

In many ways, as Oja expertly notes, "exotic Ivy Smith" and Sono Osato—described by one African-American newspaper as "mixed, merry, and musical"<sup>11</sup>—present tandem narratives of cultural arrogation, artistic attempts at racial pluralism that culminated in the "racial erasure" of the first post-war decade.<sup>12</sup> With her biographies of several of the African-Americans who collaborated on *On the Town*, Oja wrests the production's original "interracial roster of young dancers and actors who aimed for socially progressive theater" from its subsequent whitewashed resonance.<sup>13</sup> Bernstein himself did not emerge from *On the Town* untouched by sociopolitical strife: by 1955, both he and Robbins would testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in response to a long list of supposed "subversive activities."<sup>14</sup> Of the 1949 feature film starring Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly (among several other luminaries), for example, Oja writes, "it is important to recognize that the 'America' greeted by the film was different from the place it had been when the stage show emerged. By 1949, not only had World War II been won, but the United States was entering a period of unprecedented growth and cultural ascendancy. It was also a more volatile political era, especially for left-leaning artists."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, where the wartime production of the Broadway show functioned as a critical nexus of multicultural frankness (and, importantly, political and sexual fluidity), its post-war iteration is the most overt manifestation of the work's assimilative qualities: white sailors in white sailor suits sing an anaesthetized score in what Oja astutely names an act of "racial retrenchment."<sup>16</sup>

Though insightful musical references appear throughout *Bernstein on Broadway*, in the final section of the book, "Musical Style," Oja takes a critical look at the score for *On the Town*. Oja writes, "*On the Town* responded . . . to left-wing agitprop, Broadway musicals with famous choreographers, modern ballet, and the most up-to-the minute forms of social dance."<sup>17</sup> It is in Bernstein's ebullient music—and Oja's shrewd analysis of it—that we expect to find some of the most overt examples of the composer borrowing across genres and cultures to attain a poignantly "here-and-now" sound. One such appropriation concerns Bernstein's fusion of high art and jazz in the opening number, "I Feel Like I'm Now Out of Bed Yet." The song, "written by a team of whites with music coded

## Bernstein Meets Broadway (cont.)

as black,” stems from a “white lineage of Broadway spirituals”—its bluesy aesthetic expanded to include modernist, less conventional phrase lengths and adventurous melodic writing.<sup>18</sup> The beloved “Lonely Town” is a similarly eclectic offering. Oja notes that the lush, somewhat unstable harmonies of the number “convey a generalized sense of isolation,” and a break from the “disorienting violence of war.”<sup>19</sup> This wistful setting gives way to an erotically charged *pas de deux*, for which Bernstein cultivated a distinctly rich, orchestral sound within the jazz idiom. “Come Up To My Place” and “I Can Cook Too,” immortalized in 1944 by the inimitable Nancy Walker (of subsequent *Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Rhoda* fame), likewise seethe with empowered feminine sexuality, a fusion of burlesque bawdiness and operatic patter likely inspired by Bernstein’s love of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.<sup>20</sup> That type of overdramatized vocal delivery is caricatured in “Carried Away,” in which Claire and Ozzie trade in provocative innuendo and high art parody amidst the destruction of the American Museum of Natural History.

More veiled, though, are the musical-cultural references found in a trio of nightclub scenes in the second act of the production. In attendance at the fictive “Diamond Eddie’s,” “Congacabana,” and “Slam Bang” clubs, the five lead characters (all but Ivy Smith) witness performances of the seemingly innocuous number “I’m Blue.” In what Oja labels a “twisted racial journey,” “I’m Blue” appears in two satirical versions: a campy, “urban blues” that parodied “cheap white nightclub entertainment,” but that also notably traded in African-American musical tropes,<sup>21</sup> and a “Latinized,” rumba-inflected number sung by a Carmen Miranda-esque character, Señorita Dolores Dolores. Unlike the 1944 original stage work, in which two different actresses, Frances Cassard and Jeanne Gordon, delivered these racialized musical offerings, in the 2014 revival of *On the Town*, a single actress (stage veteran Jackie Hoffman) sings both “I’m Blues” in a silly but outré assimilation of racial stereotypes. Ironically, as jazz, modernist pastiche, and cultural appropriation, this trio is where Bernstein shines best musically. “Rather than being defined by how they conformed to the parameters of a well-established genre,” Oja elucidates,

musicals were characterized by their capacity for flexibility, especially in rela-

tion to high-low qualities. While Bernstein posed this argument to characterize musical comedy in general, he was also articulating a framework for his own compositional style. In a sense, he was validating the cultural status of an aspect of his artistic life that was disdained by many of his classical-music colleagues.<sup>22</sup>

While *Bernstein on Broadway* is the product of a long gestation that only happens to coincide with the 2014 Broadway revival of *On the Town* (Oja does not address this most recent production in her monograph), unpack-

ing the nightclub act in the light of this ultimate assimilation presents a provocative turn. Bernstein’s Jewishness—his own status as *Nisei*, like that of Sono Osato—might have influenced his artistic malleability and fidelity to the here-and-now. Jackie Hoffman, widely known in Broadway circles as a purveyor



Leonard Bernstein circa 1960  
Photo Courtesy of Erich Auerbach/  
Getty Images

of *schtick*, is a marker of immigrant-adjacent status; her shape-shifting presentation, from the notably Eastern European Madame Dilly, to that of Diana Dream and Dolores Dolores (in metaphysical “brown face,” no less!), is a crucial reassessment of *On the Town*’s initial understated colorblindness. Andrea Most notes, “The Broadway theater became [a set] on which Jews described their own vision of an idealized America and subtly wrote themselves into that scenario as accepted members of the white American community.”<sup>23</sup> And so, the final quartet of “Some Other Time,” as Oja indicates, prefigures configurations Bernstein would rehearse in *Candide*’s garden and *West Side Story*’s idyllic “Somewhere”<sup>24</sup>: as idealized meditations on life after shore leave, brimming with optimism for social justice and true humanist collaboration.<sup>25</sup>

## Bernstein Meets Broadway (cont.)

Carol Oja's expansive *Bernstein on Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* maps the creation of a groundbreaking work of musical theater onto its broader sociopolitical context. It does so remarkably—it is a compelling read, a compendium of rich cultural histories and previously untold stories, and as a vast resource for enthusiasts and scholars alike. The capacious footnotes and bibliography that accompany *Bernstein on Broadway* are testaments to its relevance to wide-reaching discourses. As thought-provoking and influential historiography, musicology, ethnography, and music theory, Oja's book is sure to be a fixture on many bookshelves.



On the Town (1949)  
Gene Kelly/Stanley Donen

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joan Peyser, *Bernstein: A Biography* (New York: Billboard Books, 1998), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Bernstein, et al. *Candide: A Comic Operetta in Two Acts* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Carol J. Oja, *Bernstein Meets Broadway: Collaborative Art in a Time of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Crist, "Mutual Responses in the Midst of an Era: Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*," *The Journal of Musicology* 23/4 (Fall 2006): 489.

<sup>15</sup> Carol J. Oja, *Bernstein Meets Broadway*, 114.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>23</sup> Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*" *PMLA* 113:1 (Jan. 1998), 77.

<sup>24</sup> Carol J. Oja, *Bernstein Meets Broadway*, 241.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Crist, "Mutual Responses," 522.

## *AmeriGrove II* and American Music Studies in the Twenty-First Century

Travis D. Stimeling, West Virginia University

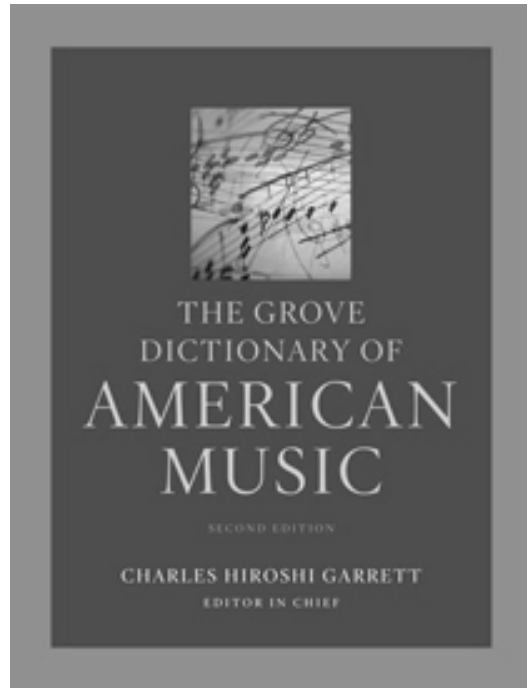
In a brief inset published in the November 1981 issue of the *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter*, Stanley Sadie, editor of the recently issued *New Grove Dictionary of Music (NG)*, announced the development of “an American Grove” to be published “by the end of 1984.”<sup>1</sup> Four years later (and a few months after the initial projected publication date), co-editor H. Wiley Hitchcock offered the first public progress report on what was then called *The New Grove Dictionary of Music in the United States*, unveiling a vision for a “national dictionary” that articulated a “wholly ecumenical and comprehensive” vision of American music and American music studies that is quite familiar to Americanist musicologists today.<sup>2</sup> With editorial input from such notable scholars as Richard Crawford, Carol Oja, Judith Tick, Horace Boyer, and Bill Malone, among many others, the editorial board developed twenty-six projected subject areas that revealed the editors’ deliberate efforts to balance coverage of art music (one-quarter of the total projected content) and the rich array of American vernacular musics, including jazz, rock, country, ragtime, blues/gospel, and “ethnic” music, while also attending to the uniquely American issues of immigrant musicians, music industry infrastructures, and multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Hitchcock indicated that the new dictionary would not simply express a decidedly American view of the nation’s musical life, but that it would strike another nationalistic chord in its use of “American orthography and usage.”<sup>4</sup> When *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* was finally published in 1986, it had ballooned to four volumes from the one volume that was initially planned and included more than 5000 entries encompassing both the breadth and depth of American music as it was known at the time.

Early reviews of the four-volume *AmeriGrove* were generally laudatory and celebrated the project’s efforts

to publish high-quality scholarship on a wide array of American music topics. Mary Wallace Davidson, for example, suggested that “[t]he edition succeeds brilliantly in its intention,”<sup>5</sup> while Keith Potter described *AmeriGrove* as “without doubt another strikingly successful juggernaut from the Macmillan/Grove assembly line.”<sup>6</sup> Richard Crawford, who served on the *AmeriGrove* editorial team, also noted “the work’s symbolic importance,” observing in the preface to his extensive historiographic review essay that “[t]here is something deeply satisfying in seeing the facts of this nation’s musical history recast into the Grove format, edited crisply and meticulously, and hence seeming to endorse the significance of a fiddle of study that traditionally has stood outside the academic establish-

ment.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, these early reviews also pointed to several issues that have been of central concern to Americanist musicology in the decades since *AmeriGrove*’s publication. For instance, both Potter and Allen Britton problematized its use of “American” to refer almost exclusively to the United States while excluding other nations that also see themselves as American;<sup>8</sup> this subject has recently been addressed by the Society for American Music, which revised its mission statement in 2012 to note its dedication “to the study, teaching, creation and dissemination of *all musics in the Americas*.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, many reviewers noted that, while *AmeriGrove* was the most comprehensive resource on

the subject to date, it was clear that editorial decisions led to the omission of many significant figures and space limitations limited opportunities to provide nuance to several significant articles.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Peter Dickinson noted in a review published in *Music & Letters*, *AmeriGrove* offered a level of depth and nuance that was not present in many of the American topics covered in *NG*, published only five years earlier.<sup>11</sup>



*The Grove Dictionary of American Music*



## *AmeriGrove II* (cont.)

The decade immediately following the publication of *AmeriGrove* witnessed the publication of an endless array of exciting new monographs and journal articles that expanded the scope of musicology, generally, and American music studies, specifically, to include serious study of an even wider array of vernacular musical practices, popular musics, and contemporary art musics than had been represented in the four-volume work. Thus, by the beginning of the new millennium, a strong case could be made for a revision that not only reflected the current state of scholarship on the topics that concerned its original editors but that also embraced the increasing diversity of methodologies and subjects that “American music” comprised. At the same time, as the field of American studies had begun to suggest in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the subsequent “Global War on Terror,” such nationalistic projects raised serious concerns about American chauvinism in an increasingly global and transnational era.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of these developments, it had become clear by the beginning of the new millennium that *AmeriGrove* was in need of a significant expansion and revision, much as *NG* itself had gone through in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The first public discussion about *AmeriGrove II* was moderated by then-*Grove Music Online* editor-in-chief Laura Macy at a joint meeting of the Society for American Music and the Center for Black Music Research in Chicago in March 2006.<sup>13</sup> As a doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who was in the midst of writing a dissertation on country music in 1970s Texas, I was overjoyed that this once-in-a-generation opportunity to contribute to such an important scholarly monument was in the works, and I immediately began to bombard Charles Hiroshi Garrett, who had been appointed *AmeriGrove II*'s editor-in-chief in 2004,<sup>14</sup> with ideas for new country music-related entries (hoping, of course, that I would be commissioned to write at least a few of them). It would take a couple of years before I received my first commission to write or revise a handful of entries related to my dissertation topic, and when I submitted those entries to the online “contributor’s portal,” I imagined that my work with *AmeriGrove II* was complete (at least until copyediting).

Needless to say, I was quite surprised when Garrett invited me to serve as a Contributing Editor (and later, a Senior Editor) for *AmeriGrove II* in the fall of 2010. I accepted the offer to edit approximately three hundred entries on country music without hesitation but with great trepidation, for I knew that I was following in the footsteps of many of the leading scholars in American musicology and, in country music studies, those of the prolific country music historians Bill Malone (who had overseen the country music entries for *AmeriGrove*) and the late Charles Wolfe. Yet, the list of country music entries that the Advisory Board passed along to me also revealed an opportunity to document ongoing developments in our knowledge of country music artists, music industry executives, and styles as well as to capture new critical perspectives on the genre’s place in domestic and transatlantic life. As Garrett notes in the preface to *AmeriGrove II*, country music coverage was increased by nearly fifty percent and a new subject entry was commissioned “[i]n response to the sustained impact of and scholarly interest in country music.”<sup>15</sup>

Following the spirit of inclusivity and diversity that guided the development of *AmeriGrove*, I followed a few guiding principles as I commissioned and, later, edited entries in my subject area. First, in recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of country music studies, I actively sought to commission articles from scholars working in a variety of fields—from musicology and ethnomusicology to American history, folklore, and journalism—and deploying a variety of research methodologies and critical frameworks through which to understand this music and its cultural contexts. Second, because country music has been the product of countless cross-cultural exchanges in the United States and abroad, I encouraged contributing authors to highlight the genre’s multicultural and global histories, when possible. Finally, I urged contributors to consider issues of musical style in their discussions of individual artists. While this seems like a fairly obvious subject for a music dictionary to discuss, many of the country music entries in *AmeriGrove* did not adequately address issues of sound and style, reflecting the disciplinary biases of the first generation of country music scholars.

## *AmeriGrove II* (cont.)

A number of entries reveal the influence of these three editorial principles, but one needs not look further than Jocelyn Neal's excellent (and more than 8000-word) entry on "country music" to see these principles in action. The entry not only offers a detailed treatment of the key styles of country music from the first recordings in the 1920s to the present, but it also guides readers to dozens of significant country artists. Furthermore, Neal offers a substantial discussion of the genre's cultural history, its roots in the culture of the rural white working class, and the institutionalization of country music through recordings and radio. A music theorist by training, Neal also brings a musically sensitive approach to her writing on the subject, pointing readers to specific songwriting techniques and performance practices. A lengthy section addressing "global country" addresses recent scholarship demonstrating country music cultures outside of North America, while a section on "fan culture" points to an often unheralded but culturally significant contributor to country music life. Finally, Neal concludes her essay with an analysis of key themes and trends in country music scholarship to demonstrate the depth and breadth of scholarly engagement with the genre.

Serving in a senior editorial role on a project of this size and scope is an object lesson in cooperation and compromise. For instance, the "country music" area overlapped significantly with several other areas, especially the "folk music" area; consequently, it was absolutely essential to work with Paul Wells, the editor responsible for the folk music entries, to ensure the best possible outcome for the entries in both areas. Furthermore, I spent at least an hour every morning for more than a year corresponding with potential contributors, responding to inquiries from commissioned authors, and managing submissions in the online editorial interface. The sometimes lengthy revision process for each entry required that all parties approach the work with a willingness to listen to one another and a desire to create exceptional scholarship. These conversations introduced me to new information and ideas and challenged me to reconsider my own preconceived notions. Perhaps more importantly, though, was the opportunity to build relationships with new colleagues and to deepen relationships with long-time collaborators. My work as a scholar of country music has been immeasurably strengthened as a consequence of this work.

Although several entries were added to the Grove Music Online system beginning in 2010, the eight-volume print version of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd Edition, made its official public debut at the 2013 American Musicological Society meeting in Pittsburgh. Flipping through its pages on the first day of the conference, it was humbling to note the sheer number of contributors who offered their expertise to this expansive resource. Over the course of the weekend, I walked past the Oxford University Press table regularly just to watch contributors walk up to the imposing volumes and seek out their entries, and it was there that I truly began to understand *AmeriGrove II's* true value. It is not only a snapshot of our current understanding of American music (broadly defined) and a springboard for future research projects, recital programs, recordings, and lesson plans. Rather, with a team of more than seventy editors, nearly two thousand contributors, and the work of the vast team at Oxford University Press working for nearly a decade,<sup>16</sup> *AmeriGrove II* represents the ongoing commitment of a massive community to telling the stories of American music with clarity, precision, and depth and demonstrates the continuing strength of our field.



*Dolly-Parton, 1975*  
Michael Ochs Archives,  
Photo courtesy of Getty Images

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Sadie, "An American Grove in the Making," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 11/1 (November 1981): 3.

<sup>2</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock, "On the Path to the U.S. Grove," *Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association, Second Series*, 41/3 (March 1985): 467.

## *AmeriGrove II* (cont.)

<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, "On the Path to the U.S. Grove," 469. Editorial assistant Susan Feder later noted that "the vast panorama of American music would be inadequately covered unless we gave generous treatment to what Wiley Hitchcock had elsewhere termed vernacular traditions" (Susan Feder, "The American Grove: An Insider's Account," *Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter* 16/1 [November 1986]: 2).

<sup>4</sup> Hitchcock, "On the Path to the U.S. Grove," 470. Richard Evidon has argued that NG was also indelibly influenced by developments in American musicology during the 1970s (Richard Evidon, "The New Grove: A Personal View," *19th-Century Music* 5/2 [Autumn 1981]: 155-156).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Wallace Davidson, review of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association, Second Series*, 44/1 (September 1987): 43.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Potter, "Amerigrove," *The Musical Times* 128/1732 (June 1987): 329.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Crawford, "Amerigrove's Pedigree: On The New Grove Dictionary of American Music," *College Music Symposium* 27 (1987): 172.

<sup>8</sup> Potter, "Amerigrove," 329; Allen Britton, review of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, American Music* 5/2 (Summer 1987): 195-196. For further context regarding the name change, consult Crawford, "Amerigrove's Pedigree," 172n1.

<sup>9</sup> "SAM: What Is SAM?" <<http://american-music.org/sam/WhatIsSAM.php>> (accessed 26 January 2014), emphasis added. Thanks to Mariana Whitmer for providing background information on the revision process (e-mail communication to author, 15 February 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Consider, for instance, Britton's extensive discussion of the various biases evident in column space devoted to various composers and performers (Britton, review of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 196-200). See also Stephen Banfield, "Review Essay: From Harry Partch to Dolly Parton," *Journal of American Studies* 22/2 (1988): 282-283; Leonard Burkat, "Letter to the Editor," *American Music* 7/4 (Winter 1989): 461-464; Stanley Sadie, "The New Grove Dictionary of American Music," *American Music* 8/2 (Summer 1990): 227-229; Leonard Burkat, "Leonard Burkat Replies," *American Music* 8/2 (Summer 1990): 229-230.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Dickinson, review of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, Music & Letters* 70/2 (May 1989): 232-235.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the discussion of transnationalism and American Studies in Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004," *American Quarterly* 57/1 (March 2005): 17-57; Mae M. Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other': Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* 57/1 (March 2005): 59-65; and Alfred Hornung, "Transnational American Studies: Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* 57/1 (March 2005): 67-73.

<sup>13</sup> *Conference on Black Music Research sponsored by the Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College Chicago, and the Thirty-Second Annual Conference of the Society for American Music, 15-19 March 2006*, <<http://american-music.org/conferences/Chicago/ChicagoConferenceProgram.pdf>> (accessed 7 February 2014), 27.

<sup>14</sup> "Grove Conversations: Charles Hiroshi Garrett," <[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/page/Contributor\\_interview](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/page/Contributor_interview)> (accessed 7 February 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "Preface," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), vii-viii.

<sup>16</sup> These numbers are taken from "Grove Conversations: Charles Hiroshi Garrett," <[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/page/Contributor\\_interview](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/page/Contributor_interview)> (accessed 7 February 2014).

# The H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music

and The Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities at Brooklyn College  
In collaboration with the Conservatory of Music, the Department of Africana Studies,  
and the American Studies Program at Brooklyn College present:

## Music in Polycultural America

### Speaker Series—Fall 2014

#### *Jazz, Genre, & Piano Rolls in the 1920s*

##### **Jeffrey Taylor**

Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, and their colleagues are now widely considered part of the first generation of jazz pianists. Yet genre boundaries during their formative years in the 1920s were actually extremely fluid, ultimately bringing into question the idea of a single musical style that could be called “jazz piano.” The largely forgotten medium of the player-piano roll—in which most of the important pianists of the decade worked—can provide some intriguing clues about how both players and listeners viewed keyboard artistry of the time.

**Jeffrey Taylor** is Director of the Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music and a Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center.

Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup> at 3:45 p.m.

Tanger Auditorium

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#### *We Got the Jazz: Next Generation Jazz, Hip hop and the Digital Scene*

##### **Aja Burrell Wood**

Over twenty years after American hip hop group A Tribe Called Quest released “Jazz (We’ve Got),” the first generation of jazz artists who also came of age in the hip-hop era are exploring with new enthusiasm the hip hop, rock and pop music of their time. Further, the use of digital technology has led to burgeoning online communities and innovative live presentations of jazz that both embrace tradition and forge new paths. Within this shifting context of music, time and technology, Revive Music Group (RMG) has emerged as one of the leading online hubs and live music presenters of what has been called “Next Generation” jazz.

**Aja Burrell Wood** is Director of Marketing and Promotional Strategy at Revive Music Group, and an Adjunct Lecturer at Brooklyn College. She is completing a PhD in ethnomusicology at the University of Michigan.

Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup> at 2:15 p.m.

Bedford Lounge, Brooklyn College Student Center (SUBO)

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#### *Exploiters or Facilitators?: The Role of Jewish Jazz Record Company Owners*

##### **Robert Cherry & Jennifer Griffith**

In the late 1960s several Jewish-owned record companies were sold off for huge sums, while most of the artists they recorded went penniless; rumors of exploitation were a result. This presentation contends that while exploitation existed, these record companies were actually responsible for bringing artists to the public’s attention—and thus black music from the periphery of popular culture to the center. It argues that the ebbs and flows of jazz popularity—not the personal values of record company owners—helps explain the behavior of these businessmen.

**Robert Cherry** is Stern Professor at Brooklyn College and co-author of *Moving Working Families Forward* (NYU Press, 2012). His work on the jazz industry is part of a larger project that looks at the role of Jewish values in shaping twentieth-century US popular culture. **Jennifer Griffith** moves between jazz scholarship and her creative efforts as a composer and jazz vocalist. She has written extensively on composer/bandleader/bassist Charles Mingus.

Monday, November 24<sup>th</sup> at 2:15 p.m.

Tanger Auditorium