

Institute for Studies In American Music

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

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume XXXIII, No. 1

Fall 2003

Filming the
*Music of
Williamsburg*
with
Alan Lomax
by
Carol J. Oja

In a twist on Tip O'Neill's famous quip, "All politics is local," a seminar last spring at the College of William and Mary combed sources in its own backyard to uncover a piece of hometown history with national resonance. Fusing archival research and fieldwork, the class project raised a number of provocative questions: what motivated the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1960 to hire the well-known folk-music collector Alan Lomax to work on a film titled *Music of Williamsburg*, which was produced to give tourists a sense of daily life in mid-eighteenth-century Virginia? Who were the traditional musicians pictured in the film? Almost all were African American, and their performances sizzle. Yet none were named in the credits. What political agenda might have energized the film, given its attempt to present a realistic portrayal of the slave experience? After all, this was 1960, a time when segregation remained firm in Virginia; schools were being closed in defiance of *Brown v. Board of Education*; and the state's infamous "Racial Integrity Law" of 1924 that forbid interracial marriage was still fully in force (it was declared unconstitutional in 1967).



*Ed Young (cane fife) and Hobart Smith (banjo) in Williamsburg, 1960
Photo by Alan Lomax/Courtesy of the Alan Lomax Archive*

What follows is a glimpse into the fascinating story unearthed by a cluster of graduate students and undergraduates, some in music, others in American Studies. We were lucky enough to have Cary Carson, Vice President of Research at Colonial Williamsburg, sit in on the class and lend generous assistance. Kip Lornell also consulted with us, helping to shape fieldwork strategies. The performers in the film turned out to include luminaries from the world of traditional music—especially Bessie Jones, John Davis, the Georgia Sea Island Singers, and banjo-player/fiddler Hobart Smith.

Music of Williamsburg, directed by Sidney Meyers, was designed to combine historical recreation with a fictional narrative. In many ways, it appears dated, even quaint, yet the quality of the workmanship is high. Our seminar focused on the musicians, however, rather than aesthetic criticism of the film. The main story involves a flirtation between a "Miller's Daughter," played by Pamela Tiffin (who the next year launched a Hollywood career with *Summer and Smoke*, followed by Billy Wilder's *One, Two, Three*), and a "Sailor," played by Christopher Cary (who made a career largely in supporting roles). As the couple banter with one another, they do so against the backdrop of an imaginary day in Williamsburg in 1768. At the opening, the sailor walks up from the James River singing "Johnny Todd," an early English ballad. Next a group of African Americans appears in a cart performing "Moses, Moses." The film soon cuts to historic Wren Chapel at the College of William and Mary, where a psalm is sung. Then follows a scene of slaves in the field, rhythmically

Inside This Issue

The Germania Musical
Society by
Nancy Newman.....4

Music of Carl Ruggles
by Stephen Slottow...6

Scorsese's Narratives
of Blues Discovery:
Review by
Ray Allen.....8

Eric Porter's *What is This
Thing Called Jazz?*:
Review by Salim
Washington10

Roger Sessions and
Arthur Berger:
Review by
Anton Vishio11

Music of Williamsburg (continued)

hoeing the soil as they sing “Emma, You’s My Darlin’.” Throughout, the scene shifts steadily between European colonists and African slaves. While whites dominate this integrated view, a crucial point is made by not caricaturing blacks but attempting to treat them with respect. Toward the end of the film, two long segments focus on a production of *The Beggar’s Opera*, attended by the Sailor and Miller’s Daughter. Meanwhile, extensive footage captures a frolic that goes on simultaneously in the slave quarters.

Two musical directors were hired to handle the different repertoires. Parlor, church, and theater music for the white colonists was “orchestrated and directed from eighteenth century scores” by Gene Forrell of New York City; *The Beggar’s Opera* was chosen because it had been performed in Williamsburg in 1768. “Such authorities as Carleton Sprague Smith and Gilbert Chase,” stated an unsigned précis of the project, “have been approached about the proposed content of the Music Film and have enthusiastically endorsed the plan” (quotations from “Notes” [1960]).

Lomax coordinated the traditional music, seeking vestiges of colonial practice in the contemporary world. He was combining fieldwork with historic re-enactment. Like Forrell, Lomax did considerable research, as outlined in a letter written to Arthur Smith, producer of the film, where he detailed sources consulted, from Hans Nathan’s articles about minstrelsy in *Musical Quarterly*, to “correspondents at the Ford Foundation Jazz Research Project at Tulane,” to historic travel accounts, to interviews by “WPA field workers . . . as late as 1930 (!)” [his exclamation point]. After all, this was more than a decade before publication of Eileen Southern’s *The Music of Black Americans* (1971) or Dena Epstein’s *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* (1977). The biggest challenge for Lomax was

the “slave sequence” at the end, as he dubbed the frolic, which was filmed at night over an eight-hour period.

For the film, Lomax scouted out musicians from across the southeastern United States, building on his longstanding contacts and taking a fieldwork trip, sponsored by Colonial Williamsburg, during the month prior to filming. The musicians

hired included Bessie Jones and the Spiritual Singers of Coastal Georgia (later known as the Georgia Sea Island Singers), Nathaniel Rahmings (drummer from the Bahamas by way of Miami), Ed Young (fife player from Como, Mississippi), Prince Ellis (jawbone player from Tidewater Virginia), and the Bright Light Quartet from Weems, Virginia (on the Northern Neck). Interestingly, in light of the issue of miscegenation that defined Virginia’s racial landscape in 1960, the fiddler and banjo player in the slave scenes was white—Hobart Smith, legendary among old-time musicians

as one of the great virtuosos of Virginia’s southwest mountains. Smith plays in the frolic scene but is not shown on screen. He does appear earlier in the film, though, wearing eighteenth-century garb and playing a fiddle in a barn.

Of the many intriguing issues that emerge from Lomax’s work on the film, several will be singled out here, including the relation of this film to Lomax’s release of *Georgia Sea Island Songs* on New World Records; Bessie Jones’s unexpected family tie to Williamsburg; and the film’s racial dynamic as emblematic of the Civil Rights Movement.

For many of us teaching American music, Lomax’s recording of *Georgia Sea Island Songs*, issued on New World Records in 1977, remains a crucial sound document for exploring African retentions in the New World, spirituals, or the glories of Bessie Jones and the singers she worked with. On that disc, Lomax included three vocal groups, labeled “A,” “B,” and “C,” which featured different configurations of the Sea Island Singers. As Lomax made clear in the liner notes, Group “B” was recorded when he went to the island “looking for musicians to perform the black music in a film about Colonial Williamsburg.” He dates this as 1961, but it must have been the previous year, since that was when the film was shot. Group “C,” meanwhile, was recorded on location at Colonial Williamsburg in 1960, and, as a result includes musicians who were not part of the usual vocal ensemble. These were Nat Rahmings on drums, Ed Young on fife, and, most interestingly, Hobart Smith



Bessie Jones (front, center) and other performers on location in Williamsburg, 1960

Photo by Alan Lomax/Courtesy of the Alan Lomax Archive

Continued on page 12

ISAM Newsletter Vol. XXXIII, No. 1 / ISSN: 0145-8396

Editors Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen

Managing Editor Benjamin Bierman

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

Production Assistant Kathleen Mason Krotzman

The ISAM Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring. Copyright 2003 by the Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 2900 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11210.

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

Email: <isam@brooklyn.cuny.edu>

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

ISAM Matters

We need your help. Public education is a low priority in the New York State budget these days—since 1990, funding for the City University of New York has been slashed by over 40 percent—and the Institute is feeling the pinch. Please make as generous a donation as you can to help support the continued existence of the Institute for Studies in American Music, now in its thirty-third year. Your contributions will help us to issue publications such as this *Newsletter* and the recently published collection of writings on jazz by Mark Tucker, to sponsor conferences such as our tribute to Alan Lomax last spring, and to invite guest speakers and performers to campus. We ask that you contribute \$30 to become a voluntary subscriber of the *Newsletter*, but would be grateful for any amount you can give. Thank you for your support of American music!

* * *

We are happy to report that **H. Wiley Hitchcock** received the Society for American Music's Lifetime Achievement Award at its meeting last March in Tempe, Arizona. The award's citation, read by **Richard Crawford**, recognizes "the foremost architect" of the effort to extend "the purview of earlier musicological organizations, practices, and patronage to include America's music making." **Carol J. Oja** has been named William Powell Mason Professor of Music at Harvard University, where she began teaching in Fall 2003. Warmest congratulations to Wiley and Carol.

Our colloquium series, **Music in Polycultural America**, continues full swing. This fall, we enjoyed a lecture/performance by the Creative Music Convergence Ensemble, comprised of our own **Salim Washington**, pianist **Vijay Iyer**, kotoist **Miya Masaoka**, saxophonists **Matana Roberts** and **Aaron Stewart**, bassist **Hakim Jami**, and drummer and cellist **Elliot Humberto Kavee**. **Kyra P. Gaunt** (New York University) shared her research on the origins of hip-hop in Brooklyn, and violinist and composer **Leroy Jenkins** spoke on the art of improvisation.

Upcoming American Music Events: On 5 February 2004, a book launch and symposium in honor of *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*, edited by Stephen Peles with Stephen Dembski, Andrew Mead, and Joseph N. Straus (Princeton University Press, 2003) will take place at the CUNY Graduate Center, 365 Fifth Avenue, New York City. On 30 October 2004, ISAM will host an international conference titled **Calypso Music in New York City and the Atlantic World**. For more information on these and other events, please visit our website, <<http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>>. On 17-19 November 2004, Music in Gotham will sponsor a conference titled **A Century of Composing in America: 1820-1920**, to be held at the CUNY Graduate Center. For information on how to submit a proposal, visit <<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/music/events/ComposingAmerica.html>>.

We thank **Graeme Fullerton** for his superb work as managing editor of the *Newsletter* from 1999 to 2003, and we welcome **Benjamin Bierman**, a composer in the Ph.D. program at the CUNY Graduate Center, as our new managing editor.

—Ellie M. Hisama

SUPPORT AMERICAN MUSIC

Please send your tax-deductible contribution made payable to **Brooklyn College Member Organization (memo: ISAM)** to:

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



Behind the Beat *Jazz Criticism by Mark Tucker*

A 48-page collection of Mark Tucker's *Behind the Beat* columns is available for purchase. Please make check or money order for \$12 (\$10 plus \$2 for shipping/handling) payable to **Brooklyn College Member Organization (memo: ISAM)** and send to the address above.

The Germania Musical Society and Other Forty-Eighters

In July 1853, *Dwight's Journal of Music* printed an "open letter" that had appeared recently in Leipzig's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.¹ The subject of the letter was the *Journal's* own accounts of musical activity in Boston during the previous year. The letter's author, Richard Pohl, described these accounts as "truly astonishing," and compared the excitement of learning that orchestral music was thriving in the United States to the discovery of "a new tract of fertile soil or a rich gold mine." An ardent advocate of symphonic music generally and Wagner specifically, Pohl proclaimed that Boston's latest season proved that the American contribution to the progress of art could no longer be ignored.

Pohl's appraisal was drawn from tallies of the 1852-53 concert season that had appeared in *Dwight's Journal* that spring. He commended the fact that all Beethoven's symphonies had been performed multiple times, noting especially that the Ninth had been presented twice by the Germania Musical Society and the Handel and Haydn Society. "By this one fact Boston raises herself to a musical rank, which neither Old England, nor many highly celebrated German chapels [*sic*] will dispute with her." Boston also surpassed England in appreciation of newer composers, namely Schumann, Berlioz, and Wagner. Pohl prophesied that America would attain artistic perfection quickly, leaving Europe behind.

Perhaps we shall, within a shorter time than we ourselves imagine, meet again "over there," to witness the first performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in Boston, and to cry out with newly confirmed conviction to the land of the Future: WESTWARD MOVES THE HISTORY OF ART! [Emphasis in the original.]

The focus on *Tannhäuser* was not accidental, as the Germania Musical Society, Boston's foremost resident orchestra, had given the U. S. premiere of the opera's Finale in autumn 1852. As if in response to Pohl, the Germanians offered a "Wagner Night" the following December that included selections from *Tannhäuser*, *Rienzi*, and *Lohengrin*, interspersed with works by Rossini, Bellini, and Paganini.

The notion of the "westward movement" of art was not intended metaphorically. As Pohl penned these words, many musicians were literally moving west, part of the transatlantic immigration that brought at least one and a half million German-speakers to the United States in the period 1840-1860.² Those individuals who left Europe as a result of political or economic difficulties in the decades straddling 1848, the "year of revolutions," have become known collectively as "Forty-Eighters."³ It was during 1848 that the members of the newly formed Germania Musical Society emigrated from Berlin to escape the constraints of aristocratic patronage and worsening conditions for musicians. For six years, the Germania's two dozen members concertized in North America, offering upwards of 900 performances in dozens of cities and towns along the eastern seaboard and as far west as the Mississippi. The Germanians brought the "sounds of home" to many immigrants in these places, appearing "as a renewal of artistic bonds between the old and new homes."⁴ Their influence went well beyond nostalgia, however. Like many Forty-Eighters, the

Germanians embodied a cosmopolitanism that superceded political boundaries. And like other Forty-Eighters, their experiences were gathered from disparate sources, part of a transatlantic exchange whose ramifications are still felt today.

Musically active Forty-Eighters who performed with the Germania include Otto Dresel and non-Germans such as Teresa Parodi and Edouard Reményi. Other "refugees of revolution" include Hans Balatka and the sometime-impresario, Henry Börnstein.⁵ Still others came to visit, displaced by the disruptions that followed the failure of the revolutionary movements: Henriette Sontag, Giovanni Mario, and Giulia Grisi. The conductor Joseph Gungl, with whom most of the Germanians had worked in Berlin, arrived in September 1848. Many of Gungl's musicians, like those of the Saxonia and Steyermark Orchestras, decided to remain in the U. S.⁶ Pohl's colleague at the *Neue Zeitschrift*, Theodor Hagen, immigrated in 1854 and became a writer for the Mason Brothers' *New York Musical Review*. An ardent Wagnerian, Hagen fulfilled Pohl's dream and witnessed the first complete American performance of *Tannhäuser*, conducted by former Germanian Carl Bergmann, in 1859.

* * *

As important as the performance of individual works was to American cultural life, it was just one aspect of the profound changes transforming the experience of instrumental music at mid-century. Concerts of the Germanians represent an entirely new era in the history of the public concert. Beginning in the 1830s, conductors such as Johann Strauss Sr. in Vienna and Philippe Musard in Paris broadened the audience for orchestral music by offering frequent, low-priced, mixed-repertory programs. During the following decade, charismatic leaders such as Gungl in Berlin and Louis Antoine Jullien in London expanded these events into the "mass orchestral concert."⁷ Their programs were designed to attract audiences numbering in the thousands—rather than the hundreds that had previously comprised the audience for individual concerts of instrumental music. To accommodate the diverse expectations inherent in such large gatherings, their repertory ranged from the new, popular dance genres (such as waltzes and polkas) to opera selections (overtures, arias, and finales), from virtuoso variations and medleys ("potpourris") to complete symphonies. Concerts were held frequently, often in series. Instead of the four to nine annual concerts typical of court orchestras and philharmonics, the new-style ensembles offered dozens of programs each season.

The Germanians brought these practices to the United States, probably the best place at that historical moment for the realization of the artistic and entrepreneurial spirit that had inspired such ensembles. Their careful programming of substantial compositions and lighter works, low ticket prices (lower still at public rehearsals), and extensive series (twelve to thirty concerts per season) were all in keeping with the phenomenon of the "private orchestras." The Germania's conductors, Carl Lenschow and (from 1850) Carl Bergmann, used the publication of original works arranged for solo piano to promote the orchestra. More than sixty compositions were intended as souvenirs for the domestic market,

Germania Musical Society (continued)

such as Bergmann's twelve-title series, "A Choice Collection of Waltzes and Polkas as performed by the Germania Musical Society," or "The Season in Newport," a set of polkas whose titles recall the large hotels where the Germanians performed during their summer residency at the Rhode Island ocean resort. The abundance of such compositions demonstrates that a mid-century musician could advocate for both the symphony and the commodification of culture, for a "classical" repertory and "modern" composition. Furthermore, what we identify today as the techniques of mass culture—marketing and inexpensive reproduction—helped secure the position of an instrumental music that was secular and autonomous, controlled by musicians rather than church and state.⁸

The democratizing tendency of the mass concert was not lost on the Forty-Eighters and their contemporaries. Audiences in the European capitals averaged 2,500, despite conservatives' suspicion of large gatherings. The Germania's audience in Boston often exceeded 3,000. On both sides of the Atlantic, these events provided ample evidence of the commercial potential and social meaning of the middle-class public, a multifarious population that did not necessarily recognize itself as something other than a collection of competing interests. The process of coming together for concerts afforded the middle-class an opportunity for self-reflection that helped changed the nature of public life itself.

Critical theorist Jürgen Habermas has noted the importance of cultural, seemingly non-political activities to the formation of a new "public sphere" that operated outside the boundaries of traditional authority.⁹ The situation of the Germanians and other Forty-Eighters offers an opportunity to explore the United States' role in this development. Certainly Dwight perceived the potential relationship between aesthetics and political ideology when he characterized the annual festivals of German singing clubs in the U. S. as "popular mass-gatherings so brimming with the sentiment of liberty."¹⁰ Implicitly acknowledging the failure of the 1848 Revolutions, Dwight observed that, "music-loving Germans must seek out a republic for the free continuance of their musical existence."

According to Germanian Henry Albrecht, it was "the free continuance of their musical existence" that the orchestra members sought in coming to the United States. In the only known memoir of the ensemble, Albrecht described their idealistic attitude toward relations between musicians. The Germanians worked cooperatively. Neither conductor nor soloists were accorded rank; the integrity of the ensemble was always emphasized. As Albrecht noted, the organization was founded on "the communist principle," a term synonymous with democracy in some quarters. In their quest for "a completely independent,

truly free life," the Germanians agreed to share equally in rights, duties, and rewards. Their motto, "One for all and all for one," was an allusion to the French social utopianism that flourished in the 1840s.¹¹

* * *

Fifty years have passed since the publication of H. Earle Johnson's article, "The Germania Musical Society," and it is still a good introduction to the orchestra.¹² Not surprisingly, however, aspects of the Germania that were less intriguing in the 1950s are of greater interest now: the ideological and historical developments that shaped the members' experience; the mix of "highbrow and lowbrow" compositions that filled their repertory; the orchestra's origins in the private orchestras of Europe and their legacy in the Symphony Orchestras of Boston and Chicago. This is not to diminish what the Germania is most well-known for, the premiere and repeat performances of compositions that became part of the standard repertory, especially works by Beethoven and

Mendelssohn. Nor should their frequent performance of Italian and French opera excerpts be neglected. But we can now consider the Germanians' activities in the context of a new perspective on 1848. Instead of focusing on the failure of the Revolutions to alter the political landscape, historians have begun to emphasize the social and cultural shifts that precipitated the uprisings.¹³ Paramount to these shifts was an exchange of ideas that transcended national boundaries, made possible by the movement of people on an unprecedented scale. For evidence of such an exchange, we need only to consider the cosmopolitanism that blended a German predilection for instrumental forms, pan-European programming practices, French social theory, and the American marketplace in an ensemble called the Germania Musical Society.

—Nancy Newman
Wesleyan University

Editors' note: This essay is drawn from Newman's Ph.D. dissertation, Good Music for a Free People: The Germania Musical Society and Transatlantic Musical Culture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century (Brown University, 2002).

Notes

¹ "OPEN LETTER TO MR. J. S. DWIGHT," as printed in *Dwight's Journal of Music* (30 July 1853), 133-34. Originally published as "Ein Blick nach dem 'fernen Westen,'" *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (17 June 1853), 269-73, and signed with Richard Pohl's pseudonym, "Hoplit."

² Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (University of Illinois Press, 1992), 15.

³ Beginning in January 1848, popular uprisings inspired partly by the French and American Revolutions engulfed continental Europe. The outcome varied according to place, but in the German lands the movement toward democracy failed completely. In mid-1849, the Prussian king rejected the constitution offered him by the first pan-German parliament, leading to a period of reaction. For a succinct account of events, see Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848-1851* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Continued on page 15



*The Germania Musical Society
Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society*

Wayward Compositional Procedure in the Music of Carl Ruggles

The American composer Carl Ruggles (1876-1971) has tended to be viewed very much as an isolated figure—a stubborn, reclusive, profane, “ruggedly individualist” New Englander, painstakingly creating his uncompromisingly dissonant music in the wilds of Vermont. This image is somewhat misleading. It may apply better to his later years, after he had virtually stopped composing, but during his active compositional career (roughly from 1899 to 1947) he was a member of a close-knit group of composers bound by close personal and professional ties and similar musical views. This group, known as the *ultra-moderns*, included such figures as Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger, Edgard Varèse, and Dane Rudhyar. Charles Ives became closely associated with the group in the late 1920s, mainly in the role of financier.

Many composers of this group have received substantial scholarly attention. Ives and Varèse, of course, have received the most, but both Cowell and Crawford have been the subjects of recent ISAM conferences, and Charles Seeger, in addition to his longstanding importance to ethnomusicologists, has also received increasing attention from musicologists and theorists.¹

In comparison, Ruggles still largely basks in a benign neglect, although interest has increased somewhat in recent years.² One reason may be that, unlike Cowell or Seeger, his influence on other composers has been small. A more important reason is that he wrote very little. He completed only nine works, of which the last, *Exaltation*, is a hymn only a page long.³ Nonetheless, despite his minuscule output, his few compositions are intense, powerful, finely crafted, and utterly individual—they are not easily mistaken for those of any other composer. An individuality so audible points to distinctive musical characteristics and compositional procedures. However, upon close examination one not only finds such procedures and characteristics, but also discovers that they are never consistently present—the music is not *systematic* in the sense of much of Ives’s and Cowell’s music. As Robert Tucker Robison writes, “Ruggles’s music, in fact, defies all attempts to make it conform to any rigid set of rules. Rather than strict systems, one finds, to use the words of James Tenney, only tendencies.”⁴ This consistent inconsistency is, I am convinced, entirely purposeful on the part of the composer.

Thus a persistent theme in Ruggles’s music is the tension between consistent compositional procedures and the composer’s determination not to be constrained by them. The strong individuality of the music points to the former; several of Ruggles’s statements demonstrate the latter, such as the following:

All real composers create their own formulas—I know I have created formulas of my own and some moderns have said “Ah, too bad, he goes by formula, if he wouldn’t do that he would be a good composer,” but I make the point that a real composer should be able to break the formula, to bust it all to hell when he felt it necessary to bust it; otherwise you are the victim of your own formula, you have created only a Frankenstein monster.⁵

One example of this flexibility—the ability to bust (or at least bend) the formula—is pitch-class nonrepetition, Ruggles’s best-

known procedure: the technique of avoiding repetition of a given note until it has sufficiently receded from aural memory. Cowell estimates the number of intervening notes at seven or eight;⁶ Seeger specifies ten.⁷ Tenney found that the average number of intervening notes more than doubled during Ruggles’s compositional career—from 4.17 in *Toys* (1919) to 8.89 in *Organum* (1944).⁸ Nonetheless, Ruggles was quite flexible in his application of pitch-class nonrepetition. Regardless of the *average* number of intervening notes, the *actual* number fluctuates widely, and sometimes the method is suspended altogether in the interests of concentrated motivic repetition.

Ruggles uses other procedures besides pitch-class nonrepetition, but with these too he is apt to break free and do something different and unexpected. Even when he does not, a tension, or balance, between strictness and freedom is often evident—a continuum of flexibility within his compositional techniques.

For instance, Ruggles usually constructs jagged, soaring, disjunct lines that combine into huge spiky arch shapes that cover immense registral spaces, creating a bright, open, spacious registration with many gaps—characteristics that also usually apply to his vertical sonorities. But occasionally, by way of contrast, he writes smoother lines characterized by stepwise movement and smaller leaps, which closely fill registral gaps, creating chromatic or near-chromatic clusters.

Another example of this continuum is Ruggles’s use of motives. A motive can be defined as a concatenation of musical features that takes on a temporary identity; as the features change, the motive transforms. If too many features change too rapidly or drastically, the motive loses its identity, dissolving or mutating into another motive. Frequently in Ruggles’s music, motives are initially presented quite strongly and imitated fairly strictly, but soon lose solidity as they begin to change shape, elongate, shrink, fragment, dissolve, or (to use Schoenberg’s sinister term) are “liquidated.”⁹ This is also true of Ruggles’s sequences, which usually begin with a fairly ordered repeated pattern that becomes progressively freer as it mutates and dissolves. Even his canons display a balance between strict and free imitation. Thus his motivic practice is highly fluid, and his music is full of roughly similar shapes.

A similar situation exists with regard to the role of dissonance. Ruggles was strongly influenced by Charles Seeger’s concept of *dissonant counterpoint*, in which the traditional relation of consonance as the norm and dissonance as the exception is reversed.¹⁰ Ruggles’s music is highly dissonant—almost every sonority and melodic fragment contains a major seventh, minor ninth, or tritone. For instance, in *Evocations 2*, measures 34-36 contain several examples of major sevenths and minor ninths (shown in the example as 11 and 13, which indicate the number of semitones; crossed diagonals indicate voice exchanges). Nonetheless, despite the almost continual chromaticism of Ruggles’s music, whole-tone collections are often emphasized, and consonant intervals (even triads) are common. But their effect is diluted or sabotaged by their placement in an overwhelmingly dissonant environment.

Carl Ruggles (continued)

All of these characteristics (and many others) share a certain flexibility. They are not always consistently applied, and most of them can be “inflected” along a continuum from strict to free usage. This results, at least in part, from Ruggles’s refusal to be boxed in by his own procedures.

This attitude is not mere orneriness (although it is that too), but an integral manifestation of Ruggles’s basic aesthetic/spiritual stance—the striving for the sublime and the transcendent, the effort to move beyond the known towards the unknown.¹¹ His stance has been widely noted. Seeger, for example, writes: “To Carl Ruggles, there are not different kinds of beauty: there is only one kind, and that he prefers to call the sublime.”¹² Virgil Thomson comments: “For that ecstasy in the expression, that unrelenting luminosity of interval and sound, is needful for producing the quality that was his overall interest and which he calls ‘the sublime.’”¹³

Although the quest for the transcendent is conducted with the tools at hand—and the tools are chosen for their fitness of purpose—in the end the goal is more important than consistency in the use of the tools themselves. Ruggles did not value systems; he was more concerned with striving towards the sublime, reaching towards the unknown. But how could he reach towards the unknown if he was boxed inside a consistent, closed musical system or set of procedures? What could be more “known” than that? However, if his procedures could be bent or broken at will, then they could become open-ended—not only used but transcended, in order to evoke what lies beyond them.

In addition, Ruggles’s compositional techniques as such are directly related to his quest to transcend the known and enter the unknown. Some examples follow:

1. He writes extremely long-breathed extended soaring lines. In a letter to Ruggles, Ruth Crawford wrote: “*Organum* was fine. In thinking back, I have the queer feeling that its line just kept on going in space.”¹⁴

2. He constructs large jagged wave shapes that convey the sense of fighting or giving in to gravity—rising and falling back through a series of subsidiary climaxes to a main climax on the ascending side of the wave, and then reversing the process on the descending side. His cadences are characterized by unrelenting ascending lines that push ever higher towards a rarified registral peak, sometimes counterpointed by contrary motion to the deepest register in the bass. These cadences are not points of relaxation or resolution, but rather of maximum tension, often reinforced by added dissonances and thicker textures.

3. His customary texture of extreme dissonance with fleeting glimpses of less dissonant or consonant intervals and sonori-

ties conveys a sense of restlessness, preventing the listener from settling down or finding a comfortable resting place anywhere. This sense of restlessness is also conveyed by Ruggles’s fluid irregular rhythm, shifting meters, and avoidance of metrical accent and regular phrasing—which combine into what Ruggles termed *tempo rubato*.

4. The quest towards transcendence is further evoked through Ruggles’s work titles and epigraphs, many taken from the poetry of Whitman, Blake, and Browning. The titles of *Angels*, *Evocations*, and *Exaltation* have no links to poetry and, I think, require no commentary. *Men and Mountains* takes its name from Blake’s *Gnostic Verses*:

“Great things are done when Men and Mountains meet; This is not done by Jostling in the Street.” Its second movement, *Lilacs*, derives its title from Whitman’s *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d*.¹⁵ *Sun-Treader* refers to the opening line of Browning’s paean to Shelley, *Pauline*: “Sun-treader, light and life be thine forever.”

In sum, the immediate and characteristic recognizability of Ruggles’s music is based

on coherent compositional strategies and techniques, which are, however, flexible and unsystematic in application. But this is not a fault—Ruggles’s lack of system is an integral part of his compositional method. The sense of the transcendent conveyed by Ruggles’s music is not only directly related to his compositional procedures, but were he to use those principles systematically he would never leave the realm of “the Known.” The fact that they are so malleable allows him to use them to intimate what lies beyond their borders. Thus not only Ruggles’s compositional procedures, but also his flexible application of them, comprise the means by which he strives to “ascend and enter the Unknown.”

—Stephen Slottow

University of North Texas

Notes

¹ Two recent books on Seeger are Taylor Aitken Greer, *A Question of Balance: Charles Seeger’s Philosophy of Music* (University of California Press, 1998); and Bell Yung and Helen Rees, eds., *Understanding Charles Seeger, Pioneer in American Musicology* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).

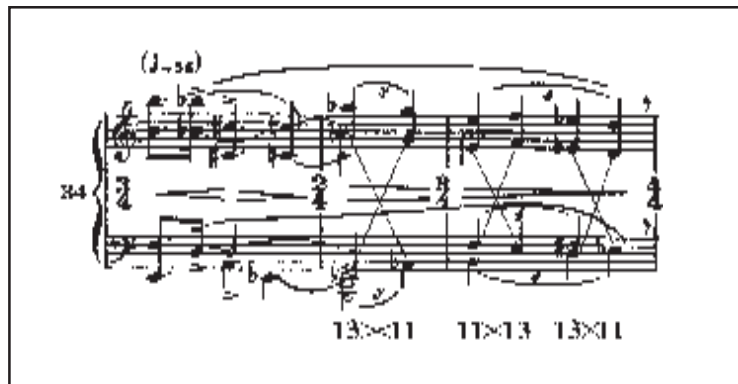
² For instance, see Stephen Slottow, *A Vast Simplicity: Pitch Organization in the Works of Carl Ruggles* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001); and Thomas Herlin, *Carl Ruggles and the Viennese Tradition: A Comparative Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 2000).

³ Ruggles’s published works are *Toys*, *Angels*, *Vox Clamans in Deserto* (three songs), *Men and Mountains*, *Portals*, *Sun-Treader*, *Evocations* (four piano pieces), *Organum*, and *Exaltation*.

⁴ Robert Tucker Robison, *Carl Ruggles’s Sun-Treader* (D.M.A. diss., University of Illinois, 1991), 16. The reference is to a letter from Tenney to Robison dated 30 July 1974.

⁵ Interview, *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 February 1935; quoted in John Tasker Howard, *Our Contemporary Composers: American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1943), 242.

Continued on page 15



Ruggles, *Evocations 2*, mm. 34-36

Scorsese's Narratives of Blues Discovery

"I'll never forget the first time I heard Lead Belly singing 'See See Rider.' I was entranced." So begins Martin Scorsese's preface to *The Blues: A Musical Journey*, the companion book to the seven-part PBS series *Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues*, which made its national debut this past September. He continues, "Like most people of my generation, I grew up listening to rock & roll. All of a sudden, in an instant, I could hear where it had all come from."

Such narratives of blues discovery permeate the films produced by Scorsese and his six series co-directors, Clint Eastwood, Richard Pearce, Wim Wenders, Marc Levin, Mike Figgis, and Charles Burnett. The story is certainly familiar to this reviewer. My own blues epiphany came in 1969 at Bill Graham's East Village cathedral of rock music, the Fillmore East, when B.B. King took the stage to open for the British band Ten Years After. I was entranced when King hit those first electrifying notes on his guitar Lucille. In that magical moment, the source of rock 'n' roll was revealed and I knew my life would never be the same. Forget about medicine, law, or engineering—I was hell-bent on catching that fast train to a career in folk music and ethnomusicology.

Thirty-plus years later, with this baggage in tow, I approached the Scorsese blues series with anticipation tempered by a degree of caution. Could Scorsese, with his cadre of five white and one black male film directors and six white film producers, with no scholarly assistance in evidence, possibly convey the richly textured history and subtle cultural complexities of the blues via the medium of television? Granted, the series is designed to be impressionistic rather than definitively historical, but the packaging and presentation leave no doubt that Scorsese is attempting to construct a canonical story of blues to rival Ken Burns's grand narrative of jazz, made-to-order for PBS consumption.

Scorsese's own film, *Feel Like Going Home*, is an epic adventure tracing bluesman Corey Harris's journey south to Mississippi and eventually back to West Africa, jawing and jamming along the way with old Delta bluesmen and venerable African griots. Harris, who is young, hip, black, and an accomplished blues guitarist, is an effective voice for the blues. His infatuation with the tradition and reverence for elder players suggest that the blues could and should continue to speak to new generations of African Americans, a theme that unfortunately is not adequately pursued in the ensuing films.

More troubling is the up-the-river, or Delta to Chicago (and eventually London) narrative established by Scorsese in *Feel Like Going Home* and developed in a number of the subsequent films.¹ Harris's musings and accompanying archival footage con-

tend that the blues was born in the Mississippi Delta and migrated up to Chicago where it would eventually disseminate to broader national and international audiences. Charlie Patton, Sun House, Skip James, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and Willie Dixon (and later Eric Clapton and the Rolling Stones) are the heroes of this tale, while neither the practitioners of the rich Texas and southeastern Piedmont blues styles nor the early vaudeville blueswomen receive sufficient attention.



The Delta/Chicago/London saga lies at the heart of Marc Levin's film, *Godfathers and Sons*, an excessively celebratory homage to Chicago-based Chess records and a work marred by the overbearing character of Marshall Chess (the son of co-founder Leonard Chess) who gleefully spins his own self-serving history of Chicago blues. Mike Figgis's film, *Red, White, and Blues*, completes the Delta/Chicago/London loop with an intriguing chronicle of the 1960s British blues explosion spearheaded by the white blues guitarists John Mayall, Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck.

Wim Wenders's disjointed offering, *Soul of a Man*, opens with Texas songster Blind Willie Johnson, hinting that blues might exist outside of the Delta/Chicago axis. The bulk of the film, however, is devoted to Delta bluesman Skip James (and his rediscovery during the 1960s folk revival) and Chicago blues singer and songwriter J.B. Lenoir (and his discovery by white art students/filmmakers Steve and Ronnog Seaberg in the 1960s). Clint Eastwood's *Piano Blues* further widens the blues field to include Georgia-born Ray Charles and New Orleans piano luminaries Fats Domino, Dr. John, and Professor Longhair, as well as jazz giants Jay McShann and Dave Brubeck. But Eastwood's omnipresence and annoying interjections during interviews detract from the larger story of black folks and blues piano.

The overarching problem with these five films is the excessively personal lens the directors bring to the blues. The result is a very narrow and very white interpretation. Scorsese et al. came of age in the post-War years at a time when the blues was beginning to slip from the R&B charts, only to be discovered by a new audience of young white folkies and rockers. For these directors, blues was first and foremost an appendage of the white folk revival and the gritty precursor to the rock and soul music of their youth. The discovery of blues roots and the romancing of old rural (mostly Delta) bluesmen became essential components of their blues mythology. Thus, in order to historicize the blues for the present project, the directors simply roll out the grainy footage of southern black folks chopping cotton, working on chain gangs, shouting in church, and gyrating around juke joints, and mix in a few hardship testimonies from old-timers. This accomplished, they feel free to jump

Narratives of Blues Discovery (continued)

cut forward to the early 1960s with Skip James and Sun House titillating white folks at the Newport Folk Festival and Muddy Waters sailing to England to inspire Clapton, Mayall, Jagger, and company.

What's missing from this skewed history is acknowledgment and exploration of the vital force that blues continued to exert in black communities across the rural south and urban north throughout the Depression, the War years, and well into the 1960s. Nor is the deeper blues trope that inspired generations of African American writers, artists, jazz musicians, and composers given any consideration. Questions of cultural appropriation, perhaps too uncomfortable for the predominantly white PBS audience, are adroitly avoided through a bevy of rhetorical testimonies (from both blacks and whites) regarding the universal nature of the blues. Such issues of African American identity and cultural politics are simply ignored since they don't fit neatly into the narrative of blues discovery that undergirds these five films.

The contribution by the project's sole black director, Charles Burnett, is *Warming by the Devil's Fire*, a semi-autobiographical tale of a twelve-year-old black boy returning to Mississippi in the 1950s for a proper baptism. But before he can be saved, his womanizing, good-for-nothing uncle whisks him away to explore the seedier side of Delta blues culture. The idea is intriguing but the execution is lamentable. The flip-flopping between docudrama and archival footage of old blues artists falls flat, and while the latter is visually compelling, the acting in the former is so abysmal that the film is often painful to watch.

The one production that moves in a broader direction is Richard Pearce's *The Road to Memphis*, a rollicking jaunt on tour with bluesmen B.B. King and Bobby Rush. Pearce's work reveals the power of WDIA, the 50,000 watt Memphis-based radio station that piped blues and gospel music to huge audiences of black listeners during the late 1940s and 1950s. Memphis's Beale Street is accurately depicted as the mid-South epicenter of black creativity while King and Rush are presented as blues artists who continue to speak to African American audiences.

In the Ken Burns tradition the seven films are packaged with a companion book and boxed five-CD set. *The Blues: A Musical Journey* (HarperCollins/Amistad, 2003; \$27.95), edited by a team of popular writers led by Peter Guralnik, is a handsomely produced trade book full of vintage photographs, song lyrics, portraits of legendary blues singers, and brief commentary from such notables as W. E. B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Zora Neale Hurston. Unfortunately, the latter are jammed into sections organized around each of the seven films, and while offering snippets of insight, fail to coalesce into a meaningful story. Aside from Robert Santelli's ample introductory chapter, there is little of scholarly value here.

The boxed CD set, also titled *The Blues: A Musical Journey*, is the most useful piece of the project, and undoubtedly the most comprehensive compilation since *The Blues: A Smithsonian Collection of Classic Blues Singers* (1993, now out of print). The

continued on page 15

Vaudeville Accordion Classics

The Complete Works of Guido Deiro

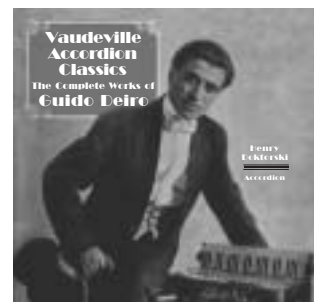
1886-1950

Italian-American composer & accordion virtuoso, Deiro was a major force in the popularization of the accordion in the early 20th century. A vaudeville star by 1910, he was the first piano accordionist to make sound recordings and solo radio broadcasts. Concert accordionist Henry Doktorski has recorded all of Deiro's music □ 47 new recordings including rags, waltzes, marches, polkas, and Deiro favorites: *My Florence Waltz*, *Egypto Fantasia* and the Broadway hit, *Kismet*.

In 1913, Deiro met Mae West, the young vaudeville performer and burgeoning sex symbol. A passionate romance ensued and the couple married secretly.



Henry Doktorski
@
Accordion



9138A/B TWO DISCS



Email: bridgerec@bridgerecords.com
Web Orders: www.BridgeRecords.com

Thinking Jazz

Eric Porter's *What is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (University of California Press, 2002; \$22.50) is a critical contribution to jazz studies. The work builds upon the insights of a new vanguard of jazz scholarship including Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz*, Farah Jasmine Griffin's *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*, and Ingrid Monson's *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, all of which focus on how jazz musicians think about their music.

Recognizing certain black jazz musicians as a class of Gramscian intellectuals who may lack the formal status enjoyed by academics, but who exercise a learned authority by means of their organic relationship to the communities for which they speak, Porter investigates their public utterances concerning the meaning of their art and craft. As a rule, the thoughts of jazz musicians about their music have carried less cachet than their thoughts as expressed through their music. The most obvious exception, of course, is Wynton Marsalis, who, through his position at Lincoln Center, his PBS specials, his indefatigable efforts as an educator and supporter of young musicians, and his passionately delivered speeches and writings, has acquired the status of the official face and voice of jazz in America. By contrast, the intellectual pronouncements of previous jazz icons like Ellington and Armstrong were more tolerated than celebrated, and too often simply ignored. Even today after the advent of Marsalis's celebrity, journalists, critics, and academics are the major players in the public discourse about jazz. In this important book Porter makes a compelling case for including the public speeches, books, articles, and other writings by jazz musicians as an integral part of this conversation.

By examining figures as diverse as Duke Ellington, Abbey Lincoln, Mary Lou Williams, and Anthony Braxton, Porter reveals that the commentary of black musicians constitutes an intellectually vibrant, conflicting and varied, deeply probing body of thought. Among the ideas discussed in this book are the propriety of the term jazz; the degree to which jazz is a symbol of black achievement versus the degree to which it is properly understood as a part of universal human culture; the aesthetic, political, and economic tensions between jazz and European art music; and the tensions between jazz and popular music.

Along with other recent works such as Sherrie Tucker's *Swing Shift*, Scott DeVeaux's *Birth of Bebop*, and Ronald Radano's *New Musical Figurations*, Porter's effort offers sustained analyses of how specific musical movements and figures are situated with respect to larger historical and cultural concerns. Consequently, the relationship of jazz to issues of gender roles and sexuality, black nationalism, cultural exploitation, and spirituality are explored in depth. Porter is not tendentious and avoids taking sides, always careful to give each position its best light. Rather than posit a coherent narrative about the ultimate meanings of jazz he argues that jazz music and practice have remained a paradox for over a

century, given the contradictions inherent in a putative American expression thoroughly ensconced in capitalism that managed to provide an important voice of cultural dissent. Porter documents how jazz musicians have functioned in this paradoxical space with a full and complicated understanding of all the ironies and tensions inherent in jazz practice. Such an argument goes against the prevalent mythologies that portray jazz musicians as naive artists at best and idiot savants at worst.

The crucial point for Porter is that some musicians have moved through this paradox self-consciously—that is, they have not only participated in jazz activities, but they have thought about their positions and have theorized their meanings and possibilities. So, for instance, “[African American jazz musicians] have not merely produced music that speaks of the forces of capitalist production; they have articulated what it means to contend with these forces while trying to create an artistic expression” (p. 335).

Porter covers ample terrain moving diachronically throughout the twentieth century. The chapter “A Marvel of Paradox” discusses jazz in association with African American modernity. Assuming that African American modernity intersects with white America's modernism of the 1920s, Porter includes the writings of J. A. Rogers and discusses the ways in which jazz in the twenties impacted the New

Negroes and the black nationalist movements of the time. The bulk of the chapter, however, examines how musicians such as Duke Ellington, W. C. Handy, and Louis Armstrong confronted notions of a jazz tradition and its ideological content.

The chapter “Dizzy Atmosphere” addresses the challenge of bebop by engaging the canonical writings of DeVeaux, von Eschen, Baraka, Lott, as well as the voices of Mary Lou Williams, Billy Taylor, Herbie Nichols, Gil Fuller, Richard Boyer, et al. The place of bop within the fractious jazz community was contested through political activism, religious statement, theoretical musings, and genre bending. Porter demonstrates how the consciousness of the jazz community was forever changed by this musical movement, and how the music's political and aesthetic reverberations went far beyond the market boundaries of bebop.

Subsequent chapters examine other seminal moments in jazz history, covering a carefully selected set of themes from the beginning of the twentieth century to its close. While there is no chapter on gender per se, Porter engages gendered and sexualized aspects of jazz music. By exploring Charles Mingus's explicitly rendered sexual politics in his autobiography *Beneath the Underdog*, and Abbey Lincoln's critiques of black masculinity in her 1966 *Negro Digest* essay, “Who Will Revere the Black Woman?,” Porter complicates the traditional set of polemics surrounding gender and sexuality in jazz. A similar dialectical structure can be construed in the juxtaposition of two chapters on “creative music”



Abbey Lincoln
Courtesy of Verve Records

continued on page 15

Composing Difficult

The visitor to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden who strolls along its Celebrity Path, which honors “famous Brooklynites,” will encounter the names of several musicians immortalized in its leafy frames. Not surprisingly, the strength of the borough connection for each varies considerably, and few inscribed there are likely to have a more tenuous connection than Roger Sessions. As described by Frederik Prausnitz in *Roger Sessions: How a “Difficult” Composer Got That Way* (Oxford University Press, 2002; \$45.00), the first substantial discussion of the composer since his death in 1985, Sessions was born in 1896 on Brooklyn’s Washington Avenue, not far from the future birthplace of Aaron Copland. He stayed long enough to attend his first orchestral concert at the nearby Brooklyn Academy of Music, stealing the show by conducting along with Walter Damrosch from his mother’s lap. However, before the budding musician’s fourth birthday, deteriorating economic circumstances forced the Sessions family to move back to his mother’s ancestral home in western Massachusetts. There Sessions acquired his sense of belonging and depth of roots; even after a career spent at Princeton, Berkeley, and Juilliard, the elderly composer could still proclaim, “I am a New England gentleman!”

Yet for all his pedigree Sessions was a cosmopolitan at heart, one who felt “most at home abroad.” He spent most of 1925 to 1933 in Europe, and witnessed firsthand the rise of ominous forms of nationalism. This led him to be suspicious of the calls for an indigenously “American” music that he confronted upon his return to the United States. Prausnitz captures the irony of Sessions’s alienation by recalling Theodore Spencer’s remark: “you have no idea how lonely one feels in this country, if one’s ancestors arrived here in the seventeenth century.” Sessions would go on to forge many of his closest musical relationships with refugees from the world he had known before the war.

Prausnitz provides a richly drawn account of Sessions’s early life. One detail with contemporary resonance concerns his opposition to the First World War, which led to his being investigated afterwards as a “draft dodger and seditious pacifist.” Sessions’s tenure on the faculty of the Cleveland Institute of Music also receives special emphasis, especially the period following the termination of his teacher, Ernest Bloch, in 1925. Other than a discussion of Sessions’s opera *Montezuma*, Prausnitz’s account of the composer’s productive later years feels rushed by comparison; three of the late symphonies are dispensed with in a single paragraph.

The book’s subtitle, taken from a 1950 *New York Times* article written by Sessions, challenges the reader with the word most often used to describe the composer’s music, “difficult.” Prausnitz is a noted conductor and longtime champion of Sessions’s music, and he largely succeeds in conveying the different ingredients of the composer’s musical thought. He wisely parcels out the musical arguments into three chapters, separated by biographical material. Yet in the end the attempt to pin down the composer’s “difficulty” proves elusive. The complexity with which Sessions’s music was seemingly born, as Alfredo Casella famously described it, arose from the struggle he had in forming his own musical language—a struggle that finally paid off when “at age 57 [he] became a prolific composer.”

It is unfortunate to have to note that a book as important as this, published by a major press, has received a less than satisfactory editing. Most of the large number of misprints are minor, but their cumulative effect is troubling.

Arthur Berger’s memoir, *Reflections of an American Composer* (University of California Press, 2002; \$44.95) touches on many of the composer’s impressively manifold contributions to contemporary American musical life—certainly many more than its title would suggest. In fact, Berger’s career as a composer often lurks in the background in his reminiscences of life as a music critic for several papers in Boston and New York, an educator who helped to form the music department at Brandeis University, an editor for the periodical *Perspectives of New Music*, and the author of the first major study of Copland’s music as well as seminal articles on music theory. His activity in all these potentially incompatible occupations gives his commentary a special weight. Few composers, for instance, are likely to admit to paying much attention to what music critics have to say today, but Berger reads them as an important gauge of the changing status of concert music in contemporary culture. Berger is himself skeptical of certain musical developments, particularly of works that adopt an explicitly political stance. His opinions are grounded in a personal struggle to reconcile a leftist orientation with a commitment to a challenging, independent art. Nevertheless, his memoir is not merely critical in nature; it includes a treasure chest of stories about many figures with whom Berger closely interacted, including Stravinsky, Virgil Thomson, and the artist Robert Motherwell, whose collage dedicated to the composer adorns the book’s cover.

Throughout his career, Berger, who died this past October at the age of ninety-one, was concerned with what he termed the “musical surface.” Part of what the term meant to him is revealed by a comment he once made, with considerable relish, that “[musical] space is one of my passions.” Not surprisingly, this works its way into his *Reflections* through an imaginative consideration of Stravinsky’s unique ways of voicing a chord; readers familiar with Berger’s Copland book may recall a similar discussion.

Perhaps the best way to experience Berger’s engagement with spaces and surfaces is through his own compositions. Fortunately, a major new recording by pianist Geoffrey Burslem, *Arthur Berger: Complete Works for Solo Piano* (Centaur CRC2593, 2002), makes this a pleasurable task. Berger’s piano music runs the length of his career, spanning just over sixty years. We might begin a brief tour of Berger’s approach to the creation of a distinctive chordal layout by listening to the shortest work, *For Luise*, written in 1991, which in five seconds of frenetic activity assembles a chord that spans nearly five octaves, and then holds it for the listener to savor. Next we might turn to the Partita, from 1947, and listen for the delectably precise construction of the first measure, or the wide spacing of the chords at the end of its Aria. Finally we could sample the considerably knottier *Five Pieces for Piano*, from 1969, and hear the constantly shifting texture, seemingly utilizing all registers of the keyboard at once, as an abstract frieze only gradually revealed. Burslem proves an excellent guide, sensitive to Berger’s distinctive nuances.

—Anton Vishio
Queens College, CUNY

Music of Williamsburg (continued)

on banjo and guitar. Even though Lomax cites Smith as being among the performers, I would guess that many listeners, except for specialists in Appalachian traditions, never paused over the fact that a white musician from the Virginia mountains performs with the Georgia Sea Island Singers in this canonic release of their music. Not only that, the Sea Islanders are joined by African Americans from Mississippi and the Bahamas, adding further complexity to the geographic mix. Smith's story is especially interesting given his own musical legacy of learning aspects of claw hammer banjo technique from an African American player named John Greer (Cohen 2001). The tunes performed by Group "C" include "Reg'lar, Reg'lar Rollin' Under," "See Aunt Dinah," "Beulah Land," and "The Titanic," only the first of which turns up in the film. Some of the other material recorded in Williamsburg was subsequently released on Lomax's *Southern Journey* series.

Another tidbit encountered by the class had to do with the unexpected lineages that shape history. Lomax recruited singers from the Sea Islands because he believed they "provided a pocket of Negro culture that has remained relatively isolated and undisturbed (until recently) since the Revolution" ("Teacher's Manual"). What he didn't realize was that one of Bessie Jones's grandfathers had been a slave in Williamsburg, so her tie to historic Virginia was genuine. While the film was being made, Jones and other visiting musicians, along with a number of Colonial Williamsburg employees, were invited to a birthday party for a white baby. At some point, Jones was asked to sing a lullaby. When she stood up to do so, Jones later recalled, she suddenly found herself "pouring" out the story "like it was ice out of a can" of how her grandfather had been a slave in Williamsburg, before moving to Georgia. "Wasn't a soul [in the room] saying a word but me," Jones said, "and I just told them like it was" (Jones 1983, 51-52).

An image of Bessie Jones standing up to speak at a mixed-race gathering in Virginia in 1960 illuminates an unspoken political agenda behind the film: integrating the narrative of the American past. A cluster of personalities was responsible for this, including Arthur L. Smith, then Director of the Audio-Visual Department at Colonial Williamsburg; Thad W. Tate, a historian on Colonial Williamsburg's staff who was author of *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*, first distributed in-house by Colonial Williamsburg in 1957; and Stanley Croner, scriptwriter and associate director for the film (Tate 1957 [1965]). In a telephone interview with my students, Croner acknowledged that a primary goal of the film was to include slaves "as real people." Focusing on eighteenth-century musical practices provided a safe space for exploring racial history, as Croner remembered, yielding a "political undertone that is not immediately obvious." But the intent was clear. "Hey fellas," Croner recalled the film as declaring, "in the eighteenth century there were lots of different people, other than the aristocrats . . . that lived in the town of Williamsburg" (Croner 2003). Furthermore, the film's director, Sidney Meyers, had a history of producing films that explored race and class. *The Quiet One* (1949) and *The Savage Eye* (1959), like *Music of Williamsburg*, combined drama and documentary, while *Edge of the City* (1957) was straight drama that provided an early role for Sydney Poitier.

Press releases for *Music of Williamsburg* made its racial content clear. "In order to portray the important contributions of the Negro race to the nation's heritage," reads one from 1962, "folk

music consultant Alan Lomax selected 22 individuals from Norfolk and Weems, Va., Memphis, Tenn., St. Simon's Island, Ga., and Miami, Fla., all with native talent but no professional training, to perform as dancers and musicians in the film." As of 1962, the film had been shown on "approximately 150 [national] telecasts since its release to television stations in August 1962" (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1962). This was a time before public-history sites had begun an aggressive initiative to modify their programs to address both social hierarchy and racial issues. For Colonial Williamsburg, it was a landmark step in moving toward an integrated public-program agenda.

—Harvard University
(formerly of the College of William and Mary)

Sources Cited

- Cohen, John. 2001. Liner Notes to *Hobart Smith: Blue Ridge Legacy*. Rounder Records.
- [Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. 1962.] "For Immediate Release" [press release]. March 12. Archives of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
- Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. 1960. *Music of Williamsburg*. Released on video and distributed by The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, P.O. Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA 23187-1776.
- Croner, Stanley. 2003. Telephone interview with Erin Krutko, Christian Olsen, Graham Savage, and Patrick Shaffner. Interview tape in Archives of Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
- Jones, Bessie. 1983. *For the Ancestors: Autobiographical Memories*. Collected and edited by John Stewart. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Lomax, Alan. 1960. Letter to Arthur Smith. 26 March. Archives of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia. Carbon in Alan Lomax Archive, New York City.
- "Notes" [1960]. "Notes about MUSIC OF WILLIAMSBURG." Typescript. Archives of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.
- Tate, Thad W. 1957 [1965]. *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*. Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Issued first in typescript and then formally published.
- "Teachers Manual." 1960. "Teachers Manual for *Music of Williamsburg*: A 29-minute motion picture in sound and color produced by Colonial Williamsburg, Inc." Archives of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Students in the seminar included Peggy Aarlien, Anna Gardner, Erin Gordon, Erin Krutko, Christian Olsen, Brandon Polk, Sarah Reeder, Graham Savage, Patrick Shaffner, and Victoria Swoap. The sources drawn upon in this article came to light through their hard work. Special thanks to the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Music of Williamsburg: A Student's Perspective

In the spring of 2003, I was part of a seminar at the College of William and Mary that tackled an original research project focusing on the relatively obscure film, *Music of Williamsburg*. Over the course of the semester we learned how to navigate a large and potentially daunting undertaking that demanded archival research, oral history, and searching for lost recordings and photographs. We tried to situate the film in a variety of contexts, exploring topics such as American vernacular musical traditions, song-collection practices, copyright concerns, museum interpretation, fieldwork and oral-history techniques, and race relations in the 1950s and 1960s.

Music of Williamsburg (continued)

The first half of the semester was dedicated to amassing as much material about the film as possible. We surveyed records at the Colonial Williamsburg Archives and the Alan Lomax Collection in New York City, including film scripts, production books, pay ledgers, and correspondence among Lomax, the museum, and the performers. In the process, we began getting a sense about how the film was produced, how Lomax searched for performers, and how the local racial climate affected the project.

At the same time, we were continually refining a list of persons to interview. Initially, we combed through archival materials and talked with museum administrators. Next we contacted a local newspaper, asking if they would run a feature story about the class and the film. As a result, a number of longtime Williamsburg residents contacted us with memories about production of the film. Although many performers in the film are no longer alive, we were able to speak with Stanley Croner (scriptwriter for the film), Thad W. Tate (historian for the film), and Rex Ellis (Vice President of Colonial Williamsburg's historic area). In addition, folk musician Mike Seeger, a lifelong acquaintance of Lomax who happened to be spending a semester on campus as artist-in-residence, contributed his thoughts.

With help from Colonial Williamsburg's staff, the class also discovered some lost treasures related to the film. Vice President of Research Cary Carson located audio recordings that captured rehearsals as well as material performed a few days after filming was completed. Graduate student Peggy Aarlien worked with visual-resource librarians at Colonial Williamsburg's Rockefeller Library to uncover more than 500 photographs documenting the film's production. The most interesting images by far were taken by Lomax himself, giving a behind-the-scenes glimpse of African American musicians at work.

Halfway through the semester, the seminar broke stride to discuss what a culminating project might be. A variety of possibilities were explored. At first, we wanted to produce a public website where visitors could listen to music clips, access primary research materials, and read our interpretations of the film. Time closed in on these ambitions, so instead we ended up producing a CD featuring excerpts from Lomax's audio recordings, accompanied by extensive liner notes. Included are robust drum performances by Nat Rahmings with Ed Young on fife and Prince Ellis on jawbone; crisp gospel renditions by the Bright Light Gospel Quartet (including tunes such as "Rollin' Through This Unfriendly World," "Hand Me Down the Silver Trumpet, Gabriel," and "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel"); and several large-group performances by the Georgia Sea Island Singers accompanied by Rahmings (drum), Young (cane fife), and Hobart Smith (banjo). Lomax's speaking voice is heard as well, counting out cues for performers. Some of these performances were included on Lomax's 1961 record series, *A Southern Journey*, and on his 1977 release for New World Records, *Georgia Sea Island Songs*. Most of the material, however, remains unissued, and soon we hope to interest a commercial company in releasing it.

By the end of the semester, we had learned to craft a coherent cultural narrative from a broad array of sources. Equally important, we had uncovered a fascinating story about the intersection of music and race in Williamsburg, Virginia during a pivotal period in our nation's struggle for civil rights.

—Erin Krutko

College of William and Mary

THE ALAN LOMAX COLLECTION

presents the legendary recordings of pioneering musicologist Alan Lomax:

 <p>Blues in the Mississippi Night</p> <p>Featuring Big Bill Broonzy, Memphis Slim and Sonny Boy Williamson</p> <p>Historic studio recording from 1947</p>	 <p>Alan Lomax Popular Songbook</p> <p>Some of the best known songs in popular music, captured in early performances</p> <p>Available on both CD and SACD</p>	 <p>Alan Lomax Blues Songbook</p> <p>Special 2 CD set, with booklet preface written by Martin Scorsese</p> <p>Featuring blues greats Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Blind Willie McTell and more</p>
--	---	---



Available everywhere • 1-800-ROUNDER • www.rounder.com

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Broadway

It has been nine years since Stephen Sondheim finished *Passion*, and the chief musical-theater project of the intervening years finally made it to the stage. Created with librettist John Weidman and director Harold Prince, *Bounce* opened on 30 June at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, where we caught it eight days earlier during previews. The story dramatizes the real-life adventures of the peripatetic brothers Addison and Wilson Mizner as they travel the world in search of fame and fortune. Bouncing from the turn-of-the-century Yukon Gold Rush to the 1920s Florida real-estate boom, the brothers discover two disparate but compatible talents as Addison finds his gift as an architect and Wilson becomes a con man. Along the way they face an escalating cycle of boom and bust, always moving on with the same motto: "Find a new road, forge a new trail—Bounce."

The title song, heard three times, not only voices the show's theme; it also sums up a key impulse behind Sondheim's musical-theater writing. Whether they succeed or fail, Sondheim's shows always represent a fresh and often startling response to the challenge of creating musical theater in the post-Rodgers and Hammerstein era. Sondheim identified *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* of 1962 as "the antithesis of the Rodgers and Hammerstein school."¹ With a vaudeville-inflected script, the show began by telling audiences exactly what they were getting ("Comedy Tonight") and proceeded to offer a sequence of whimsical songs easily extracted from their plot context. Since then, none of Sondheim's shows has returned so completely to the light musical comedy vein he revived in *Forum*.

Until now. Almost everything about *Bounce* aims to revive musical comedy and vaudeville of the pre-R&H era. The difference lies in a distinctively Sondheim-esque self-consciousness about it. The show relishes its artifice: the conventional medley-of-tunes overture, the quaint postcard backdrops, the song-and-dance routines, the follow spots, the carry-on props and furniture, the deaths (like punchlines) punctuated by a percussive boom. The songs, too, have the vamp-and-patter spirit of early musical comedy and vaudeville, and their titles are positively telegraphic: "Bounce," "Gold!," "What's Your Rush?," "Next to You," "The Game," "Talent," and "You," to name a few. All of which makes a swooning love ballad stand out as the musical centerpiece of the show: "The Best Thing that Ever Happened to Me." But even this song echoes the old days. The long melody on the title phrase, capped by a two-note codetta "you are," recalls that Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields hit from *The Blackbirds of 1928*, with its opening line "I can't give you anything but love, baby." Finally, like early musical comedy, this show counts on star power. Addison was created by Richard Kind, from TV's "Spin City" and "Mad About You"; Wilson was Howard McGillin, fresh from his Broadway run as the Phantom; his on-again-off-again love Nellie was the recent Tony-award-winning Michele Pawk; and Mama Mizner was Jane Powell, a veteran of more than twenty MGM musicals.

The show has another pre-R&H model, of course, one that Sondheim has openly claimed: the Hope and Crosby "Road movies" that began in 1940 with *The Road to Singapore*. "The Mizners,

or at least our Mizners," Sondheim has written, "were in many ways the Bob Hope and Bing Crosby of the Road movies—Wilson as Crosby the manipulator, Addison as Hope the patsy, two conniving rivals who would stop at nothing to ruin each other, but partners and soul mates in the face of the world. And vaudeville to the core."² Both *Bounce* and the Road movies feature the duets, the two-guys-and-a-girl scenario, the travelogue motif, the situation comedy, and even—for anyone who remembers *The Road to Morocco*—a gay kiss.

Bounce could, however, never be mistaken for a show from the Hope and Crosby years. While the gay subtext in *The Road to Morocco* is treated as no more than a passing heterosexual joke, in *Bounce* it grows into an explicit and sincere love interest between one of the brothers and a wealthy patron. More than that, the show lays bare the psychological roots of the brothers' conflicts and drives. On his deathbed, their father charges them to grasp at "Opportunity" when it comes along. Later, a soft ballad called "Next to You" evolves into a chilling site of fraternal competition as Wilson and Addison jockey for position as Mama's favorite. In the song's final moments, Prince's staging confirms Mama's choice. All of this gives the show a once-removed quality from the Road movies and early musical comedy, but none of it will surprise Sondheim aficionados.

Since we saw it on 22 June, the show apparently underwent some revision, especially focused on Nellie, the Yukon bargirl turned millionairess, and her relationship to Wilson.³ The amount of hand-wringing over the book itself marks yet another departure from early musical comedy, where stories often depended more on stars, songs, and dances, than narrative integrity. In fact, the show's tortuous road to production parallels the Mizner's vicissitudes: Sondheim conceived it back in the early 1950s, but shelved the idea when he discovered that Irving Berlin was working on a Mizner show, which was never finished. Sondheim picked up the trail in the mid-1990s and the show has undergone many changes, not least in its title: from *Wise Guys to Gold!* to *Bounce*. The reviewers were respectfully unimpressed by this latest version. In the punning style that few could resist, a *Chicago Tribune* headline of 2 July read "Sondheim Doesn't 'Bounce' High Enough." After a brief run at the Kennedy Center in the fall, Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* extended the metaphor into the basketball arena: "The bounce in 'Bounce' is never very high," he wrote. "It's more like a close-to-the-floor dribble."⁴ Nineteen days later, the *Times* confirmed "No Bounce to Broadway." It's too bad Broadway audiences won't get a chance to see Sondheim reinventing his style in a lighter vein. It takes discipline, and even courage, to scale back in this way. But true to the show's spirit, Roger Berlind, co-holder of the commercial rights to the show, insisted that "The show will not die. There's going to be many productions of this show. It's part of the canon."⁵

Whether or not *Bounce* can be termed a "flop," the consolation for its demise is at least built into the show: you forget the past and go on to the next thing. What's the next thing for Sondheim? No one knows for sure, but at a pre-show talk at Chicago's Ravinia Festival in late August, he mentioned his

Sondheim (continued)

interest in doing a “theme and variations” piece, possibly a musical version of the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*.⁶ In any case, we can be sure that, unlike the film’s characters, Sondheim will not repeat himself.

—Gayle Sherwood and Jeffrey Magee
Indiana University

Notes

¹ Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Co*, 2nd ed. (Da Capo Press, 1994), 68.

² Stephen Sondheim, “A Musical Isn’t Built in a Day, but This Took 47 Years,” *New York Times* (12 September 1999); www.nytimes.com.

³ Bruce Weber, “Adding a Sexy Spring to Levitate ‘Bounce,’” *New York Times* (30 July 2003); www.nytimes.com.

⁴ Ben Brantley, “Sondheim Guides Two Brothers on a Tour of Life,” *New York Times* (1 November 2003); www.nytimes.com.

⁵ Jesse McKinley, “Confirmed: No Bounce to Broadway This Season,” *New York Times* (19 November 2003); www.nytimes.com.

⁶ Hedy Weiss, “Sondheim Plans Changes to ‘Bounce,’” *Chicago Sun-Times* (25 August 2003): 38.

Thinking Jazz (continued)

that probe the iconoclastic upstarts of the 1960s and 1970s such as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, and Andrew Cyrille, with the final chapter, “The Majesty of the Blues,” which examines Marsalis’s neo-conservative movement.

Eric Porter succeeds magnificently in his corrective to one of the gaping holes in African American intellectual history and in jazz studies. His volume will make it impossible for musicologists and historians to ignore the voices of jazz musicians when seeking to understand the place of jazz in twentieth-century American culture.

—Salim Washington
Brooklyn College

Carl Ruggles (continued)

⁶ Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 41-42; repr. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁷ Charles Seeger, “Carl Ruggles,” *Musical Quarterly* 18 (1932): 585-86.

⁸ James Tenney, “The Chronological Development of Carl Ruggles’ Melodic Style,” *Perspectives of New Music* 16/1 (1977): 36-69.

⁹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein (Faber and Faber, 1967), 58.

¹⁰ The theory is fully presented in Charles Seeger, *Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*, in *Studies in Musicology II: 1929-1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (University of California Press, 1994), 17-273.

¹¹ The idea of the known and unknown refers to the first line of Whitman’s poem “Portals” from *Leaves of Grass* (1881), which Ruggles quotes as an epigram for his own *Portals*: “What are those of the known but to ascend and enter the Unknown?”

¹² Seeger, “Carl Ruggles,” 580.

¹³ Virgil Thomson, *American Music Since 1910* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970), 35.

¹⁴ Letter to Ruggles dated 27 January 1928, quoted in Nina Archabal, *Carl Ruggles: an Ultramodern Composer as Painter* (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1979), 121.

¹⁵ Marilyn Ziffirin, *Carl Ruggles: Composer, Painter, and Storyteller* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), 93.

Narratives of Blues Discovery (continued)

Scorsese CD set moves comfortably over time and through space, presenting a wide variety of rural and urban blues styles. But unlike the Smithsonian collection that exclusively features African American artists, the final third of the Scorsese anthology is peppered with white bluesmen and a few white blueswomen. This provocative editorial decision results in an accurate portrayal of blues music’s steady migration towards white production and consumption throughout the second half of the twentieth century. But more importantly, the close juxtaposition of black and white singers underscores two critical points about blacks, whites, and the blues that the editors may not have foreseen. First, white folks sure can play the blues a lot better than they can sing them; and second, the most successful white interpreters are those who began with a bluesy feeling and took the music somewhere else. White singers like Jimmy Rodgers, Elvis, Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, and the Allman Brothers, rather than the slavish imitators, have clearly created the most durable music from the blues.

I suppose those of us who teach American music should be grateful that Martin Scorsese and his collaborators have brought so much attention to one of our most cherished and enduring forms of musical expression. But the uneven quality and narrow focus of the series is a regrettable yet predictable result of too many white-boys-discover-the-blues fantasies and too little serious understanding of the African American experience that lies at the heart of the blues. Meanwhile, the disquieting realization that Hollywood celebrities like Mr. Scorsese seem to be calling the shots at PBS these days should give serious documentary filmmakers and scholars a good reason to sing the blues.

—Ray Allen

¹For more on the up-the-river myth and other blues misconceptions, see David Evans, “Demythologizing the Blues,” *ISAM Newsletter* XXIX/1 (Fall 1999): 8-9, 13.

Germania (continued)

⁴ Frederic Ritter, *Music in America*, 2d ed. (Chas. Scribner’s Sons, 1890), 342.

⁵ On Balatka and Börnstein, see Carl Wittke, *Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), 289 and 295.

⁶ On the ensembles, see Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, vol. 1, *Resonances* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 545 and 598.

⁷ The term is borrowed from William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna* (Holmes and Meier, 1975), 109-13.

⁸ William Weber, “Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770-1870,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 8, no. 1 (June 1977): 5-21.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (MIT Press, 1989), 27-43.

¹⁰ *Dwight’s Journal* (2 July 1853), 101-102.

¹¹ All quotations are translated by the author from Henry Albrecht’s *Skizzen aus dem Leben der Musik-Gesellschaft Germania* (King and Baird, 1869), 5-6.

¹² H. Earle Johnson, “The Germania Musical Society,” *Musical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (January 1953): 75-93.

¹³ See, for example, Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, cited in note 3.



*Roger Sessions, 1962
Courtesy of Oxford University Press*

Inside This Issue

Music In Williamsburg

Germania Musical Society

Scorsese's Blues

Sessions & Berger

Sondheim

Ruggles

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ _____.
Suggested donation: \$30. Please make payable to:
Brooklyn College Member Organization (memo ISAM)
All contributions are tax-deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____



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

Please become a voluntary subscriber.

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

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

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Brooklyn, NY
Permit No. 3091