

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 XXXV, No. 1

Fall 2005

“White Woman” as Jazz Collector in *New Orleans* (1947)

by
Sherrie Tucker

“The music I’ve been singing, so traditional, it was new once. And I’ve been learning to make it mine. But this! This music is mine already!”¹ So gushes Miralee Smith, the white opera singing, jazz-smitten ingénue played by Dorothy Patrick in the 1947 film *New Orleans*, set in 1917. Despite having spent a good deal of the scene talking over the collective improvisation of Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, Zutty Singleton and other musicians, Miralee finds her attraction to “authentic New Orleans jazz” rising to a crescendo. Especially moved by the film’s theme song, “Do



Dorothy Patrick, Arturo de Cordova, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and other musicians in New Orleans (1947)

You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans,” as sung by Endie, her black maid (played with palpable unhappiness by Billie Holiday in her only role in a feature motion picture), Miralee rises, eyes glowing, cheeks flushed; and declares, “I’m going to sing that New Orleans song!”

For this act of white lady impropriety, Miralee is bounced from the Basin Street club. Such a rebuff would crush many a die-hard jazz fan, but not Miralee, whose desire now burns hotter than Buddy Bolden’s trumpet calling the children back home. This music is *hers*! She simply *must* feel the song of her black maid moving through her own white lady body, as indeed, she will, before this musical romance is over. The grand finale finds her singing the song from the concert hall stage, making a “lady out of jazz” like Paul Whiteman.

Until recently, the only parts of *New Orleans* I had seen were the musical clips containing Billie Holiday—how awful to see her in the maid’s uniform, but oh, how her singing transcended Hollywood’s limitations—and Louis Armstrong, leading a “Trad” revivalist’s dream team of New Orleans musicians. The consensus of jazz and film critics, historians, and aficionados is that with the exception of the musical sequences, the film is, as Donald Bogle puts it, “a dreary pedestrian mess.” Writes Bogle, “Although the story is supposedly about jazz’s rise to mainstream acceptance, the real jazz innovators—Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday—are neatly relegated to the sidelines while the plot follows the lives of the lead white characters, who are uniformly bland.”²

While I heartily agree with Bogle’s critical assessment, I would argue that the juxtaposition of bland white characters with brilliant black musicians is not at all at odds with the racial project of the film, of “Trad” fans of the 1940s, or of much jazz appreciation since then.³ White blandness and black affect, in fact, are not incidental to this film. The characters with which the white target audience is invited to identify are united by their weariness of European high culture and by their enthusiasm for jazz as played by black musicians. There is something, in other words, about the failure of the film that works in favor of its message: the

Inside This Issue

Hurricane Katrina
and the New Jazz
Orthodoxy by
Salim Washington...4

Celebrating Noah
Creshevsky.....6

Dusty Springfield and
the Motown Invasion
by Annie Janeiro
Randall.....8

Review: Searching for
Robert Johnson
by Nathan W.
Pearson.....10

Review: From Paris
to Peoria by
Nancy Newman.....12

New Orleans (continued)

redemptive promise of authentic black New Orleans jazz for the bodies and souls of white Americans.

It isn't enough to critique this film as musically "bright" and "dramatically a 'dud'" (to cite the headline that didn't do justice to Leonard Feather's explicitly anti-racist review). These performances of bland white characters gaping at creative black musicking are enactments of power; acts facilitated in large part through a particular construction of white womanhood as unaware, or "innocent," of her social power.⁴ To face the entire film, rather than just the musical sequences starring the black jazz musicians, compels us to consider the curious efficacy of the "white lady" in that very enactment of jazz appropriation analyzed in jazz studies as a white masculinist routine. We in jazz studies have gotten adept at wagging our fingers at the unconscious primitivism of figures such as Mezz Mezzrow, Norman Mailer, and Jack Kerouac. And women-in-jazz historians like me have been far more interested in recovering women jazz musicians of any race as forgotten historical actors, than in retrieving lost histories of white women as jazz appropriators, symbolic or otherwise. Yet, acknowledging such appropriation is central to appreciating the cultural politics of a film like *New Orleans*.

Krin Gabbard has identified the recurring figure of the "Jazz Nerd" as a white man who can't bear any gaps in his collection, and who develops an outside-the-mainstream masculine identity through amassing, organizing and memorizing jazz records, especially those of black men whom the "Jazz Nerd" admires as "hip."⁵ Ingrid Monson cautions that the historical problem with "white hipness" is its tendency to project white desires for affect, authenticity, sexuality, onto black bodies and black music—so that even when the "hipster" is sincere in loving jazz, he or she may be reproducing elements of the very aspects of dominant constructions of race that buoy white supremacist ideology. Monson draws from Eric Lott's analysis of the continuation of minstrelsy through bohemianism in white men's hipness, but she also notes that "[m]any white women have enjoyed the reputation of black men and women for hypersexuality," adding, that, "[a]ttention to the particular pathways of identification would no doubt illuminate the cultural issue further."⁶

To critically unpack the "pathways of identification" available to jazz-loving white women historically, we need much more

information about white women as minstrel performers and audience members, as bohemians, and as fans of black music.⁷ Jayna Brown writes that what white women stood to gain from minstrel performance was "conditional access to realms of expressive freedoms they were otherwise forbidden."⁸ Many white women jazz fans would reject any analyses of their devotion to jazz as appropriation, and understandably so. Yet white womanhood has certainly shaped my own pathway of identification as a jazz fan, and jazz seemed to offer what felt like an "escape" from the social position I continue to inhabit, which, of course, has its privileges in a racist culture. Part of my responsibility, then, as a white woman jazz fan is to lose my "innocence" about the pathways of identification I inherit. I may not *identify* with Miralee's jazz desire, but I need to know its history.

Miralee knows nothing about jazz, except that it is "hers." If "hip" means "in the know," then "hip" she is not. How does her desire drive this narrative about white jazz love? I want to make it clear that I am not arguing that Miralee Smith reveals what white upper-class northern U.S. women jazz fans were *really* like in 1947 or at any other time. But this representation is relevant towards an understanding about white womanhood and jazz desire. What I want to argue is that this performance tells us something about cultural legibility of one kind of figure of white woman, who, in this case, obscures a black women's performance, and that the cultural ubiquity of the trope of white woman that she performs makes it difficult to know about, imagine, and perhaps even to *become* another kind of white woman jazz fan.

I'm anchoring my reading in Ruth Frankenberg's analysis of the recurring, co-constructed and powerful "family of tropes" in which White Woman is characterized as vulnerable, innocent, sexually pure, enabling White Man's cultural value as protector of white womanhood. The trope of Man of Color shores up these roles by standing in as white woman's sexual predator—what Angela Davis has called the Myth of the Black Rapist. (Alternately, he is rendered sexless and powerless, as in Uncle Tom's benign friendship with Little Eva.) The trope of Woman of Color has the thankless job of enhancing White Woman's purity by representing everything she is not supposed to be: "seductress, fertile, unhygienic" who is "always on a slippery slope from exotic beauty to unfemininity and ugliness."⁹ Throughout it all, White Woman must remain unsullied by the knowledge that her social position is powerful.

The power of these tropes is not in their accurate reflection of who we are, but in their efficacy in justifying hierarchical social relations, and, as Frankenberg puts it, in the fact that they "continue to enlist" actual people into their service with "varying degrees of consciousness and unconsciousness...."¹⁰ The family of tropes, for example, makes it very easy for actual white women to become unknowing agents of racism while identifying as innocent and respectable.¹¹ Hilary Harris posits that "the imagining and performing" of a genuinely "antiracist white womanhood" could only be achieved through tactics by which white women "fail" at the trope of "White Woman."¹²

The white singer in *New Orleans* animates a jazz-liking white woman who succeeds at the trope of White Woman, and therefore

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

Editors Ellie M. Hisama and Jeff Taylor

Managing Editor Carl Clements

Contributing Editors Ray Allen
H. Wiley Hitchcock
Carol J. Oja

Production Assistant Kathleen Mason Krotman

The ISAM Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring. Copyright 2005 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: www.bcisam.org

ISAM Matters

Hurricane Katrina devastated much of New Orleans and the gulf region this fall. Over 1,300 people died, and many musicians lost their families, homes, and belongings, including their instruments. Flooding destroyed the music library at Tulane University, and several other university libraries were damaged. Many people are still awaiting aid. For a list of ways to help musicians and institutions affected by Hurricane Katrina, please see p. 5.

Our colloquium series, **Music in Polycultural America**, continues to bring exciting speakers to campus. This fall, **Jeffrey Magee** (Indiana University) gave a lecture on the music of Irving Berlin, jazz, and Broadway in the 1920s. **Daphne Brooks** (Princeton University) presented a black feminist reading of rock criticism and performances by women musicians including Nikka Costa and Betty Davis. **Annie Janeiro Randall** (Bucknell University) gave a talk on Dusty Springfield's performance at the Brooklyn Fox in 1964. Her article on Springfield appears in this issue of the Newsletter (p. 8). Finally, the composer/conductor **Lukas Foss** spoke about his music and played some of his compositions. We thank the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities and the Cerf Fund for their generous support of our series. For information on our Spring 2006 lecture series, please visit our website, www.bcisam.org, or call the Institute at (718) 951-5655.

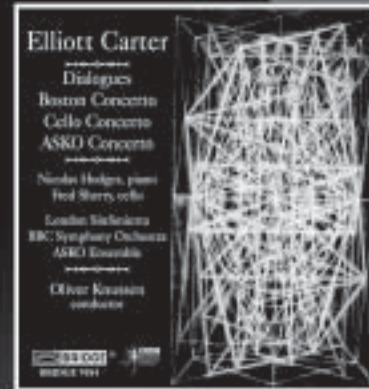
The eighth meeting of the international conference **Feminist Theory and Music** took place at the City University of New York, Graduate Center and New York University on 23-26 June 2005, with over 200 participants and audience members. Highlights included the keynote address "Midsummer's Night in Harlem: A Cultural Critic Listens" by **Farah Jasmine Griffin**; an opening plenary session with **Suzanne Cusick**, **Farzaneh Milani** and **Elizabeth Wood**; six concerts featuring music by **Pauline Oliveros**, **Ursel Schlicht**, **Frances White** and others, with performances by musicians including trombonist **Monique Buzzarté**, pianist **Sarah Cahill**, soprano **Kristin Norderval**, and violinist **Airi Yoshioka**; and fifteen paper sessions on topics ranging from American women making musical culture to feminist punk. Special events included a talk and performance by **DJ Kuttin Kandi**; a preview of a documentary on gospel singer **Marion Williams** by **Ray Allen**, **Kathryn Golden**, and **Ashley James**; and an excerpt from a documentary on jazz pianist and composer **Mary Lou Williams** by **Carol Bash**. The next Feminist Theory and Music conference will be held at McGill University in Montréal in summer 2007. Stay tuned for the conference announcement and call for papers.

The next Feminist Theory and Music conference will be held at McGill University's Schulich School of Music in Montréal in summer 2007. The conference announcement and call for papers will be posted at www.mcgill.ca/music in Fall 2006.

Two new faculty members joined Brooklyn College's Conservatory of Music in Fall 2005. **David Grubbs** is Assistant Professor of Radio and Sound Art with appointments in the Performance Interactive Media Arts (PIMA) program, Conservatory of Music, and Radio/Television program. In November, he successfully defended his dissertation, *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, The Sixties, and Sound Recording*, at the University of Chicago. A founding member of

Continued on page 9

In celebration of Elliott Carter's 97th birthday

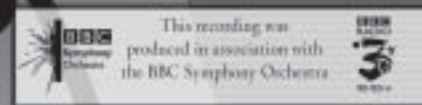


BRIDGE 9184

The Music of Elliott Carter, Volume 7 premiere recordings

Dialogues (2003) for piano and chamber orchestra
Cello Concerto (2001) for cello and orchestra
Boston Concerto (2002) for orchestra
and the premiere concert performance of
ASKO Concerto (2000) for chamber ensemble

Nicolas Hodges, piano • Fred Sherry, cello
BBC Symphony Orchestra • London Sinfonietta
Asko Ensemble • Oliver Knussen, conductor



BRIDGE 9177

The Music of Elliott Carter, Volume 6 Violin Concerto (1990)

Four Lauds for solo violin (1984-2000)
Holiday Overture (1944)

Rolf Schulte, violin
Odense Symphony Orchestra
Justin Brown and Donald Palma, conductors



www.BridgeRecords.com

phone orders: 1-800-752-1951

Hurricane Katrina and the New Jazz Orthodoxy

Editors' note: The following opinion piece is a response to an article by Wynton Marsalis that appeared in Time on 19 September 2005. The original article is available at <www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1103569,00.html>.

Has Hurricane Katrina failed to blow the wool from our eyes? The recent disaster in the Gulf region is not only historic, but mythical. It provides a window into our political, economic, and social life, and our ideas and fantasies about who and how we are. Not surprisingly, in a nation that is habitually self-congratulatory and completely sentimental about its own history, the government, media, and pundits have too often framed this disaster and its consequent reactions with a narrative that emphasizes individual heroic efforts over systemic racism and class-based oppression, fiscal and managerial mishaps over the institutional ravages insured by modern day capitalism, the laudatory tweakings of a bourgeois, liberal democracy over the imperialistic domination upon which its affluent lifestyle is based, and the fiction of a melting pot culture over the widening alienation and vicious behavior between various "Americas."

In "Saving America's Soul Kitchen: How to Bring This Country Together? Listen to the Message of New Orleans," Wynton Marsalis, our de facto national voice of jazz, addresses the nation, rightly admonishing us to consider the cultural worth of New Orleans through its cuisine, architecture, and music (or at least one strand of the latter). And while he urges us to see the mythic scale of the current crisis, his choice to view New Orleans's place in the nation's soul only through the lens of culture continues a long tradition of myth-making that hides more about our national character than it reveals.

Marsalis has been an indisputable force as trumpeter, music educator, and promoter of young talent. Nevertheless, I feel it important to address the philosophical basis for some of his views, which can nearly have the effect of policy in the jazz world. Lest anyone be seduced into thinking he is just a straw man, however, let me also say that his is the iconic voice of a chorus of jazz thinkers (which includes most notably Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch) who have sought to redress the criminal marginalization of jazz's significance by emphasizing its elegance and artistic stature. This project continues what Ellison saw as a corrective of Amiri Baraka's overly sociological treatment of the blues aesthetic. However, to my mind they have taken the remedy too far. It is as if they focused on only one third of the late scholar Harold Cruse's

admonishment to include culture in all considerations of the plight of African Americans, to the exclusion of considerations of the political economy.

Marsalis laments that Americans "have never understood how our core beliefs are manifest in culture—and how culture should guide [our] political and economic realities." Culture, politics, and economics are part of a whole in life, and must be considered together if our lived experience is to progress towards our highest ideals. But what Marsalis fails to acknowledge is that many in America care no more about saving America's "soul kitchen" than they do for the liberation of Uncle Ben or Aunt Jemimah. While Marsalis, in his celebration of the cultural triumphs of the "Big Easy," fails to mention injustice and inequality, white America and black America (to cite only two groups) differ in their perceptions of the salience of race and class in this crisis.

The black poor have been rendered invisible to such a degree that their current plight is seen as an isolated event rather than a condition constitutive of a political economy continuing from slavery to today. Our inability to acknowledge that fact also makes us blind to the racial overtones of the Katrina crisis, a state dramatically highlighted by the mythic proportions of what is only the most recent massive dispossession. The color-blind ideology implicit in Marsalis's New Orleans-centric version of "the birth of jazz" story, based upon a fictive American melting pot, ignores the bitterness and fractiousness that has existed between the so-called races

of New Orleans musicians and the ways they have affected the music.

In one famous example, Ferdinand Joseph La Menthe, the great pianist, composer and band leader Jelly Roll Morton, showed great resentment toward his demotion to de facto blackness, when New Orleans's Creoles of color, who had lived between the states of whiteness and blackness, were suddenly lumped entirely into the latter category. In contrast reed player Sidney Bechet, who also grew up as Creole and spoke French in his household, considered himself black, identifying both himself and his music as African in his autobiography *Treat It Gentle*. His story of jazz's origin differs considerably from Marsalis's in this regard. Bechet's myth has jazz, African music made American through the crucible of slavery, told in a remarkable romance that includes slave owners, slaves, maroon communities, psychosexual expressions with respect to race, dismemberment and loss, disenfranchisement, and other topics of historical and cultural significance. Maybe his neglect as



*Sidney Bechet at Childs Paramount Restaurant, New York City. August 23, 1953
Courtesy of Bob Parent/Archive Photos*

Helping Musicians and Institutions Affected by Hurricane Katrina

TO SUPPORT MUSICIANS AND MUSIC PROGRAMS

The **New Orleans Musicians Clinic** provides free medical services, shelter, and information to musicians. Please send donations to: **NOMC Emergency Fund**. Funds will be distributed by SW LA Area Health Education Center Foundation, Inc. and can be contacted at:

SW LA Area Health Education Center Foundation, Inc
103 Independence Blvd.
Lafayette, LA 70506
phone: (337) 989-0001
e-mail: finance@swlahec.com or musiciank@swlahec.com
website: www.swlahec.com

Jazz Foundation of America will be addressing the longer term needs of these jazz and blues artists who will have just lost everything. They are raising funds and distributing money for the musicians to get new apartments or room for rent, and working with music stores and manufacturers to replace instruments and equipment. They also help hundreds of elderly musicians find employment through the Jazz in the Schools program.

Please send donations to:

Jazz Foundation of America
322 West 48th Street, 6th floor
New York, NY 10036
phone: (212) 245-3999, ext. 21

DONATING MONEY TO LIBRARIES

To help **Tulane University's music library**, please mail your donation to:

Tulane University
Department 572
P.O. Box 4869
Houston, TX 77210-4869

or visit: www.tulane.edu/rebuildingfund.html

The American Library Association has excellent information on the situation of libraries in the gulf south and how to make donations: visit ala.org

DONATING BOOKS, SCORES, RECORDINGS, INSTRUMENTS

Efforts are being organized by American Musicological Society President Elaine Sisman, along with the Music Library Association and publishers to help New Orleans libraries rebuild. This effort will be spearheaded by Laura Macy (editor of Grove Online, Oxford University Press) and Paula Matthews (Princeton University Music Library).

Please organize book drives or collect your own unwanted or duplicated books, scores, and recordings, and speak with your local librarians to locate space to collect these items. As soon as libraries in New Orleans are able to accept these donations, information will be posted on ISAM's website, www.bcisam.org. Please visit the **Louisiana Music Teachers Association's** website, lmta.org, for more information on how to donate music and instruments.

International Association for Jazz Education has established a Hurricane Relief Zone for IAJE members in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. They have asked members in those states to identify their immediate needs and to post them on the IAJE Bulletin Board. Through this network, you can provide direct assistance to those in need. Please visit www.iaje.org/hurricanerelief to learn how you can provide offers of assistance or respond directly to members asking for assistance. This could include employment opportunities, housing, telephone calling cards, instruments, or relief supplies.

The **Acadiana Arts Council of Southeastern Louisiana**, through its Project HEAL (Helping Employ Artists Locally), funds performances in clubs and in schools by displaced musicians in the area, and provides musical instruments to those who have lost their own: visit acadianaarts.council.org.

The **Tipitina's Foundation** runs programs to help musicians. They provide computers, recording equipment, classes, and instruments to schoolchildren through their Instruments A-Comin' program: visit tipitinas.com/foundation

Editors' note: Our thanks to Elizabeth West Marvin (Eastman School of Music) of the Scholars for Social Responsibility for helping to assemble this information.

Celebrating Noah Creshevsky

Noah Creshevsky studied composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and Luciano Berio at Juilliard. As a faculty member in Brooklyn College's Conservatory of Music, he coordinated the composition program and directed the Center for Computer Music. Creshevsky's recent compositional work is part of a genre known as hyperrealism, explored in his essay below.

On 3 November 2005 the Brooklyn College International Electro-Acoustic Music Festival presented a concert to celebrate Creshevsky's sixtieth birthday. The concert took place at Klavierhaus in Manhattan and featured performances by Vahagn Avetisyan (piano), Dennis Bathory-Kitsz (voice), Thomas Buckner (baritone), and Beth Griffith (soprano). Highlights of the program were compositions written in Creshevsky's honor by Dennis Bathory-Kitsz, George Brunner, Douglas Cohen, David Gunn, Michael Kinney, Tania León, Robert Voisey, and Amnon Wolman.

In honor of Creshevsky's birthday, an excerpt from León's *Para-Noah*, and reminiscences and statements by his friends and colleagues are published on p. 7. The complete tribute statements are available at <www.bcisam.org>.

—Douglas Cohen
Brooklyn College

On Hyperrealism

My musical vocabulary consists largely of familiar bits of words, songs, and instrumental music which are edited but rarely subjected to electronic processing. The result is that music that obscures the boundaries of real and imaginary ensembles through the fusion of opposites: music and noise, comprehensible and incomprehensible vocal sources, human and superhuman vocal and instrumental capacities. My most recent hyperrealist compositions explore the fragmentation and reconstruction of pre-existing music in combination with original synthetic and acoustic materials. Moment suggest musical environments of indeterminate ethnicity—simultaneously Western and non-Western, ancient and modern, familiar and unfamiliar. Hyperrealism is an electroacoustic musical language constructed from sounds that are found in our shared environment (“realism”), handled in ways that are somehow exaggerated or excessive (“hyper”).

Hyperreal music exists in two basic genres. The first uses the sounds of traditional instruments that are pushed beyond the capacities of human performers in order to create superperformers—hypothetical virtuosos who transcend the limitations of individual performance capabilities. These are the “supermen” who appeared

in a number of my compositions, beginning with *Circuit* (1971) for harpsichord, on tape. The compact disc *Man & Superman* (Centaur CRC 2126) was largely connected to my interest in the ambiguous borders between live performers and their impossibly expanded electronic counterparts. The idea of superperformers has numerous precursors, including the violin music of Paganini, the piano music of Liszt, conventions music or player piano, and the fully realized player-piano music of Conlon Nancarrow.

Fundamental to the second genre of hyperrealism is the expansion of the sound palettes from which music is made. Developments in technology and transformations in social and economic realities have made it possible for composers to incorporate the sounds of the entire world into their music. Hyperrealism of this second genre aims to integrate vast and diverse sonic elements to produce an expressive and versatile musical language. Its vocabulary is an inclusive, limitless sonic compendium, free of ethnic and national particularity.

Essential to the concept of hyperrealism is that its sounds are generally of natural origin, and that they remain sufficiently unprocessed so that their origin is perceived by the listener as being “natural.” Since the sounds of our environment vary from year to year, generation to generation, and culture to culture, it is impossible to isolate a definitive encyclopedia of “natural” sounds, but there are a great many sounds that are familiar to nearly all of us. These are the most basic building blocks in the formation of a shared (if temporary) collective sonic reality. The development and incorporation of expanded palettes consisting of natural sounds also has precursors, most notably the work of Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henri, and the overall tradition of *musique concrète*. Hyperrealism celebrates bounty, either by the extravagant treatment

of limited sound palettes or by assembling and manipulating substantially extended palettes.

—Noah Creshevsky
New York



Noah Creshevsky in the 1970s

Editors' note: Excerpts from Creshevsky's works may be heard at: <www.newmus.net.org/creshevsky.html>

For more information about Tania León and her music, please visit: <www.tanialeon.com>

Celebrating Creshevsky (continued)

32 *Bluesy* *meno mosso, molto dolce sempre rubato*
♩ = 60

34 *Pia. (ad libitum)*
sub. f *mp* *mf*

37 *Ritmico, mechanical*
♩ = 120

Tania León, Para-Noah, mm. 32-38
Courtesy of Tania León

Fractured Sounds of a Broken World

I discovered in Creshevsky's music a world I had never before experienced, even imagined. Here were sounds that hadn't occupied the same musical space, now somehow co-existing, and creating an integrated music that seemed to transcend style, time, and place.

—Robert Carl
Hartt School of Music

Creshevsky's music magnifies the reality of the sounds, creating an unexpected level of integration between the familiar in sound, the familiar in meaning, and the familiar in composition.

—Dennis Báthory-Kitsz
Northfield, Vermont

Sometimes a composer looks at a certain technology and sees it in a way that is not how it was designed. This is the case with Noah and samplers. He assembles several hundreds or more of pre-recorded sounds and imports them into the samplers.... The focus is on sound not pitch. His approach is one of the most imaginative I've experienced in all of MIDI implemented music and, in fact, all of electro-acoustic music.

—George Brunner
Brooklyn College

You can teach almost any musically talented person to make music that sounds like music; what interests me are people who make music that sounds like themselves. Noah Creshevsky is certainly a composer whose music sounds like no other.

—Thomas Buckner
New York

For Noah, the whole world of ideas, sounds, and experiences is a potential source of inspiration and he encourages the same openness in his students.

—Nancy Hager
Brooklyn College

The fractured sounds of a broken world recover their unity in the kaleidoscope of Noah's music.

—Charles Amirkhania
San Francisco

Dusty Springfield and the Motown Invasion

While the Beatles were cutting a swath across America and conquering the US pop charts during the mid-1960s British Invasion, another important musical phenomenon was taking place across the Atlantic—the Motown Invasion of Britain. While American teenagers were avidly consuming the Beatles’ records, British teenagers were discovering Berry Gordy’s Motown Revue and forming a fan base for a genre now known as “British Soul.” This devotion to black American artists such as Tina Turner, Marvin Gaye, and Aretha Franklin influenced the careers of British artists including Lulu, Tom Jones, and Annie Lennox. The first and perhaps best-known British artist in this long line of “blue-eyed soul” vocalists was the late Dusty Springfield (1939-1999).

Springfield was the most important figure in facilitating the Motown Invasion. In addition to covering many Motown hits herself, she gave the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, and many other groups their first television exposure in the UK. The Motown stars’ appearance on Springfield’s television special *The Sounds of Motown* in 1965 was as significant as the Beatles’ landmark 1965 appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, which catapulted them into the commercial stratosphere. *The Sounds of Motown* was conceived and hosted by Springfield for the express purpose of igniting the careers of the Detroit singers in European markets. Through Springfield’s advocacy, these Detroit artists were transported into the European spotlight.¹

During *The Sounds of Motown*, audiences in Britain and across the globe were able to see the singers performing live the songs they had been hearing on their radios—songs such as “Dancin’ in the Streets” by Martha and the Vandellas, “Stop in the Name of Love” by the Supremes, and “Just My Imagination” by Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. The show allowed British and BBC audiences to view an image of African Americans who modeled a hopeful postcolonial vision for the African diaspora. “Detroit” represented the social and political attainment of black, middle-class urbanites who were rockin’ and rollin,’ but who also stood in stark contrast to other contemporary images of African Americans that Europeans were likely to have seen: television news footage of black civil rights protesters in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia as they were assaulted by police, harassed by White Citizens’ Councils, and stalked by the Ku Klux Klan.

This jarring contrast between the images projected on *Sounds of Motown* and those broadcast on the evening news is key to understanding the reception and lasting importance of the Motown Invasion and, indeed, the reception of their advocate, Dusty Springfield, in both the UK and the US. The widely reported racial violence triggered by the civil rights movement was the ever-present backdrop for the Detroit musicians: their April 1965 UK television appearance with Springfield followed the landmark events of 1964’s “Freedom Summer” and preceded America’s urban riots of 1965 by only a few months. And while Springfield and the Motown artists scrupulously avoided attaching any political significance to their TV special, no one could have missed the message of solidarity it conveyed, following on the heels of Springfield’s front-page deportation from South Africa for her refusal in December 1964 to entertain segregated audiences.²

If the images of *Sounds of Motown* embodied a rejection of racism and apartheid for an international audience, then the sounds of Reeves, Springfield, and the other Detroit acts singing together enacted the same. This was the first time Springfield’s fans saw their idol in the presence of the singers that she herself idolized, whose sound she emulated in



Martha Reeves and Dusty Springfield in the Tamla Motown television special, 1965

her own performances, and whose cultural background she acknowledged as a principal source of her vocal style. Their musical harmony can be understood as demonstrating an idealized racial harmony during a time of horrific racial disharmony through Springfield’s own persona as the “White Queen of Soul,” which bound together seemingly incongruent racial elements.³

Springfield acquired the title “White Queen of Soul” as a result of her many hit cover versions of songs by African American artists such as the Shirelles, Inez and Charlie Foxx, and Baby Washington.⁴ Her first album, *A Girl Called Dusty* (1964) was dominated by such covers. Springfield had internalized the then-current black pop sound so thoroughly that many listeners in the US who had only heard her songs on the radio but had never seen her assumed that she was an African American.⁵

Springfield’s covers of songs by African American singers ranged from close copies of the original versions to clever reworkings. Springfield faithfully copied the interpretations of black female artists—her covers of The Shirelles’ “Mama Said [There’d be Days Like This]” and the Velvelettes’ “Needle in a Haystack” are similar to the originals in most respects—but showed no

Springfield and the Motown Invasion (continued)

comparable fealty to interpretations of black male singers. For example, her cover of Garnett Mimms's "It Was Easier to Hurt Her" omits the gratuitous, spoken opening lines ("Give her some hard times, treat her mean/that's what all the guys say/It'll only make her love you more/but it just don't go down that way"), and then shapes the song from an emotional position that is more complex and conflicted than Mimms's. Springfield insisted that her white, British session musicians copy precisely the instrumental playing styles of black American musicians. She even paid for her backing band, The Echoes, to hear concerts by James Brown and the Famous Flames to facilitate the exact reproduction of the sound of Brown's band on her recordings.⁶

Though *A Girl Called Dusty* includes remakes of songs by white US singers such as Lesley Gore and Gene Pitney, Springfield made no attempt to copy their singing styles. Springfield's "You Don't Own Me" bears little vocal resemblance to Gore's perfect rendition of a New Jersey teenager's first petulant attempt to establish social and sexual autonomy. Similarly, her cover of Pitney's "Twenty-Four Hours from Tulsa," a song in which a man runs off with a new girlfriend, adopts a humorous, protofeminist stance as the protagonist who dumps her Tulsa boyfriend for a man she has just met at a truck stop. To the delight of her teenaged female fans, Springfield succeeded in regendering such songs and turning the usual male-female dynamic on its head.⁷ One wonders how audiences might have read the pattern of Springfield's preferences, including her reverence for vocal interpretations of African American female artists and instrumental styles of African American male artists, and her willingness to invert power relationships in songs by black and white American male singers.⁸

In all of its racial and gendered complexity, the reception of US pop in Britain during the mid-1960s was a phenomenon of considerable significance both within the confines of pop music and within the broader sphere of pop culture. The Motown Invasion reflected and contributed to the evolving shifts in social and political power relationships that marked this period in the US and Britain. The lasting cultural impact of this transatlantic moment in the 1960s and its extraordinarily rich music were undoubtedly as important as the endlessly analyzed social phenomena associated with the Beatles and the British Invasion.

—Annie Janeiro Randall
Bucknell University

Notes

¹ Martha Reeves and Mark Bego, *Dancing in the Streets: Confessions of a Motown Diva* (Hyperion, 1994), 124. Vicki Wickham, producer of the show, gives an account of Dusty's role in the creation of "Sounds of Motown" in Penny Valentine and Vicki Wickham, *Dancing With Demons, The Authorized Biography of Dusty Springfield* (St. Martin's Press, 2000), 69

² The much publicized expulsion of Britain's top female singer from South Africa occupied the front pages of UK newspapers for days. Springfield received support from members of Parliament and from Prime Minister Harold Wilson. As a result of Springfield's stance, most British singers touring South Africa after this incident also refused to entertain segregated

audiences. See Lucy O'Brien, *Dusty: The Queen Bee of Pop* (Pan Books, 1999), 64-77.

³ Britain too was plagued by racism as a result of large-scale immigration from its former colonies in the Caribbean and Asia.

⁴ The origin of the phrase "White Queen of Soul" is unknown, though the British pop singer Cliff Richard is credited with first using the expression "white negress" in reference to Springfield sometime in the mid-'60s. See O'Brien, *Dusty: Queen Bee of Pop*, 61.

⁵ Martha Reeves was among those who had made this assumption and had even wondered why Berry Gordy had not yet signed such a talented black singer to the Motown label. Quoted in O'Brien, *Dusty: Queen Bee of Pop*, 59.

⁶ According to Derek Wadsworth, trombonist and arranger for The Echoes, Springfield was obsessed with getting the right instrumental sound, and demanded countless takes during extremely expensive recording sessions until she was satisfied with the sound. Interview with Wadsworth by the author (June 2004).

⁷ Journalist Ray Coleman wrote in a 21 November 1964 article for *Melody Maker* that "Her gay, dashing image clicked with thousands. And girl hit parade fans, notoriously apathetic towards girl singers until now, accepted her as the symbol of a new 'mod revolution.'" Quoted in Paul Howes, ed., *The Dusty Springfield Bulletin* (March 1997), 10.

⁸ Paul Howes traces the origins of all of Springfield's known recordings, including foreign language releases in *The Complete Dusty Springfield* (Reynolds and Hearn, 2001) while Patricia Juliana Smith examines Springfield's "resigned" cover versions in "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me": The Camp Masquerades of Dusty Springfield," in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (Routledge, 1999), 105-126.

ISAM Matters (continued)

the groups Gastr del Sol and Squirrel Bait, Professor Grubbs collaborated with the poet Susan Howe on *Thiefth* (Blue Chopsticks, 2005). **George Rothman**, founder and former director of the acclaimed Riverside Symphony, is Associate Professor of Music and the conductor of the Brooklyn College Orchestra. With the Riverside Symphony, he has recorded works by Mario Davidovsky (Bridge, 2002) and Stephen Hartke (New World Records, 1998); their recording of Andrew Imbrie's *Requiem* (Bridge, 1999) was nominated for a Grammy. A warm welcome to David and George.

Good news for researchers and fans of the *Newsletter*: all past issues are being made available free of charge as pdfs on our website: www.bcisam.org. All issues of the *Newsletter*, from our very first published in 1971, should be available by early 2006.

During his sabbatical last spring, **Jeff Taylor** worked on his book *Stompin' 'Em Down: Early Jazz Piano on Chicago's South Side*, to be published by the University of California Press. Thanks to Jeff for co-editing this issue of the *Newsletter*. Congratulations to **Carl Clements** for his new CD *Forth and Back* (Saraswati, 2005). I will be on leave in Spring 2006, and **Ray Allen**, who has been on a research leave with an Ethyle R. Wolfe faculty fellowship, will serve as Acting Director.

—Ellie M. Hisama

Searching for Robert Johnson

During his short life Robert Johnson (1911-1938) was a blues musician of minor prominence but great talent. But since the reissue of his songs twenty-three years after his death on the 1961 LP *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, he has become the most influential and iconic of all the country blues musicians. His “Sweet Home Chicago” emerged as the signature tune of the electric Chicago blues style of the early 1950s, and “Cross Road Blues” became an archetype of blues rock after it was recorded by Eric Clapton’s British rock group Cream in the late 1960s. For decades it has been nearly obligatory for rock blues guitarists to cite Johnson as their inspiration.

Frank Driggs’s notes to the *King of the Delta Blues Singers* album set in motion a process of myth-making that would endure for decades. Driggs and early blues scholar Sam Charters portrayed Johnson as a deeply tormented artist and an easily victimized primitive who never traveled far from home. Speculations on the violent causes of his unsolved death at the age of twenty-seven enhanced the Johnson mystique. But the mythologizing of Johnson took on grander proportions in 1966 when Pete Welding’s essay entitled “Hell Hound on His Trail: Robert Johnson” included a supposed quote from Johnson’s mentor Son House speculating that Johnson had sold his soul to the devil in exchange for blues greatness. Generations of listeners have in various ways clung to the supernatural tale, finding evidence of Johnson’s ties with the devil in his songs such as “Hellhound on My Trail,” “Me and the Devil Blues,” and “If I Had Possession over Judgment Day.” The mythic aspects of Robert Johnson grew so strong that they began to obscure his music and his impact upon the development of the blues.

Three recent books help correct the historical record while exposing the process by which Johnson’s career was mythologized. Read together, they provide a remarkably full picture of one of the most important but misunderstood American musicians of the twentieth century. Barry Lee Pearson [no relation to the reviewer] and Bill McCulloch’s *Robert Johnson Lost and Found* (University of Illinois Press, 2003; \$24.95) distills available source material to provide fresh and insightful commentary on Johnson’s life and music. In their preface, the authors warn: “We are suspicious of both the process by which the Johnson legend appears to have been constructed and the timing of the construction project” and argue that “Johnson and his music are best understood in the recollections of his peers and in the context of rural African American culture as it existed during the lean times of the twenties and thirties” (preface, p. x). Pearson and McCulloch’s approach is unromantic, research-driven, and underpinned by a deep understanding of both the music and its cultural context.

Of particular value in this book is a critical analysis of Johnson’s lyrics. Pearson and McCulloch effectively place Johnson’s songs in the context of his time: “Johnson was very much a folk artist, but he was also canny and businesslike in his mastery of the codes of commercial culture, albeit largely within his own culture” (p. 71). An example of their insightful examination of Johnson’s songs is their discussion of “If I had Possession of Judgment Day”: “Paul Oliver claimed to hear evidence of Johnson’s ‘tormented spirit’ here, but the melody is straight out of the blues tradition and is

known to most folks as ‘Rolling and Tumbling,’ the Delta national anthem. The verses focus on mistreatment and seduction ... but there is no hint of Faustian angst” (p. 75). They demonstrate that Johnson’s songs are strong and emotional, but not more focused on the supernatural or the singer’s own anxieties than other performers of the era. The picture that emerges is of a talented professional musician—well-traveled, sophisticated, focused on his career—not of a primitive.

Pearson and McCulloch are passionate admirers of Johnson who eschew flowery description and romantic images in favor of presenting research that contextualizes Johnson’s life and art. The book persuasively shows

how Johnson’s artistry included synthesis as well as innovation. “Johnny Shines claimed Johnson could add a song to his repertoire after hearing it only once ... but Johnson did more than just cover the material of other artists; he was remarkably adept at drawing what suited him from an array of sources and then melding the fragments into a personal statement through his own voice, his instrumental innovations, and his ability to project feeling.” (p. 72) The reader emerges with renewed appreciation of Johnson’s creativity and a deeper understanding of the contexts in which he worked.

Elijah Wald’s *Escaping the Delta—Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues* (Amistad, 2004; \$14.95) draws upon a variety of primary sources in retelling and interpreting the Johnson story. Citing a Fisk University and Library of Congress field research project from the 1940s that describes daily life and musical tastes in the rural South during Johnson’s life, Wald argues that rather than being a place of unrelenting racial oppression and poverty, by the turn of the twentieth century the Mississippi Delta was for many black farmers a land of potential opportunity. The first generation of blues innovators, including Son House and Skip James, who reached prominence in the early 1920s were thus the products of a relatively stable, even optimistic African American rural world. Wald further observes that by the 1930s many factors, notably the Depression and more mechanized farming, dramatically worsened the economic condition of the Delta. Poverty eventually



Robert Johnson, King of the Delta Blues Singers
Sony, 1998

Robert Johnson (continued)

replaced optimism and stability. The second generation of blues performers, including Robert Johnson, B. B. King, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf, would reach maturity during this period of economic decline which was also marked by technological advancement, with radio and the jukebox bringing new sounds and styles to the ears of these younger players.

Wald thus provides an alternative picture of the social and musical context of Robert Johnson. Rather than comprising a group of primitive tradition-bearers, Johnson and his contemporaries including Elmore James and Muddy Waters emerged in the late 1930s as progressives who would eventually relocate geographically and evolve musically. James and Muddy Waters would become the progenitors of the electric Chicago blues style, and as Wald persuasively argues, it is likely that Johnson's music would have evolved in similar fashion had he lived longer. Wald reinforces this claim with compelling evidence that Johnson, like his contemporaries, was inspired by the popular tunes of his day as much as by the blues.

Wald's discussion of Johnson's songs is the most thorough assessment I have encountered, providing insightful, detailed musical portraits. In describing "Me and the Devil Blues" Wald notes that "There is a good deal of dark humor mixed in with the fine singing, the brilliantly understated guitar work ... that make this one of Johnson's most fully conceived performances. The range of tone he can pack into a few lines is astonishing. The first verse starts with his voice sounding tight and forced ... Then he steps aside, ... talking in a normal, conversational tone ... then he is again singing the opening line again, but now in a comfortable middle range, sounding like a more muscular Leroy Carr" (pp. 178-179). By providing such perceptive musical discussions and situating Johnson's music in its historical and cultural contexts, Wald's book is the most accessible and broadly informative account of Johnson and his music to date.

Patricia Schroeder's *Robert Johnson, Mythmaking and Contemporary American Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 2004; \$24.95) has a different goal from the aforementioned studies. Rather than attempting to assemble a historically accurate story of Johnson's life, Schroeder interprets the process of mythologizing that turned Johnson into an iconic figure. She is highly skeptical about the validity of any historical accounts regarding Johnson's life, noting "... even the simplest, most apparently factual details are open to dispute" (p. 19), and consequently dismisses efforts to uncover the reality behind the myth as neither particularly interesting nor valuable. Instead, she seeks to offer "a better understanding of how Robert Johnson's image has been used and what those uses tell us about American society in general and postmodern culture in particular" (p. 64).

Schroeder offers as an example the U.S. Postal Service's 1994 release of a Robert Johnson commemorative stamp. She argues that originally Johnson's image on the stamp was used to signify America's historical appreciation of jazz and blues music, but that the stamp was eventually highjacked by various interest groups including advocates of smokers' rights, public health, and censorship. Schroeder concludes: "In this process, Robert

Johnson the artist was all but erased, his image used to create cultural myths that reveal the ideologies of different interest groups. The truth about Robert Johnson hardly matters. We invest the images of and stories about Robert Johnson with our own values leaving Johnson as another 'evanescent presence,' drained of his own history as he comes to signify something about ours" (p. 13). She also explores some of other ways writers, musicians, and filmmakers have appropriated the Robert Johnson myth, turning the musician into someone quite different from who he actually was.

Schroeder frames her commentary by drawing upon Marxist theory, John Fiske's writings about the influence of "power bloc" authority on culture, and other social and cultural theories. Unfortunately, this focus on a particular political, or socio-economic, point of view regarding the creation and promulgation of Johnson's myth does not always illuminate as much as create a set of political strawmen. If some of Schroeder's assertions had been supported by the kind of historical research that she largely rejects, they would have been much more convincing. For example, in examining the various stories about Johnson's violent death, she suggests "that this veiling of history includes underestimating the violence of the Depression-era Jim Crow South, violence that ... was pervasive and profound, stemmed from a variety of sources, and becomes visible in Johnson's life once we resituate it in its original time and place" (p. 48). Yet Johnson's researchers have not in general avoided acknowledging the violent, racist nature of the Depression Era south. Much of the writing that Schroeder accurately describes as romanticizing Johnson in the 1960s indeed reinforces the notion that he was the victim of violent times.

Much of Schroeder's book is devoted to critical analysis of works of art, including books, films, and plays that re-imagine Johnson or use the Johnson of legend as a key dramatic device. She notes that in novels such as Alan Rodger's *Bone Music*, Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, and Walter Mosley's *RL's Dream*, the authors "all depict Johnson's blues and their own art of storytelling as powerful agents of multicultural transmission..." (p. 114). Her book is valuable for this observation alone, but it would have been more useful if its explorations of myth and culture had not been so tightly circumscribed by the politics of critical theory and if it had offered more evidence to back up suppositions about how Johnson's image was constructed and used.

The brilliance of Robert Johnson need not be mythologized to be widely appreciated, but nearly all those who are familiar with the musician have encountered aspects of the Johnson myth. And while that romance will always play some part of how he and his music are perceived, we benefit from the research, interpretation, and contextualization that Pearson and McCulloch, Wald, and Schroeder provide. Together these three books paint a rich picture of Johnson's life and music as well as his transformation into an American icon, and will serve as benchmarks for future research into Johnson and the country blues.

—Nathan W. Pearson, Jr.
Rye, New York

Review: From Paris to Peoria

The appearance of R. Allen Lott's *From Paris to Peoria: How European Piano Virtuosos Brought Classical Music to the American Heartland* (Oxford University Press, 2003; \$55) bears a certain resemblance to the subject matter it treats: like the arrival of the nineteenth-century European virtuosi on these shores, this book has been eagerly awaited and much anticipated. Having been tantalized by brief glimpses and advance reports, this reviewer is happy to attest that the wait has been worthwhile. *From Paris to Peoria* offers the reader a vivid portrait of a singular aspect of concert life in the United States, the solo recitals of five notable pianists during the years 1845-1876. These are: Leopold De Meyer, Henri Herz, Sigismund Thalberg, Anton Rubinstein, and Hans von Bülow, performer-composers who exerted tremendous influence on America's musical life but whose concert tours have never before been systematically examined.

It is this systematic treatment—the scholarly consideration of travelling virtuosi—that is the book's great innovation. Just as nineteenth-century Americans had to wait for celebrated European performers to make the arduous trip across the Atlantic, we of the twenty-first century have had to wait for the emergence of an intellectual climate that would support the

serious treatment of such a topic. Just twenty-five years ago, for example, H. Earle Johnson could pay a back-handed compliment to the New York Philharmonic and Boston's Handel and Haydn Society by comparing their accomplishments to those of visiting musicians. The "feeble bodies" of such mid-nineteenth century American ensembles had "accomplished more for music than touring virtuosi (De Meyer, Herz, Gottschalk, Ole Bull, Remenyi, and Thalberg) who, confounding audiences with their individualisms and their techniques, implanted low standards by means of galops, waltzes, themes and variations, and nauseous potpourris."¹ Similar attitudes have long found support in Liszt's renunciation of the recital circuit and Schumann's condemnations of exhibitionistic performers. Yet to accept the received wisdom on this topic is to ignore both the re-evaluation of the role of performers in shaping music history, as seen in Richard Crawford's *America's Musical Life*, and the nineteenth-century mingling of popular and serious genres explored in Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

Further evidence for the changed climate is found in the rehabilitated reputations of two of Johnson's targets, Gottschalk and Ole Bull. Three others—Herz, De Meyer, and Thalberg—are the

subjects of Lott's research, and his analyses promise to do the same for these figures. These three were the subject of Lott's dissertation, and he has extended this study to include the more prominent Rubinstein and von Bülow. By bringing these five pianists together in a single volume, addressing their similarities as well as their differences, Lott enables us to look at the question of the virtuosi's impact and accomplishments in an entirely new light. What he has found is a "listening continuum" spanning thirty years, a time in which "most Americans believed the visiting virtuosos were a beneficent phenomenon, awakening musical interest among a wide range of audiences and providing excellent models for students and aspiring professional musicians" (p. 292). Indeed, Lott observes that our own age is still beholden to the



*"The Celebrated Racer, De Meyer, (The property of G.C. Reitheimer, Esq.) winning the Great Fall Sweepstakes of 1846" (Yankee Doodle, October 1846)
Courtesy of the Literature Department, The Free Library of Philadelphia*

virtuoso. The difference is that while the mid-nineteenth-century virtuoso played his or her own, individualized compositions, the late nineteenth and twentieth-century virtuosi performed their own, individualized "interpretations" (p. 290). Such insights coax us toward a more sophisticated understanding of the function of spectacle in the pursuit of aesthetic pleasures.

Lott has derived a satisfying scheme for the presentation of an abundance of information.

The book is organized into five roughly equal parts, each one focused on a virtuoso and arranged in chronological order of his concert tour of the United States. Each part is comprised of several chapters, providing relevant biographical information, an evaluation of the career point at which an American tour was undertaken, a description of the tour and its highlights, analyses of repertory, and the introduction of "assisting artists." In addition to providing a wealth of material on five renowned pianists, *From Paris to Peoria* is an important source of information on a number of notable violinists, including Henry Vieuxtemps, Joseph Burke, George Knoop, Henryk Wienawski and Camillo Sivori (Paganini's "only pupil" [p. 76]). Lott's discussion of the prominent role played by violinists in eliciting audience appreciation for fabulous technique, fertile invention, and unique interpretation, suggests that a comparable project treating transatlantic violin virtuosi such as Eduard Remenyi and Miska Hauser awaits further research.

The book's structure resembles a mid-century concert or theater program in its pacing, with the presentation of the main parts—each containing lively writing and highly varied topics—linked by two brief interludes. The latter address nineteenth-century views on issues such as the educational value of virtuoso performance,

Continued on p. 14

New Orleans (continued)

supports the racial hierarchy while thinking she is championing black culture. I call this figure the “Jazz Virgin,” a white woman character who is stirred by what she hears in black music—which in this film is construed as sexuality, authenticity, emotion, newness, modernity—while *other characters* serve as her anxious protectors.¹³ In this film, it is not only white men who protect white womanhood, but *all* characters: a black male jazz musician played by Louis Armstrong; a Creole gambling hall owner and Miralee’s love interest, Nick Duquesnes, played by Mexican actor Arturo de Cordova; and the singing black maid played by Billie Holiday. Repeatedly, other characters try to prevent jazz from entering Miralee’s body, or from entering the wrong parts of her body, or to prevent the wrong parts of the music from entering her body. Her protectors know that “too much jazz” signals danger—criminality, sexuality, impurity—and with them, the threat to topple the white woman from her pedestal.¹⁴ The character who is most ambivalent about the pedestal is another white woman who represents an alternative to the “Jazz Virgin”—predictably, it is the “Jazz Whore,” a fallen white woman aptly named Grace, who has had too much jazz, drink, and sex, loses her social position, and is cinematically punished by getting hit by a car. The fallen Grace is dark-haired and has a French surname, and so like Duquesnes, she is Creole, not quite American, not quite white. What will happen to innocent white Anglo-America if jazz enters Miralee’s body?

We are first introduced to Miralee when her boat from Baltimore pulls into the port of New Orleans as Louis Armstrong plays in a band on the pier. Her entrée to jazz appreciation is her training as a singer of European art songs. From the moment we meet her, she is drawn to jazz without knowing what it is. As a “Jazz Virgin,” her wide-open ears are a *tabula rasa*. We recognize Armstrong. The chaperon hears danger, crime, and poor taste. Miralee hears Armstrong’s sound, even identifies his instrument, but affirms her defining innocence when she exclaims: “That cornet in that wagon, did you ever hear anything like it?” She is resolutely a different kind of a jazz listener than the Nerd, who *has* heard something like it, knows that it’s Armstrong, and can name all the sidemen.

This image of Miralee continues when she sets foot in her new home in New Orleans. Again, she leads with her fine-tuned yet jazz-innocent ears, drawn this time to the sound of Endie’s/Billie Holiday’s voice. Again, she is protected—this time by two older white women, her chaperon and mother—who act as culture police, and do their best to enforce racial hierarchy. Nonetheless, when the protectors of white womanhood leave the room, the budding sexuality of the “Jazz Virgin” is once again apparent as she begs for more song. At the sound of Endie’s voice, Miralee seems physically stimulated. She disobeys her mother, yet upholds and modernizes conventions of white power when she overrules Endie’s own attempts to protect white womanhood. She has commanded her to sing. Now she playfully orders her to take her “slumming.”

Miralee’s pathway to jazz, then, trades on a race- and class-naturalized mistress-maid relationship, via “slumming,” a mode of white privilege that, like other forms of tourism, affirms hierarchy through exoticizing difference. Krin Gabbard has written about the erotic charge between Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday in

the musical scenes in *New Orleans*, but in my reading, the charge belongs solely to Miralee, whose female gaze we watch and adopt by the end of the scene. As she descends into the depths of the “Orpheum Cabaret,” she can barely contain her physical excitement. She gingerly steps into the club, eyes, and lips moist, face aglow. The scene is remarkable for its situating of female pleasure in a jazz scene, but complicated in the sense that what enables white female pleasure is the fetishizing of black men and a black woman. When Endie finishes her song, Miralee plies Nick with breathless questions that suggest her impending loss of innocence, such as, “Where does such music come from?” Nick begins to narrate the miracle of jazz until the once innocent and now fallen Grace who appears in the doorway. The climax of the scene comes when Miralee, now consumed with her desire to feel Endie’s song emanating from her own body, rushes for the stage. She is “rescued” by Nick, who expels her from the club. The rest of the film is spent reconciling Miralee’s epiphany that jazz belongs to her, with concerns that her love of jazz may lead to the loss of other entitlements for her and other white characters.

Like the “Jazz Nerd,” the “Jazz Virgin” collects, and in the final scene, Miralee triumphs at New York’s Symphony Hall, delivering Endie’s song in her best *bel canto* belt (dubbed by white lyric soprano Theodora Lynch). Not an old stock aristocrat like her mother, indebted to European notions of high culture, Miralee proves herself as a modern national subject, for whom shedding Italian art songs and claiming jazz as her own enacts a gendered story of innocent imperialism. We hear a little more chest resonance in the finale than in Miralee’s European art song renditions and English instead of Italian, but we do not hear signs of blackness such as blue notes, speech effects, syncopation, or improvised turns of phrasing and melody that would popularize other white women singers such as the Boswell Sisters from New Orleans, who also learned about black music from their maids.

Though referred to throughout the film as a “blues,” “Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans” is a popular song written especially for this film, and is full of southern pastoral nostalgia scathingly critiqued in Abel Meeropol’s lyrics to “Strange Fruit.” Backed by an all-white symphony orchestra and an all-white jazz orchestra (Woody Herman’s first Herd), Miralee woos an all-white concert-going audience to share her epiphany that this music belongs to them, too. In the final scenes of *New Orleans*, neither Billie Holiday nor the black jazz instrumentalists who so inspired Miralee throughout the first half of the film are seen or heard. As film scholars have documented, while the black musicians were supposed to appear in an integrated finale, McCarthy-era Hollywood would not allow it.¹⁵ And so, a white woman presents a nostalgic song about a happy south stolen from her black maid, thus transforming jazz into respectable American culture, and the film swells to its musical big finish without apology or even apparent awareness that one might be called for. It is typical white-boy-meets-black-music cinematic jazz fare, as analyzed by Gabbard, in which sincere white devotees rescue jazz from black obscurity by trumpeting it from white concert hall stages.¹⁶ Only this time, the colonizing white boy with a (dubbed) horn is a colonizing white girl with a (dubbed) voice.

Continued on page 14

New Orleans (continued)

While painful to watch, the film *New Orleans* encourages us to think critically about jazz desire among those who wish to oppose legacies of cultural imperialism, racial injustice, sexism, and poverty. For me, this involves interrogating the spheres of jazz scholarship, including women-in-jazz scholarship, and jazz fandom that I myself inhabit. The tendency of jazz discourse to occlude ongoing histories of injustice and inequality is a pernicious one. A century of national love for New Orleans as the birthplace of jazz, for instance, did little to rectify a century of cohabitation of jazz tourism and institutional neglect of poor and black lives in the most flood-vulnerable areas of the city and the wider Gulf region.¹⁷ The lyric “Do you Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans” will never mean quite the same after Hurricane Katrina, but the root of its tragic irony—the idealization of moss-draped, gumbo-rich, all-male, color-blind egalitarian jam sessions—and concurrent neglect of ongoing structures of race- and class-based unequal life chances—troubles a century of jazz desire.

—University of Kansas

Notes

¹ *New Orleans* (1947), dir. Arthur Lubin. All quotes are taken from the Kino DVD release (2000).

² Donald Bogle, “Louis Armstrong: The Films,” in *Louis Armstrong: A Cultural Legacy*, ed. Marc H. Miller (Queens Museum of Art/University of Washington Press, 1994), 147.

³ Made in the 1940s, this film takes a clear side in the “Jazz Wars” raging at the time. “Trad” fans, also called “Mouldy Figs,” invested in early New Orleans jazz as a traditional folk music. See Bernard Gendron’s “Mouldy Figs and Jazz at War (1942-1946),” *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Duke University Press, 1995), 31-56.

⁴ Leonard Feather, “The Reel Armstrong: Musically, *New Orleans* is a Bright Film; Dramatically, It’s a Dud,” *Metronome* (April 1947), 43.

⁵ Krin Gabbard, *Black Magic, White Hollywood, and African American Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁶ Ingrid Monson, “The Problem with White Hipness: Race, Gender, and Cultural Conceptions in Jazz Historical Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XLVIII/3 (Fall 1995), 405.

⁷ The emerging scholarship on women and minstrelsy includes Jayna Jennifer Brown, *Babylon Girls: African American Women Performers and the Making of the Modern*, Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001; Michele Wallace, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Before and After the Jim Crow Era,” *The Drama Review* 44/1 (Spring 2000), 137-156; M. Alison Kiebler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), and Pamela Brown Lavitt, “First of the Red Hot Mamas: Coon Shouting and the Jewish Ziegfeld Girl,” *American Jewish History* 87/4 (1999), 253-290.

⁸ Brown, *Babylon Girls*, 53.

⁹ Ruth Frankenberg, “Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness,” in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Duke University Press, 1997), 11-12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² Hilary Harris, “Failing ‘White Woman’: Interrogating the Performance of Respectability,” *Theatre Journal* 52/2 (2000), 183-209.

¹³ The jury is still out regarding the frequency of this formula, though if we include jazz sound-tracks in films that aren’t literally “about” jazz, this plot is more common than it might seem at first glance. See Peter Stanfeld, “An Excursion into the Lower Depths: Hollywood, Urban Primitivism, and St. Louis Blues, 1929-1937,” *Cinema Journal* 41/2 (Winter 2002), 84-108.

¹⁴ Another fascinating representation of a white woman’s love of jazz occurs in *Syncope* (1942), dir. William Dieterle. Kit’s father objects to her jazz

piano aspirations, so she transfers her love to a white male swing musician, who suffers a moment of doubt when he worries that a more talented black musician is being left in the dust of his own success. Kit assures her boyfriend that he is modern, unlike their black friend, who is “New Orleans.” Thanks to Krin Gabbard for introducing me to this film.

¹⁵ Laurence Bergreen, *Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life* (Broadway Books, 1997), 427-49.

¹⁶ In *Jammin’ at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), Krin Gabbard points out that New Orleans is one of many Hollywood films that “wait until the end to elevate white music over black music” (79). Other films with this plot include *The Fabulous Dorseys* (1947), and *The Benny Goodman Story* (1955) (80).

¹⁷ See Salim Washington’s article in this issue of the *Newsletter*.

From Paris to Peoria (continued)

female pianists, and the changing function of the piano itself. In addition, insets are used as “sweetmeats” throughout the book to treat special topics, such as “Liszt and America,” “The Bleeding of Sivori” (by the press) and “Rubinstein’s Contract.” Everything is framed by an introductory “prelude” and concluding “postlude.” Finally, two appendices coordinate much data. The first gives the itineraries (dates and cities) of each pianist’s tour; the second, the repertoire performed by Rubinstein and Bülow in the United States.

From Paris to Peoria is also richly peppered with illustrations, including portraits of each pianist, maps displaying their concert destinations, caricatures, cartoons, program broadsides, sheet music covers, and musical examples. Special mention should be made of the brief but insightful musical analyses featured in several sections. From De Meyer’s “exotic” *La danse du sérail*, Op. 51, to Herz’s crowd-pleaser, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Op. 159, to Thalberg’s opera fantasias, Lott has found a context in which to address “the music itself” so that such an endeavor is meaningful rather than positivistic. Audio examples are available through a supporting website (www.rallenlott.info), as are several full scores and an abundance of additional material. The website seems both scholarly in design and promotional, and sections such as “Satire”—a compendium of lengthy articles “that spoof virtuoso pianists, traveling artists in general, the people who managed them, and the people who heard them”—promise to serve both purposes.

A small peculiarity of the book is that the index includes neither Paris nor Peoria, although both places are mentioned in the text and many other towns have index entries. The omission of Paris seems particularly unfortunate, as a more extensive consideration of the transatlantic ramifications of the traveling virtuosi’s activities would be welcome. But not to worry: we who study nineteenth-century American musical life know that the greatest rewards are worth the wait.

—Nancy Newman
University at Albany

Notes

¹ H. Earle Johnson, *First Performances in America to 1900: Works with Orchestra*. Bibliographies in American Music 4 (Detroit: College Music Society, 1979), xiv.

Hurricane Katrina (continued)

a pioneering early jazz soloist (an honor universally awarded to Louis Armstrong), and the even more egregious oversight as one of the first great saxophonists in the tradition (honors that “properly” belong to Coleman Hawkins) are due in part to his cultural views about jazz, which do not neatly fit the heroic narrative of the canonical jazz story. How might our views of the music’s meanings and aesthetics be different if Bechet’s example were as prominent as that of Pops or Jelly Roll?

Marsalis points out the injustice of “[t]he genuine greatness of Armstrong [being] reduced to his good nature.” But does not the ease of this reduction stem from political and economic realities that informed the culture, just as much as the culture informed the political economy? The willful refusal to incorporate this truth into art is the biggest weakness in the aesthetics of the nearly triumphant neo-conservative movement in modern jazz. If it is true that jazz embodies, as Marsalis puts it, a “flowering of creative intelligence” brought about “where elegance met an indefinable wildness,” at its best the music has historically critiqued American hegemony through its blues-based revolt against the strictures of Western aesthetics. In a deal with the devil, jazz is threatening to become respectable with the full trappings of mainstream institutional support. We are constantly reminded of that old saw, “be careful what you wish for.” The not-so-hidden costs of this deal include: redefining jazz as America’s “sole” art form rather than as an African American art form, the reification of certain styles and artifacts over the processes and dynamic interactions of the music, and the acceptance of liberal bourgeois ideology over the revolutionary aspirations of earlier generations of jazz musicians. These are hefty costs indeed, and if paid in full will rob the United States of one of its historically rich voices, a potential resource in the humanization of a nation that values commodities over people.

It is America’s perceived “me first and damn the world” attitude that has earned us the disdain of much of the globe. The attitude is so pervasive that some of us occasionally sink into its grasp even when trying to provide a prophetic voice. Hip hop artist Kanye West’s blistering attack on the Bush administration notwithstanding, I lament the lack of substantive critique of the American empire from the hip hop community in a time when the decadence of American culture and the viciousness of its politics have landed us into yet another war. Perhaps the willful ignorance and apathy of our artists only mirror the historical amnesia of a people who act surprised by the New Orleans crisis, despite the clear example Mississippi flood of 1927, when the black poor were forced to repair the levee at gunpoint and abused in rescue camps.

Our peculiar lack of historical consciousness is an apt companion to the clouded vision in the discourse around “rebuilding” New Orleans. Musician, scholar and activist Fred Ho raised the central issues that should be taken into account when he questioned (in a recent private correspondence) “the notion of rebuilding a defective New Orleans in which the wetlands were degraded and eviscerated, in which the ocean surrounding the coast has become a ‘dead zone’ devoid of oxygen and nutrients to support marine life due to the scarring and pillaging by oil rigs and pipelines.” This disregard of environmental needs when they interfere with profits is mirrored in the local government’s plans to revitalize the tourist district as a key point of the city’s

restoration, rather than develop a way to incorporate humanitarian values into city planning.

It is not possible to rebuild—or even plan—culture, history, and community per se. What *is* possible is to examine how we can excuse the failure of our political will and our government’s administration to prepare for a disaster that was inevitable and foreseeable. We could confront the self-image of a nation that always holds the morality, civility, and ultimately the humanity of black people in question. If this is a tall order for a country that cannot muster appropriate outrage at what many view as an illegitimate administration bent on imperialism (though often cloaking its aims under calls for the expansion of democracy), it is also a stretch for the spiritual resources of an aesthetic that hides its head in technical brilliance over truth seeking, and institutional respectability over revolutionary zeal.

—Salim Washington
Brooklyn College

Now available from
The Institute for Studies in American Music



A collection of essays with contributions from:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Ellie M. Hisama
Afro-Asian Hip Hop | David G. Pier
Live Hip Hop in New York |
| Jonathan Toubin
Hip Hop Music in Downtown Manhattan | |
| Stephanie Jensen-Moulton
Gender Dynamics in the Film <i>Anne B. Real</i> | |
| Evan Rapport
On the Brooklyn-based Rapper Sensational | |
| Robert Wood
A Life in the Day of Benjamin Andre | |
| Ejima Baker
Exploring Reggaetón | Carl Clements
Indian Music & Hip Hop |

For order information, call (718) 951-5655
or visit <www.bcisam.org>



Billie Holiday

Inside This Issue

Robert Johnson

Noah Creshevsky

Dusty Springfield

Music in New Orleans

European Piano Virtuosos

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