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Desire in Three Works by Ruth Crawford Seeger

Beau Bothwell

Among the most basic passions evoked by music, central to the way we conceive of the art, is desire. Relying on a tradition of tonality, we are accustomed to the idea that desire plays a central role in the way music works, whether we attribute that desire anthropomorphically to the notes themselves (e.g., “the leading tone wants to resolve”) or more accurately to ourselves as listeners (e.g., “I want the leading tone to resolve”). Susan McClary traces the birth of tonality itself to the need to manipulate desire, stating that “Tonality emerged as a way of arousing and channeling desire in early opera, although instrumentalists quickly adopted its procedures for their own repertoires.”¹ In her post-tonal music, Ruth Crawford Seeger abandoned what she considered outmoded idioms of composition, but maintained the emotional resonance of music’s ability to evoke desire.



Carl Sandburg and Ruth Crawford Seeger, ca. 1929

Three of her works—Diaphonic Suite no. 4 (1930), “Chinaman, Laundryman” from *Two Ricercare* (1932), and “White Moon” from *Five Songs to Poems by Carl Sandburg* (1929)—clearly demonstrate how her music engages intellectual, nostalgic, political, and erotic desire.

Although we do not have a convenient, uniform vocabulary for analyzing expectation and desire in post-tonal music, its formal elements can still imply directionality. In the twelve-tone analytic tradition, for example, the completion of an aggregate of all twelve pitches in the octave is often heard as a point of arrival, such that the absence of one pitch from a section of a piece is often assumed to create in the listener a desire for its appearance. Drawing an analogy with the tonal tradition, Joseph Straus, in *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), identifies the completion of a twelve-tone aggregate, or even just a chromatic segment of it, as a structural component of Crawford Seeger’s work that parallels the desire-producing cadences of tonal music. In so doing, Straus injects both a direction and intentionality into the musical narrative.

Much post-tonal analysis is engaged in the search for such narrative, often in the form of recursive identities that allow a large section of music to be explained in relation to a small section. The word *narrative* itself is not routinely used in the analysis of post-tonal music, but that is not indicative of its absence from the experience of listening. However, the discussion of narrative and directionality has often been obscured by the intellectual desire for the formal logic of recursive small-scale to large-scale relationships within a piece. This is by no means the only type of desire useful for understanding post-tonal music, but it offers me a place to begin.

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Institute News

About a week ago, bulldozers and other heavy construction equipment appeared near the Brooklyn College library, signaling the first construction phase of our new Tow Performing Arts Center. Though the next few terms will be difficult, with many of our classes held in “swing space” in other buildings on campus, the end result will be a new focal point for arts in Brooklyn. With this new Tow Center, and our expanding relationship with Brooklyn College’s Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, the campus’s for-profit arts presenting organization, the Institute will see exciting new opportunities to feature both local and internationally known scholars and musicians. We will continue pursuing our own version of “thinking globally, acting locally” as we explore the diverse diasporic cultures in our hometown, while still considering the significance of America’s music on the world stage.

An important move in this direction was taken on 23 October, when we hosted an event in the Brooklyn Art’s Council’s (BAC) year-long Black Brooklyn Renaissance celebration. This day of panel discussions, dance, and music, detailed later in this issue, represented another step in our efforts to build relationships with local arts institutions, and to celebrate the culture of our own backyard. We look forward to additional collaborations with the BAC and other organizations in the five boroughs.

The other two presentations in our Music of Polycultural America series focused on issues of national importance. On 15 November **Peter J. Vasconcellos** of the CUNY Graduate Center gave a talk titled “The DJ Hangs Himself? Authenticity in the Face of Extinction” that featured live deejaying by **DJ Kayo (Keith Overton)** and a hands-on exploration of how sound files and software like Serato are replacing the crates of LPs that DJs have famously carted from gig to gig. The talk was both a celebration of new technology and a nostalgic glance at the demise of vinyl. And on 1 December, **Stephen Kelly** of Carleton College gave a fascinating talk about a concert he attended in 1963 at Spring Hill College, an institution that quietly integrated its student population in the early 1950s, long before the tumultuous desegregation of schools in Arkansas and elsewhere. Working from a rare tape of the event, Kelly explored Baez’s role in the Civil Rights Movement, especially during this one explosive year. The event resonated with me personally, as Kelly, who is retiring from my alma mater next year, initially sparked my interest in musicology and music of the U.S. over thirty years ago.

A book launch for **Ray Allen**’s recently released *Gone to the Country: The New Lost City Ramblers and the Folk Music Revival* (University of Illinois Press, 2010) took place on 19 November at Brooklyn’s hot spot for folk and country music, Jalopy Theatre. The evening featured a ragged-but-right performance of old-time fiddle music by the Dust Busters, a trio of twenty-something young fogies and one old fogey, retired NLC Rambler **John Cohen**. Much to John’s delight, *The Wall Street Journal* described *Gone to the Country* as “a portrait of cranky eccentrics on the margins of the commercial music world.”

Finally, congratulations to Institute Research Fellow and Conservatory faculty member **Stephanie Jensen-Moulton** for winning a Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation award for teaching excellence in the humanities, releasing her from teaching hours for one semester of the 2011–12 academic year. During this leave, she will continue work on Miriam Gideon’s opera *Fortunato* for A-R Editions, and her study of disability in American opera. We’re looking forward to the results!

—J.T.

Ruth Crawford Seeger (continued)

The first movement of Crawford Seeger's Diaphonic Suite no. 4 for oboe and cello simultaneously fulfills an analyst's longing for formal logic and a listener's desire for narrative. In his analysis of this movement, Straus identifies a "precompositional plan" accounting for every note in the movement. An initial seven-note melody, beginning with F#, is played by the cello and recurs repeatedly. With each iteration, the second and seventh notes in the melody are transposed down two semitones, and notes three through six are transposed down one semitone. The oboe joins in with the same sequence, a "canon at the unison" with the same pitch classes appearing in different rhythms. As Straus points out, the pattern reverses itself at different points for each of the instruments, undoing the transpositions until it arrives in a retrograde version of the first seven-note melody, now ending in F#.

The structure Straus identifies is a kind of narrative, with a beginning, middle, and an end. This narrative is intellectually satisfying: it rewards a desire for logical form, but in isolation is not likely to have much emotional resonance with listeners. While on a good day I could probably recognize that the oboe enters with the ordered pitch-class set that the cello began with, in making that connection I will have lost track of both the cello line and the continuing canon altogether. This isn't to say that the canonical, symmetrical structure of the piece won't affect the musical narrative created as I listen—undoubtedly it will—but the narrative I engage in emotionally will be primarily predicated on other factors.

One moment midway through this piece particularly stands out because it prepares the ear to hear subsequent events differently, creating desire within the realm of the piece. This moment comes in measure 38, wherein the oboe passes off one of the many F#s that appear every seven notes (this one an octave and a half above middle C) to the dovetailing cello. As the cello crescendos, it takes a moment for the listener to notice the change in timbre from oboe, to oboe and cello together, to cello alone. By the time that timbral change has registered, the oboe enters again on top of a lingering utterance, which in my mind at least still belongs to that same oboe voice—a simple but arresting gesture, and the only moment in the movement where the two instruments share the same pitch. The ear is now drawn to that F# in particular, and each time an instrument lands on that specific pitch, I want to linger a bit, hoping to explore the timbre again. The pitch-class hearing emphasized in the precompositional structure outlined by Straus, in which any F# is functionally the same, changes into a type of hearing where each F# in the gamut is different, fostering a desire to further explore the moment of the piece that holds the most timbral interest.

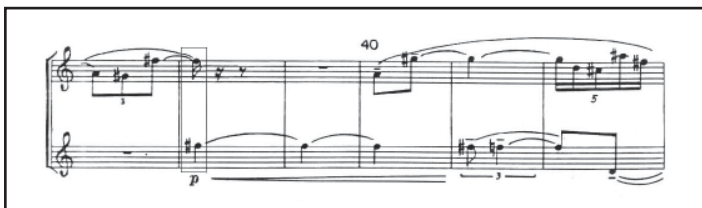


Figure 1: Ruth Crawford Seeger's Diaphonic Suite no. 4, measures 37–42
Oboe and cello coincide in measure 38 on F#5

After this moment, large-scale formal structure does not shape the experience of the piece as much as the memory of that brief simultaneity in measure 38. Each new F# that occurs within an iteration of the seven-note pattern now arouses nostalgic desire for the unique timbre of that moment, a desire that colors the rest of the movement.

As an expression of the activism Crawford Seeger and her husband Charles embraced in the early 1930s, "Chinaman, Laundryman" is an explicitly political work. Both aesthetically and rhetorically, the composition is meant to incite in listeners a degree of empathy towards Chinese immigrant workers and to connect their plight to that of exploited workers in general. Within the text of "Chinaman, Laundryman" two competing political desires are at work: the desire of the Laundryman to be fairly compensated, and the desire of the bosses to maintain the profitable status quo. The political field of the performance is even more crowded, populated by musicians, listeners, and analysts.

Performing "Chinaman, Laundryman" in the 1930s would have been a statement of political affiliation; in the 1950s it would have been an invitation to be blacklisted. Even today, performing these songs is at least a nominally political act, presenting a certain fondness for the less apologetic past of America's Left. The level of political desire brought to the performance is an essential part of the experience. According to Judith Tick, "[f]ew contemporary singers can muster the social outrage their successful interpretation demands."²

In *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Ellie Hisama explores the social relationships described in "Chinaman, Laundryman" through the use of contour theory. Where Straus describes the relationship between the voice and the piano as having an "obvious dramatic significance, contrasting the yearnings of the narrator with the oppressive world in which he is trapped," Hisama presents a more complex political reading, wherein the narrator creates for himself a possibility of action despite the restrictions of his situation, an act of political imagination indicated by a final ascending line.³

Persuaded by Hisama's argument regarding the ascending line's significance finally adopted by the narrator as a signal of his own agency, I evaluate any performance of "Chinaman, Laundryman" partially in terms of how well it brings out that aspect. While I hear the exclamations "Wash! Wash!", "Iron! Iron!", and "Dry! Dry!" in ascending pairs, I want the performer to accent them, to use those contours to foreshadow the loosening of bonds made clear later in the piece ("Here is the brush made of study/Here is the soap made of action").

My own political leanings coincide with the kind of narrative Hisama reads in the piece and are no doubt factors in the way I listen. That is, I find it politically satisfying to imagine

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Concert Spirituals and the Fisk Jubilee Singers

On 6 October 2010, I attended “Jubilee Day,” a Fisk University holiday celebrating the anniversary of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers’ first international tour in 1871. The events began with a convocation including speeches, a performance by the 2010–11 Fisk Jubilee Singers, and a rousing rendition of the alma mater. The proceedings concluded with a funeral procession to two local cemeteries where appointed school leaders recounted the biographies of four original Singers alongside performances by the current ensemble. The day’s events allowed participants to both remember the contribution of the original Singers and reflect on their mission.

The Honorable Hazel R. O’Leary, current president of Fisk University, opened the Jubilee Day convocation with a welcome in which she described the original Singers as selfless, courageous, global, entrepreneurial teachers. She said:

I thought that especially for the freshman class ... we ought to remind ourselves who the [original] Jubilee Singers were. We know they had great voice, but I want to remind you that ... the [original] Jubilee Singers are role models for the way we live our lives ... Fiskites, it’s your legacy as well. These are your jobs to perform. I lift up the Jubilee Singers to you, I lift up their history, and their example.

I was familiar with the milieu at Fisk but had yet to encounter such an explicit articulation of the university administration’s standards for their students in relation to the Singers. President O’Leary asserted that emulating the character of the original Singers and their concert spiritual singing would allow students opportunity to achieve excellence at this historically black university.

Under the direction of Dr. Paul T. Kwami, the Singers carry on the tradition of singing entire programs of concert spirituals established by the original singers. The performances by the contemporary Fisk singers embody the complicated relationship of race, repertoire, and higher education that continues to shape concert spiritual performance practice. From the students’ perspective, singing concert spirituals helps them manage three realms of hegemony during their college experience: 1) the superimposed U.S. racial ideology of inequality that stereotypes black bodies as contested sites, that is, essentialized specimens of athleticism, musical-

ity, and humor; 2) the university administration that proclaims the Singers and their singing as the model of educational and cultural excellence; and 3) the broader system of American higher learning avowing liberal education as self-exploration. The contemporary Singers’ interaction with these hegemonic realms provides insight into the construction of an African American bourgeois singing voice. This singing voice expresses both the ideological and affective constructions of excellence and blackness among people at Fisk through simultaneously sounding the aesthetic ideals of bel canto and straight-tone singing associated with popular styles.¹ A closer look at the vocalicity employed by these contemporary singers, especially their vocal timbre and diction, helps to clarify this process.



The Fisk Jubilee Singers, 1870s

Concert spirituals are folk songs transformed into art songs through transcription and arrangement in standard Western notation for soloists or choirs and sung with a bel canto vocal aesthetic with occasional use of straight-tone singing.² They developed into a genre distinct from the large body of songs emerging from the experiences of enslaved Africans in the

U.S. Concert spirituals have been the subject of extensive research in the context of Reconstruction, sacred song traditions, folk and art music debates, race and class politics, and the construction of an American music canon.

Located in Nashville, Tennessee, Fisk University was founded in 1866. The American Missionary Association and the Freedman’s Bureau, Fisk’s principle benefactors, sought to increase literacy among recently emancipated black people in the U.S. George L. White was the music director at Fisk in charge of programming works for the choir. When White overheard students singing folk spirituals after rehearsal, songs unknown to him, he was so impressed that he recommended they be incorporated into the choir’s repertoire. White worked with the singers to transfer their memory of spirituals into Western music notation and the ensemble began to sing the songs from the scores with a bel canto aesthetic.³ In response to the university’s financial needs, White proposed that the choir tour, singing concert spirituals in order to raise money for the school.

The success of the original Singers’ concert spiritual performance inspired other historically black colleges, including Hampton and Tuskegee Universities, to establish concert spiritual ensembles. Their politics of respectability, global reception, and middle class appeal realized an unprecedented performance of

Fisk Singers (continued)

New World blackness in the midst of blackface minstrel popularity. Scholars have thoroughly documented the work of the Singers in the nineteenth century, but literature on the current ensemble's activity remains scant.

African Americans singing in the academy proves a precarious act that informs the educational impact of concert spirituals. Lindon Barrett describes the African American singing voice as “a primary means by which African Americans may exchange an expended, valueless self in the New World for a productive, recognized self.”⁷⁴ The Singers perpetually exemplify this phenomenon. However, their participation in vocalizing concert spirituals also produces an essentialist imagination of African Americans as concert spiritual singers—that African Americans have an innate ability to perform spirituals in a unique way. The success of the original Singers made concert spirituals a dignified genre, henceforward insinuating that African American concert singers should present spirituals as a matter of course. At the same time, “The academy and the African American singing voice are understood as radically opposed counterparts, one representing the height of reason, and the other its seeming nadir, which is to say, the intensity of ludic dissipation.”⁷⁵ Concert spiritual singing mediates these contradictory entities through the disciplining of vocal techniques and the performance of middle class sensibilities associated with higher education.

Concert spirituals and the popularity of bel canto pedagogy developed alongside national schools of singing in nineteenth century Western Europe and U.S. conservatories. Academic discourse constructed bel canto singing as “correct” and “healthy” as opposed to the “damaging” singing approaches associated with the non-bel canto vocalizing of folk and popular music. “Healthy” vocalism became codified as mastery of bodily manipulation and vocal technique. Throughout the West, and especially among “classical” and professional church singers, this “pathologizing of voices” emerged as a way to distinguish “bourgeois” vocal sounds from those “primitive.”⁷⁶ Concert spiritual singing thus helped to facilitate bourgeois vocal practice within American institutions of higher education. Yet, even within the tradition of formal concert spiritual singing, a complicated relationship between race and repertoire continues to exist. In vocal pedagogy, concert spirituals largely remain associated with African American singing voices as an imaginatively historicized, clichéd relic of U.S. slavery. The

formal instruction of classical vocalists consists of mastering the standard repertoire for one's voice classification—soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass-baritone. Though this curriculum structure varies, the expectation that African American singers should develop a working set of concert spirituals pervades vocal pedagogy. It is at this crux of repertoire expectations and race that the politics of concert spiritual programming and performance come to the fore. Perhaps more than any other demographic of classical singers, African American singers confront an expectation to represent their race through the singing of concert spirituals.

Two aspects of vocalism principally exemplify the performance

of an African American bourgeois voice within concert spiritual repertoire: vocal timbre and diction. When performing concert spirituals, singers use both the bel canto vibrato common in opera and art song and occasional straight-tone singing prevalent in gospel and popular music. This performance practice exemplifies the heritage of concert spirituals, a genre emerging from art and folk singing traditions. A singer's shift between bel canto and straight-tone timbre reveals improvisatory

possibilities in concert spiritual performance, as scores do not indicate timbre specifications. This timbral heterogeneity works to construct an aspect of a complicated African American bourgeois singing voice.

The text of concert spirituals remains fraught with the politics of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) orthography. The dialects of AAVE produced through conditions of anti-literacy legislation during enslavement extended into the lyrics of spirituals. Transcribers and arrangers also transmitted AAVE dialects into concert spiritual scores. In contemporary performance practice, singers make a choice as to how to sing the dialect written into concert spiritual scores—either adhering to the dialect or modifying the text into General English. This decision is loaded with the politics of respectability, consciousness of reception, and desire for middle class appeal that faced the original Singers. As outlined by President O'Leary, the Fisk administration values a formal self-presentation among the student body. The contemporary Singers' use of AAVE contradicts this value. Alongside decisions about the use of vocal timbre, the contemporary Singers' varying adherence AAVE also constructs an African American bourgeois singing voice and their Jubilee Day performance was no exception.



The Fisk Jubilee Singers' 2008 performance at the Dixie Carter Performing Arts and Academic Enrichment Center in Huntingdon, Tennessee

Photo by Nicole Kaklis

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New Discoveries: Ives, Cowell, Nancarrow, and the Hitchcock Papers at the NYPL

A few months before his death in 2007, the eminent musicologist and founder of the organization that now bears his name, the H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music, kindly donated his papers to the Music Division of The New York Public Library (NYPL) for the Performing Arts. The recently processed papers reveal much about his multi-faceted career, his research interests, and the history of the Institute. The papers are in two divisions: Hitchcock's own papers and the records of the Institute, though there is occasional overlap.

Hitchcock's professional papers include his correspondence; his research notes, manuscripts, and scores; his writings, lectures and teaching notes; papers relating to his editorial work; and papers relating to special projects and work with musicological societies.

The correspondence is with a host of important figures in late-twentieth-century music and musicology, including John Kirkpatrick, Richard Crawford, Roger Reynolds, Kyle Gann, Carol Oja, Mark Tucker, Sidney Robertson Cowell, Steve Reich, and many others. The letters often tend toward the personal side, as many of these people were Hitchcock's close friends and colleagues. But Hitchcock had a way of combining the professional and the personal with humor that so often makes his letters entertaining as well as informative. The letters from John Kirkpatrick and Mark Tucker are, of course, some of the more compelling finds. Tucker's correspondence includes the proposal for his never-completed book on Thelonious Monk, emphasizing the crushing loss his early passing was to musicology.

Some of the richest musicological meat of the papers can be found in the writings, research, and editorial sections. Though Hitchcock's writings contain correspondence and drafts related to his *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Prentice Hall, originally published in 1969), as well as the music criticism he wrote for an Ann Arbor newspaper in the 1950s, the real treasures here are the lectures he delivered to academic and general audiences. The titles say it all: "Nadia Boulanger and 'History of Music': A Personal Memoir" (2003); "Beyond the Quadrivium, or, The Many Mansions of the Music Library" (1986); "Ives and Copland: An Odd Couple, and Yet..." (1993); and "The Symbiosis of Teaching and Research" (2003) are only a few examples. In several cases, the collection contains valuable audio recordings of lectures in addition to Hitchcock's text or notes.

Research papers focus mostly on the two composers Hitchcock concentrated on later in his career, Charles Ives and Henry Cowell. Regarding Ives, the collection contains Hitchcock's notes and manuscripts for the Ives Society edition of *Three Harvest Home Chorales*, which he edited, and for his *Critical Commentaries for Charles Ives 129 Songs*. His general research on Ives contains files on compositions and particular topics such as Herman Langer, the engraver for the "Comedy" movement from the Symphony no. 4 as published by Henry Cowell's New Music Publications (the file contains Hitchcock-transcribed correspondence between Ives and Langer).



H. Wiley Hitchcock (right) with Otto Luening (left) and Elie Siegmester (center)

The Cowell content is more voluminous than the Ives because of Hitchcock's special role in Cowell studies. In the 1970s Sidney Robertson Cowell designated Hitchcock the arbiter for the Cowell Collection that she donated to the Music Division of NYPL. His papers contain discussion of that collection, as well as articles about and analysis of Cowell's work, a small set of Cowell biographical source material and correspondence with Sidney Robertson Cowell. They also include a set of Cowell songs that were scheduled to be published by Peter

Garland's Soundings Press in the early 1990s. That project, which Hitchcock was assisting in the capacity of editor, never came to fruition. Hitchcock's papers contain clear copyist versions of the songs, and correspondence with Garland and Sidney Robertson Cowell about the project. Finally, Hitchcock's research files contain audio recordings he collected, some unique. These include music by George Chadwick, Roger Reynolds and Arthur Foote, radio interviews with Aaron Copland and Richard Rodgers, and sixty tapes of performances conducted by Richard Korn.

Hitchcock's work as an editor of *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (1986; referred to in the papers as Amerigrove) produced considerable paperwork. The Amerigrove files contain correspondence and memos between Hitchcock, his co-editor Stanley Sadie, their assistant Susan Feder, and Macmillan Press. Hitchcock's correspondence with contributors to the dictionary offers an inside view of the creation of this landmark reference work.

Finally, Hitchcock's professional papers contain files documenting special projects and his work with organizations, primarily the American Musicological Society (AMS) and the Society for American Music (SAM). The AMS papers mainly

New Discoveries (continued)

document Hitchcock's work with the Society's Committee for the Publication of American Music (COPAM) and his editorial work on an edition of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (A-R Editions and the American Musicological Society, 2008) published posthumously. These papers also contain Hitchcock's syllabi and other teaching materials for courses at Brooklyn College, including "Composers and Controversy: Activism in American Music," a seminar on Ives and Cowell, and "Music in American Popular Culture."

The Institute records provide an extensive history of the organization's activities from its 1971 inception until Hitchcock's 1993 retirement. They are divided into publishing and general files. The publishing files document the Institute's role as an important academic press. General files contain correspondence, memos, photographs, and sound recordings documenting the activities, research, and public presentations undertaken by the Institute.

The publishing files contain letters, drafts, proofs, and inter-office memos regarding the production of the Institute monograph series, the *ISAM Newsletter* (now known as the *American Music Review*), the *Recent Researches in American Music* series, and special publications, most notably *American Music Recordings: A Discography of 20th Century U.S. Composers*. Nearly every item published under the Institute's name from 1971–93 has a file documenting its creation.

The general files contain some of the best material in the collection. Seventy-five audio tapes document events including the Charles Ives Festival and Conference in October 1974, a 1972 ragtime colloquium, a 1974 colloquium on spirituals, a 1977 conference titled "The Phonograph and Our Musical Life," several concerts including retrospectives on Henry Cowell and John Cage, and a seminar by Vivian Perlis (featuring an appearance by Eubie Blake). These and other activities are further represented by programs and photographs.

The Institute general files also include transcripts of oral histories with contemporaries of Henry Cowell and correspondence with visiting lecturers, research fellows, research assistants, publishers, and scholars. These files yielded one of the most surprising and intriguing finds in the collection: for reasons unknown, Peter Garland, a frequent correspondent of Hitchcock and the Institute, sent a folder full of copies of his extensive correspondence with Conlon Nancarrow, written between 1977 and 1994.

In all, the H. Wiley Hitchcock Papers have much to offer scholars on many fronts, and the collection is a fitting memorial to this towering figure in the study of American music. The collection is now open for research. The finding aid can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/hwileyhitchcock>. For more information, contact the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at musicdiv@nypl.org.

—Matthew Snyder
Manuscripts & Archives Division, NYPL

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Now in its 28th year, *American Music* publishes articles on American composers, performers, publishers, institutions, events, and the music industry, as well as book and recording reviews, bibliographies, and discographies. Article topics have included the lyricism of Charles Ives,

Henry Cowell's "sliding tones," Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, Henry Brant's "Spatial Music," the reception and transformation of pop icons such as Presley and Sinatra, and the history and analysis of blues, jazz, folk music, and mixed and emerging musical styles.

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Current issues of *American Music* are available online from the University of Illinois Press at <http://am.press.uiuc.edu> or from Project MUSE.

Becoming Jimi Hendrix

Jimi Hendrix's early career in America is a fascinating yet often overlooked history. While he became famous in England in 1967, the five years that Hendrix spent working in the U.S. as a struggling sideman and studio musician—from 1962 to 1966—are critical in understanding his life and later work. Steven Roby and Brad Schreiber's *Becoming Jimi Hendrix: From Southern Crossroads to Psychedelic London, the Untold Musical Genius* (Da Capo Press, 2010) sets out to uncover the history in these years. They turned what normally appears as a footnote, or at best a short chapter in any of the Hendrix biographies, into the focus of their study.

Roby has significant experience writing about Hendrix. The former editor of *Experience Hendrix* magazine, he previously authored *Black Gold: The Lost Archive of Jimi Hendrix* (Billboard, 2002), which carefully catalogues every lost recorded jam session, recording date, court date and interview. *Black Gold* is a well-researched and valuable contribution to Hendrix scholarship, but since it is a true catalog of events rather than narrative, is best used by Hendrix-knowledgeable readers who know what they are looking for. *Becoming Jimi Hendrix*, however, is written by Roby and Schreiber in the style of a biography. It is intended for a broad audience and offers no musical analysis.

The authors compact the first nineteen and a half years of Hendrix's impoverished childhood and early musical experiences in Seattle into a brief introduction. The famous years, beginning with his relocation to London from 1967 to his death in 1970, are treated in a short epilogue. The main ten chapters of the book cover six months each of the five-year period 1962–66. Roby's interviews with Hendrix's friends and associates during this time provide most of the source material for the book.

The initial chapter details then-“Jimmy” Hendrix's brief stint in the army in 1962. This and later chapters benefit significantly from the first-hand accounts of Billy Cox, an early bandmate and close friend of Hendrix, and later Band of Gypsies bassist. The chapter contains insightful moments, such as Hendrix telling fellow soldiers that he wanted to capture the sounds of army planes on his guitar. This technique would become an important part of Hendrix's performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock in 1969.

The second chapter explores the beginning of Hendrix's post-army travels as a journeyman musician, which are centered around

Clarksville and Nashville, Tennessee. Since Hendrix later described Nashville as key to the development of his guitar playing technique, the history of his performances with local R&B group the King Kasuals is valuable. The chapter also describes Hendrix's little-discussed arrest and incarceration for purposely ignoring a whites-only sign at a Nashville Diner. Hendrix's first touring experience as backing guitarist for a national R&B act, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, is detailed in Chapter Three. Here the authors explore Hendrix's famous stage techniques, like playing with his teeth and behind his back, and their long roots in the tradition of Nashville R&B.



Jimi Hendrix and Wilson Pickett, 5 May 1966
Photo by William “PoPsie” Randolph, www.PoPsiePhotos.com

Chapter Four covers the last half of 1963, including Hendrix's brief period playing in a band backing up the Impressions with Curtis Mayfield and Jerry Butler. Mayfield's florid, ornamented guitar style was an important influence on Hendrix but the description here lacks musical specificity. As Roby and Schreiber rely heavily on their interviews, sometimes the included anecdotes fall off-topic into the rock biography trend of groupie stories. Those interested in Hendrix's early musical choices will find scant information here, with the exception of useful notes on performance repertoire and Hendrix's continued interest in electric guitar feedback and wild soloing.

By the end of 1963, Hendrix had moved to New York City in search of new opportunities. A period of unemployment, which lasted into the beginning of 1964, is described largely in chapter five through the remembrances of then-girlfriend Lithofayne Pridgeon. While stories of Hendrix's affection for certain blues records are useful, other personal anecdotes lend little to the history of Hendrix the musician. Chapter Six discusses Hendrix's work with the Isley Brothers, and key recording sessions including Hendrix's Mayfield-inspired playing on Don Covay's single “Mercy, Mercy.” The next two chapters explore Hendrix's experience as a guitarist for Little Richard, with a brief stretch backing Ike and Tina Turner. During this period, Hendrix performed on a number of recordings with Little Richard and other artists, which are thoroughly detailed by date in the appendices.

The final two chapters cover Hendrix's experience in New York City in 1966. During this period, he gained considerable studio experience, as well as an audience in Greenwich Village clubs, which led to his eventual “discovery” and trip to England with his new manager Chas Chandler. While useful details are uncovered here, the reader would benefit from greater discussion of his early

Black Brooklyn Renaissance

Over the past half-century, Brooklyn has emerged as a global crossroads of Afro-diasporic culture. The borough's southern black and West Indian communities grew steadily in the first half of the twentieth century, thanks in no small part to Duke and Strayhorn's fabled A train that connected central Brooklyn's nascent black neighborhoods to mother Harlem. But it was the post-War migration waves from the American South, and the influx of diverse Caribbean and African immigrants following the 1965 Immigration Act, that led to black Brooklyn's rise to prominence.

Today one can sway to roiling West African rhythms in Prospect Park's weekly drumming circle or on the Coney Island boardwalk during the Annual

Tribute to the Ancestors celebration; dance to the latest West Indian Carnival soca tunes on Eastern Parkway; hear cutting edge rap and reggaeton in hip Williamsburg clubs; groove to modern jazz and spoken word poetry in local Fort Greene bars; feel the spirit of southern gospel singing in Bedford-Stuyvesant churches; honor the *Loa* pantheon of spirits at Haitian *vodoun* ceremonies in East Flatbush basements; or be awed by the fusion of African and post-modern dance styles at the annual DanceAfrica and International African Arts Festival celebrations in Downtown Brooklyn.

Tracing the development of this rich trove of culture over the past fifty years is at the center of a multi-year project conceived of by Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC) folklorist Dr. Kay Turner:

The idea for the project came out of a sense that the Harlem Renaissance is iconic of African American culture and art in New York and the world. But I realized we have an equally important, albeit different, arts renaissance in Brooklyn, which has one of the most diverse black populations in the U.S. As folklorist for BAC I had met a wealth of artists practicing traditional, modern, and post-modern expressions of the African diaspora and I wanted to signify the importance of their work. The fifty-year breadth of the project was inspiring in the way it provided an opportunity to research and present these legacies.

The programming of Black Brooklyn Renaissance (BBR) concerts, workshops, symposia, and conferences began in February of this year and will stretch through February 2011.

On 23 October 2010, the Hitchcock Institute hosted a day-long conference that brought together scholars, artists, and cultural activists to assess the BBR from various perspectives. Acclaimed culture critic Greg Tate, along with jazz luminaries Randy Weston, Cecil Bridgewater, Neil Clarke, and Fred Ho joined in conversation with local African percussionist Wali Obara Rahman Ndiaye, gospel singer Ivan Jackson, West Indian dancer/choreographer Michael Manswell, and performance artist Baraka de Soleil. Ethnomusicologists Kyra Gaunt and Joe Schloss and Caribbean specialists Dale Byam and Lois Wilcken lent their scholarly expertise to the proceedings. Performances by Caribbean drummers Frisner Augustin and José Ortiz, the Dynasty Rockers dancers, and the New Cookers jazz ensemble rounded out the day.



*Brooklyn uprocking demonstration by the Dynasty Rockers
Photo by Enrique Martin*

Throughout the conference participants made unexpected connections among seemingly disparate forms such as African drumming and modern jazz, gospel singing and hip hop, and traditional Carnival practices and modern dance. The East Cultural and Educational Center, an Afro-centric Brooklyn community school and jazz venue in the 1970s, was an unsolicited topic

of much discussion among the jazz musicians, African percussionists, and dancers. The East emerged as a paradigm for Brooklyn's renaissance—a space that encouraged the blending of diverse black cultural traditions and welcomed radical artistic experimentation.

One thing was clear by the end of the final panel on new hybrid forms of music and dance: more research needs to be done on Brooklyn's vast reserve of black performance traditions. Turner made a closing call:

We need more research on, and documentation of, African diasporic arts and artists in Brooklyn. The borough is a major center of black arts culture and it should be recognized as such. Maybe someone out there will write the book, or make the film that addresses this in a comprehensive way. At the very least we need to encourage academics, scholars, and documentarians to consider African Brooklyn and its continuing legacy.

To be continued ...

—R.A.

Orchestrating Broadway

Steve Suskin's latest contribution to the study of musical theater continues to display his passion for the subject. He has written widely on Broadway composers and their works, from the hits to the flops and in between. In *The Sound of Broadway Music: A Book of Orchestrators and Orchestration* (Oxford University Press, 2009), Suskin begins a serious consideration of one of the silent partners of the musical creation team—the orchestrator. This is a provocative study, bringing to light the shadows or “ghosts” (as some orchestrators refer to themselves) that have haunted orchestra pits since the early 1920s.

Suskin opens with a brief history of the field, discussing the relationship between the men (he points out that orchestrators were all male) and the business end of the job, which was dominated by the machinations of Max Dreyfus and his companies. This is an illuminating section, explaining that a short song, which one might work very hard on for a long time, did not bring the orchestrator nearly as much financial reward as a longer, repetitive, and quickly written dance section. An extensive group of mini-biographies (“Men of Note”) follows, spotlighting various craftsmen and lists shows on which they worked.

The next part of the book, “The Bridge,” deals with the question of what an orchestrator actually does. Suskin covers specific elements of the job, including vocal arrangements, the use of individual instruments, and the use of doubling, just to name a few. He also incorporates details of several songs, usually looking at two or more by each major orchestrator, including Hans Spilek, Robert Russell Bennett, and Don Walker. The technical details of orchestration are discussed.

The most extensive part of the book, “What’s the Score?,” and gives a show-by-show look at exactly who did what in terms of composition, arrangement, and orchestration. There are some intriguing revelations here, with Suskin pointing out that there are places where orchestrators teamed together on particular songs at the section level, and, at times, even measure by measure. The author includes such useful information as the number of instruments in each show’s pit, detailed relationships between the composers and the orchestrators, and—perhaps most helpful to students of the field—locations for many of the original documents. A brief “Coda” gives a chronological table of the musicals and their central orchestrators.

Suskin is first and foremost is a talented storyteller. His casual use of language is thoroughly engaging, propelling the reader forward. For example, his personal story of being involved with the 2002 revival of *Sweeney Todd* is one of the highlights of the book. Additionally, the way Suskin breaks down the various pieces of orchestration into specific elements

is essential for understanding the art of orchestration. And finally, Suskin has taken many of these people and brought their accomplishments to light. As with many multi-contributor arts (film is another excellent example), there are always some who get left behind in the genesis-stories of great works. *The Sound of Broadway Music* opens a window into one aspect of musical theater that might have been forgotten, but more importantly it is a tribute to the people who gave much of their energy and careers to the world of the Broadway musical.

Despite these important contributions, there several weaknesses with the work. Suskin has compiled a substantial volume, but his decision not to use footnotes leaves much of the information unverifiable. In his discussion of Phil Lang, Suskin says that this is “what he heard.” This is part of a long tradition of telling stories of Broadway by many people associated with the subject. Writers like Thomas Hischak include this kind of non-reference throughout their work. This approach only gives a partial picture of events, be they apocryphal or true, requiring the reader to take their word for granted. Suskin’s choice to refrain from “littering these pages with musical notation” (p. 166) creates further problems. When Suskin “hums” music for us that he claims is repeated in show after show, his analysis (“BUM-pa-dum-pa/BUM-pa-DUMMM, pa-DUM”) is not helpful for either musician or layman. He clearly has something important to say, so why not say it with music?

Another vexing issue is where Suskin begins his story. Using the biography of Max Dreyfus as a stepping stone, he glosses over the field before 1920, suggesting there was no milieu from whence Robert Russell Bennett and others came. He briefly mentions Frank Saddler—Jerome Kern’s collaborator and a very prolific orchestrator—but there is no real sense of how orchestration became an integral part of the Broadway musical process. Many of Saddler’s orchestrations remain extant, and it is curious why this towering figure of the business and his contemporaries are ignored. Finally, Suskin portrays his book as the first significant study in the field. Key scholars such as George J. Ferencz and Jon Alan Conrad are either glossed-over or omitted; as a result, their important contributions to our understanding of orchestration have not received the prominence they deserve.

Suskin’s *The Sound of Broadway Music* is an important early study in the rich field of orchestration. Thankfully, Suskin wrote this book before many of the people he contacted disappeared. Many of his arguments will become stepping stones for later writers on the subject, establishing this monograph as groundbreaking and vital to musical theater studies.

—Jonas Westover
Minneapolis, MN

Crittenden's Rag

No, it's not an obscure piece of early ragtime music. It's the headline of a newspaper article from the 4 February 1881 edition of the *Kansas City Star* reporting a reception and social event given by newly elected Missouri Governor Thomas T. Crittenden at his Jefferson City mansion the previous Wednesday evening. This discovery confounds the previous understanding of the evolution of the word "rag." That evolution culminated in 1896 with the first appearance of the compound "rag time" (also "rag-time" and "ragtime") as the formal designation for the syncopated musical genre that exploded into public consciousness that year.

Textual examples suggesting various meanings of the word "rag" started appearing soon thereafter in the mainstream press. These reveal three etymologically related but distinct common uses of the word by 1896, all of them considered to be rooted in African American vernacular culture: a musical style, a performance practice on the piano, and a style of dance.

Pianist and entertainer Ben Harney ignited the ragtime craze when he sang and played so-called "coon songs" in that style from the stages at several New York theaters. In a 1928 interview he said that he had learned the style listening to a string band performing it at rural dances in his native Kentucky.¹ His success led New York publisher M. Witmark to buy his first composition, "You've Been a Good Old Wagon but You've Done Broke Down," proclaiming on the cover of its edition, copyrighted 5 August 1896, "Written, Composed, and Introduced by Ben Harney, Original Introducer to the Stage of the Now Popular 'Rag Time' in Ethiopian Songs." Thus the word was associated with a musical style.

A writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, in a lengthy article from 18 October 1896 headed "Fads in Popular Songs" asserted: "The old regular and monotonous 'tum-tum' of the supposed [piano?] banjo has been supplanted by syncopated, or in darky [sic] parlance, 'rag' time, and the harmonics are much better than of old," thus associating "rag" with a particular performance practice.

The 6 September 1896 *Brooklyn Eagle* review of a vaudeville show at Hyde and Behman's Theater provides an example of ragtime's association with dance: "The novelty of the performance is Ben R. Harvey [sic, Harney], who ought to interest students of American music and Dvorak [sic, Dvořák]. He invents and plays what he calls rag time airs and dances, the effect of syncopations being to make the melody ragged."

Edward Berlin's *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* was one of the first rigorous effort to examine the various applications of the word and to critique assertions made about its origin. Berlin notes: "Throughout the period [following 1896] there are references to specific steps being 'rags' and to 'ragging' being a style of dancing" and reports five examples from the mainstream press.² In an effort to trace the application of the word to a musical style, he evaluates other reports from ragtime's glory years, and concludes, "Overwhelmingly the evidence points to the simplest and most direct explanation: the ragged quality of the syncopated rhythm."³

CRITTENDEN'S RAG.
The Governor's Reception at "Pneumonia Bluff," and Who Was There.
The governor's reception at Jefferson City Thursday evening is pronounced by those present a most enjoyable affair. The reception at the mansion was from eight to one o'clock, and in spite of the immense crowd in attendance, was greatly enjoyed by all. The governor and his wife and Hon. E. B. Washburne received the guests in the parlor and made all "at home" at once. The reception is pronounced one of the finest ever held at Missouri's dingy capital. These present from Kansas City, in addition to the representatives and senators from the city, were:

"Crittenden's Rag," *Kansas City Star*, 4 February 1881

There the matter rested until 2002 when authors and researchers Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff published their study *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895*. In their effort to uncover information about African-American music in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Abbott and Seroff searched for published references to embryonic ragtime before its 1896 revelation. They attained success in eastern Kansas and environs with three black newspapers and the mainstream *Kansas City Star*. Their findings predate the previously known historical definition of "rag," further document and confirm the aforementioned uses of the word in African American vernacular culture, and identify a fourth.

Abbott and Seroff identify three instances of "rag" from 1894 and 1895 signifying a musical style and one (in its gerund form) a performance practice. While not explicitly stated in their text or any of their newspaper references, it is implied that syncopation usually characterized the process of "ragging." But more surprisingly, they cite five instances of "rag" between 1891 and 1895 referring to social affairs featuring dancing, leading them to conclude "... a 'rag' was ... a kind of grassroots social function, sometimes integrated, at which black string bands provided music for dancing."⁴

"Crittenden's Rag" reveals that "rag," denoting a social function, was applied in high society as well as in black vernacular culture and thus may not have been of black origin. It further suggests that this use was common by 1881 since the reporter does not elucidate the terminology. Quotations from several contemporary newspapers delineate the elaborate event (incidentally, only the *Star* calls it a "rag"). Before the event: "About two thousand invitations have been issued and even this number has failed to meet the supply needed." "A special train will be run from Kansas City ..." After the event: "... in response [to the invitations] a

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Ruth Crawford Seeger (continued)

Crawford Seeger creating a Laundryman who is an active, subversive agent for change. The possibility of the political desires of listeners influencing the way they hear a piece has been used repeatedly to attack feminist and other politically minded musical analyses. The critique is made under the assumption that such analysts hear what they want to hear, and that a more objective ear would not be able to detect the political signification we get so excited about. It is easy to dismiss this argument by denying the possibility of an objective listening position, and pointing out that the desire to reserve for music a privileged place outside general social discourse is itself a political desire, with the power to influence a reading. On the other hand, a more fruitful response might be to accept the critique and ask what the political engagement of a listener actually means for the joint creation of a musical event between composer, performer, and listener. It is for this reason that I include political desire in this discussion—not just because it is one of the feelings that can be evoked by music, though that is certainly true, but because in Crawford Seeger’s music that desire sometimes serves a fundamental role in the production of musical experience.

One of the set “White Moon,” contains the most sensual melody Crawford ever wrote. Sandburg’s subtle eroticism matched her mood, and even if she changed the title of the poem from “Baby Face” to “White Moon,” Crawford identified with the restless woman “by the window tonight.”⁴

When Tick describes “White Moon” as containing “the most sensual melody Crawford ever wrote” she evokes a general idea of musical sensuality that, loosely stated, might include the following guidelines: relatively chromatic melodies, often involving stepwise motion combined with multiple changes in direction, which tend to set up melodic goals that provide some sense of release when attained or frustration when denied. A simple glance at the score confirms the first two of these indicators: the vocal line is quite chromatic, and it involves a surprising degree of stepwise motion (at one point the voice provides us with six pitches of an ascending major scale, a rare move for Crawford Seeger). The third idea, the existence of melodic goals, is the most important, and it is in the lust for specific kinds of musical motion that most eroticism emerges.

Though these musical elements may occur in situations devoid of sensuality, here in Crawford Seeger’s setting they guide the listener towards an erotic reading of Sandburg’s poem over an equally plausible child-like one.

*White moon comes in on a baby face.
The shafts across her bed are flimmering.*

*Out on the land White Moon shines,
Shines and glimmers against gnarled shadows,*

*All silver to slow twisted shadows
Falling across the long road that runs from the house.
Keep a little of your beauty
And some of your flimmering silver
For her by the window to-night
Where you come in, White Moon.*⁵

Tick describes the poem as suggesting “the erotic scene of a woman in a bedroom, perhaps waiting for her lover,” and this sense of anticipation pervades the poem, down to the little pause that the mouth makes in the middle of “flimmering.”⁶ The moon’s entrance to the scene adds a glowing symbol of feminine sexuality, an association made explicit in in Sandburg’s 1920 poem “Night Stuff”: “Listen a while, the moon is a lovely woman, a lonely woman, lost in a silver dress, lost in a circus rider’s silver dress...”⁷ The erotic reading is clearly there for Crawford Seeger to use, but it isn’t necessarily the only reading, or even the most obvious.

With the opening line, “White moon comes in on a baby face,” the narrator’s voice can be heard as that of a hopeful parent, entreating the moon to leave a blessing for an infant daughter: “a little of your beauty, and some of your flimmering silver, for her by the window tonight.” A pairing of the celestial with the domestic, the moon alongside a girl in her bed, would have been familiar to Crawford Seeger from another of Sandburg’s poems, “Child Moon” (from his 1916 collection *Chicago Poems*).⁸

Despite this alternative scene, and the potential dual reading of the poem, the combination of Sandburg’s text with Crawford Seeger’s setting does convey something indelibly erotic.⁹ Tick describes the final setting as “climactic,” and one could certainly point to the apex of the last verse when an unaccompanied leap of a diminished seventh lands the singer on a whole note Eb, the highest vocal pitch in the piece. The concept of climax, though, can be overemphasized in discussions of erotics and narrative in music. It is easy for an analyst to identify the highest, loudest, densest, or most harmonically surprising or definitive point in a piece, encouraging a tendency to describe musical narratives in terms of movement to and away from this climax. As many scholars of gender and sexuality have pointed out, however, climax is a reductive framework for thinking about eroticism and narrative. Climax is not as erotic as foreplay, so in seeking the erotic it is better to focus on the beginning of the climactic stanza to see how anticipation is created.

With the introduction of the third stanza (“Keep a little of your beauty”), the voice switches from describing the White Moon to directly addressing it (her?). Here, the vocal line is a mix of chromatic motion and large intervallic leaps, with each leap followed by a change of direction. The effect of this change is for the voice to alternate between two separate lines, a descending chromatic line beginning on A4, and an ascending chromatic line beginning on A#3 (see Figure 2). These two lines, inversionally related to each other, begin in the voice before switching to the piano.

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Ruth Crawford Seeger (continued)

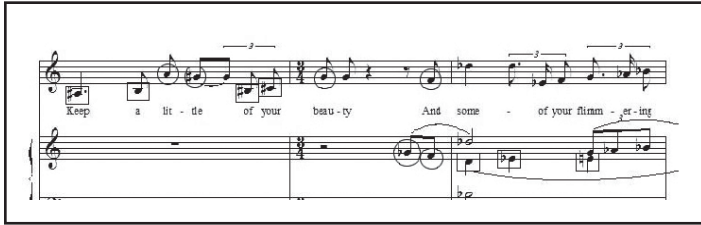


Figure 2: Ruth Crawford Seeger's "White Moon" from *Five Songs to Poems* by Carl Sandburg (1929), measures 18–20. The notes in circles constitute the descending chromatic line, and the notes in squares constitute the ascending line.

The section of the line performed by the voice, while not complete, provides enough to imply the melodic shape and a destination for each line, with termination points of E and Eb, respectively.

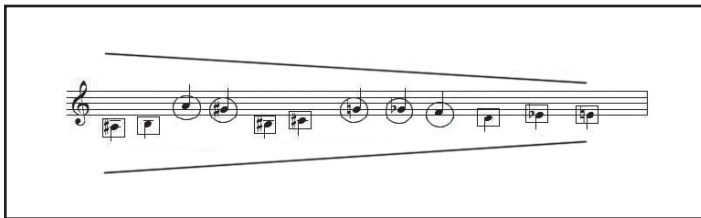


Figure 3: Ruth Crawford Seeger's "White Moon." The pitches creating the funnel or V shape in measures 18–20.

As presented in these bars, the logic of the two chromatic lines, the two legs of the V, is not completely satisfied. The first seven notes of the gesture, sung to "Keep a little of your beauty," direct the ear towards their inversion axis, and the notes at the junction of the two legs of the V (E and Eb). The listener is even assisted in following the transition from the voice to the piano by a unison F on the word "and." The final E, however, which would have been reached from above in a perfect continuation of the vocal gesture (with six notes ascending and six descending), is attained from below here. The two lines deliver the full chromatic aggregate, but we don't get the satisfying F to E movement that would have fully completed the descending line until the last two words of the song. With this final movement delayed, the last two notes of the vocal line become doubly satisfying; ending with an F and E on the words "White Moon," they represent a perfect resolution to the inversional symmetry presented earlier. In addition, the final E, the end of the descending line, becomes one of a pair with the Eb of the climax in measure 23, which repeats the final pitch class of the ascending line.

The back and forth moves of the melody in this final stanza, like the "flimmering shafts" of the moon, are easy to imbue with erotic intent even without any further analysis. The inversional gesture that they outline adds direction to this eroticism, giving a possible endpoint for the melody. The line moves bit by bit towards the center of the V, up one leg a few inches, then turning to move higher up the other, back and forth until reaching the goal.

The types of desire addressed in this article—intellectual desire for large-scale logic and nostalgic desire for a particular musical moment in Diaphonic Suite no. 4, political desire in "Chinaman, Laundryman," and erotic desire in "White Moon"—are not simply significant as the byproducts of musical events, the sympathetic vibrations brought about by passing waves of sound. Rather desire is the material used by Crawford Seeger, performers, and listeners to jointly create meaning and narrative. By establishing in the listener a desire for the specific sounds of a musical moment, for particular actions from musical characters, or for the satisfying attainment of melodic goals, her music is able to create complex emotional narratives. The fact that Crawford Seeger's compositional language eschewed the most standardized methods of creating desire (such as the tension and resolution of tonality), allows us to experience the production of musical desire in real time over the course of a piece, without the expectations of a given harmonic or melodic narrative associated with some musical styles. Her compositional language remains fresh today not simply because of her unique melodic sense and mastery of dissonant counterpoint, but because she employed this language to create complex emotional trajectories, arousing and satisfying a variety of different desires in the listener.

Notes

¹ Susan McClary, "Narrative Agendas in 'Absolute' Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms's Third Symphony" in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 326-348.

² Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 194.

³ Joseph Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75.

⁴ Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 99.

⁵ Carl Sandburg, "Baby Face," in *The Cornhuskers* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1918), 114.

⁶ Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 79.

⁷ Carl Sandburg "Night Stuff," in *Smoke and Steel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 162.

⁸ *The child's wonder*
At the old moon
Comes back nightly.
She points her finger
To the far silent yellow thing
Shining through the branches
Filtering on the leaves a golden sand,
Crying with her little tongue, "See the moon!"
And in her bed fading to sleep
With babblings of the moon on her little mouth.

Carl Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1916), 142.

⁹ While an exploration of the relationship between these pieces and the composer's biography is beyond the scope of this analysis, the dualities and complex relationships to femininity described here were mirrored by the composer's own life at the time. As Judith Tick describes in a chapter titled "A Career or Life?," in 1929

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Ruth Crawford Seeger

(continued)

when Crawford Seeger was writing the set of songs which includes “White Moon,” she was also struggling to resolve the perceived dichotomy between the work she wanted to create as a composer and life she wanted to lead as a woman. While intrigued by the prospect of children and married life, Crawford Seeger also feared that the beginning of that chapter would mean the end of the main ambitions of her composing career. Further complicating the notions of femininity with which she was struggling at this point in her life, Crawford Seeger herself traced the burst of inspiration that allowed her to create the “Five Songs” to her own powerful attraction to Marion Bauer, a feeling that vacillated between the homoerotic affection “like mad falling in love,” and “sisterly-motherly love.” See Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 107.

Fisk Singers

(continued)

After reading the University prayer aloud, the sixteen immaculately dressed, newly appointed students of the 2010–11 Singers ensemble stood from their pews and filed onto the chapel stage making two rows of singers, women assisted up the stairs by a male member of the choir. The concert spiritual “Every Time I Feel the Spirit” was their first piece, arranged by Dr. Matthew Kennedy, Fisk class of 1947 and Professor Emeritus of Music. A baritone in the back row sounded the tonic pitch and the ensemble began singing the chorus. Between the three repetitions of the chorus, two sopranos sang verses that incorporated straight tone in the melodic line. The second verse had the lyrics (the words in italics sung with straight tone): “All around me look so shine/Asked the *Lord* if *all were mine*/Ain’t but one train on this track/Runs to *heaven and runs right* back.” The words “Lord” and “heaven” occur on the highest pitch of the melody, the duration of which would easily allow for vibrato. The soloists’ choice to sing these highest pitches with straight tone, with the majority of the piece sung using vibrato, provides vocal contrast and variety. The refrain repeats three times over the course of the piece and in the first two refrains, all the singers in the ensemble used consistent vibrato, vowel definition, and resonance endemic of bel canto singing. However, some singers employed both a straight-tone and bel canto singing in the performance of the final refrain, singing: “every *time* I feel the *spirit moving* in my heart I will pray/*every time* I feel the *spirit moving* in my heart I will *pray*.” This mixed approach to timbre within the ensemble, aspects of the music not indicated in the score and changing from performance to performance, highlights how singers’ individual timbre choices shape the sonic ideals of the African American bourgeois singing through improvisational self expression.

Following this piece, the ensemble sang “Great Day” arranged by John Hall. Two tenors began the piece singing the words “great day” in unison with an over-articulation of [t]. In the singing of American General English, [t] [d] are both alveolar consonants—[t] unvoiced and [d] voiced. When singing a text that has adjacent alveolar consonants, only one is usually articulated. Following this, the singing of these words would sound as: [greI-deI] or [greI-teI] as opposed to [greIt-deI] (the letters “eI” stand for the diphthong “-ay” as in “bay” or “may”). In the case of this Singers performance, the choir responds to the tenors in four part harmony and sing [greIt-deI], with an articulation of both the [t] and the [d]. It is clear from the uniformity of this diction that the signers were guided to sing the words “great day” as

Fisk Singers

(continued)

[greIt-deI], but what is also at play is the singers’ choice to value the accurate performance of General English. Articulations of both the [t] and the [d] are not necessary for a listener’s understanding of the text. The articulation of both [t] and [d] stylize this performance by the Singers and shows how their diction communicates, in addition to the text clarity, an effort for recognition as representatives of Fisk’s tradition of excellence.

While the singers perform properness in the beginning of the refrain through their diction of the words “great day,” we find an example of the ensemble’s varying adherence to AAVE by the end of the refrain. The text of the final line reads “God’s going to build up Zion’s walls.” The ensemble, throughout the soloists’ singing of the verses, repeats this same text. Consistent throughout the piece is their singing of “gonna” instead of “going to.” The singers articulate the final consonant [d] in “build” with less consistency. Some repetitions are sung “God’s gonna build up Zion’s walls” and some repetitions are sung “God’s gonna buil up Zion’s walls.” Through the Singers’ attention to AAVE, General English, and a heterogeneous vocal timbre, they find possibilities to manage their individual vocal expressions among the hegemonic realms of the university administration’s goals for student excellence and dominant U.S. racial ideology.

Concert spirituals are not a mystical or natural song genre but rather a contemporary idiom rooted in the historical complexity of race and class in the U.S.⁷ Bridging the past and the present, concert spiritual singing vocalizes the traditions of the U.S. black middle class. Examining the process by which people at Fisk educate each other on how to acquire an African American bourgeois singing voice is a rich example of the hidden and explicit perpetual reproduction of sounding “black” in the U.S.⁸ The vocal deliberations about race, repertoire and higher education expressed by the contemporary Fisk Jubilee Singers reveal how individuals use their singing voices to collectively challenge modern race constructions.

—Marti Newland
Columbia University

For more on the activities of the contemporary Fisk Jubilee Singers, visit www.fiskjubileesingers.org.

Notes

¹ Steven Feld and Andrew Fox link phenomenological and metaphoric discourses on the voice to explain how acoustic signs become public symbols that diffuse social sentiments and identities. See Feld and Fox, “Music and Language,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 25-53.

² My use of bel canto (Italian for “beautiful singing”) refers to classical or opera style singing in which an ideal vocal timbre demonstrates consistent vibrato, vowel definition and resonance in all vocal registers. In contrast, straight-tone singing refers to a vocal sound with no vibrato, achieved by a singer’s application of air-flow that constricts oscillation of the vocal chords.

³ In addition to the concertizing work of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, nineteenth-century music collectors and composers also concertized spirituals. For example, Czech composer Antonín Dvořák encouraged his student H.T. Burleigh to write solo voice and piano arrangements of concert spirituals.

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Fisk Singers

(continued)

⁴ Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ Grant Olwage, "The Class of Colour and Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (2004): 203–26.

⁷ Sandra Graham, "The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The Beginnings of an American Tradition" (PhD diss., New York University, 2001).

⁸ Nina Eidsheim, "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).

Becoming Jimi Hendrix

(continued)

recordings. For example, Hendrix's work on Billy Lamont's 1966 single "Sweet Thing" is described, but there is no mention that Hendrix would reuse the guitar riff on his own 1967 single, "Fire." Details like this would help readers unfamiliar with these early recordings to understand the extent to which Hendrix's style was formed during this period. The epilogue briefly covers the best-known part of the Hendrix story, when "Jimmy" became the famous Jimi Hendrix in England.

Becoming Jimi Hendrix provides new insights into Hendrix's early career and development as a musician. The book includes four appendices: a bibliography, recommended listening, the early "sessionography," and a chronology of tours and events from 1962 through 1966. The fascinating photographs show Hendrix as R&B sideman to Little Richard, the Isley Brothers, Percy Sledge, and Wilson Pickett, as well as in local bands. Though a greater emphasis on the music recorded during these years would have benefited the discussion, *Becoming Jimi Hendrix* is a valuable addition to the study of Hendrix during his formative years.

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Crittenden's Rag

(continued)

large crowd of ladies and gentlemen, representing the intelligence and beauty of the state, met each other last night ... "The ladies were all elegantly and tastefully dressed, some of the costumes were exquisite, and exceedingly rich and costly." "Evergreens and cut flowers were distributed liberally in the decoration and one beautiful design was the American flag surrounded by a wreath of evergreens in the back of the music stand. In the main hall is a sort of alcove [which] the music was placed within." "A good string band made music for the dancers, and almost as soon as enough couples were present to form a quadrille, the dancing commenced, and was kept up until about 1 o'clock." "On the second floor an itinerant band of harmonicas and violincellos issued sweet notes at intervals, and round dances were indulged in, which were not

Crittenden's Rag

(continued)

on the regular programme." Fourteen dance numbers were on the "regular programme": three waltzes, three quadrilles, three lancers, two galops, a waltz quadrille, a schottische, and a racquet.⁵

The question immediately arises whether "rag" had an initial sense from which one or more of the others ramified, and if so, which one? Intuitively it seems plausible for "rag" to have started as a reference to a particular style of vernacular dance, which was then generalized to a dance event at which the particular style was commonly performed. Consistent with this approach, the application to a musical style and performance practice commonly used to accompany the dance would have followed in African American slang. Arguably Abbott and Seroff seem to favor this scenario with their conclusion, "In any case, dance was the medium through which the new music fashions were propelled."⁶ However, the formal nature of "Crittenden's Rag" and the program of dances performed there (which could hardly be characterized as "rags") seem inconsistent with this hypothesis. A feasible explanation is that the reporter simply borrowed a widely known slang term to lend a touch of flippancy to his piece. The article contains certain other allusions which would lend credence to this theory: namely, he or she refers to Jefferson City as "pneumonia bluff" and "Missouri's dingy capital."

"Crittenden's Rag," therefore, precedes Abbott and Seroff's finding concerning use of "rag" to signify a social function featuring music and dancing. It broadens the word's connotation from black vernacular culture to mainstream culture. It also implies that the music at a "rag" need not have been syncopated, although it may well have been when black musicians performed it. Unanswered questions remain, however; how and when the word "rag" originally became associated with social dance affairs, and how and when it came to denote the incipient form of the style of music later named "ragtime."

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Notes

¹ Henry K. Burton, "Ben R. Harney, 'Jazz' Originator, Tells about Its Introduction," *Indianapolis Star*, 22 January 1928.

² Edward Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (University of California Press, 1980), 13.

³ *Ibid.*, 26–29.

⁴ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889–1895* (University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 443.

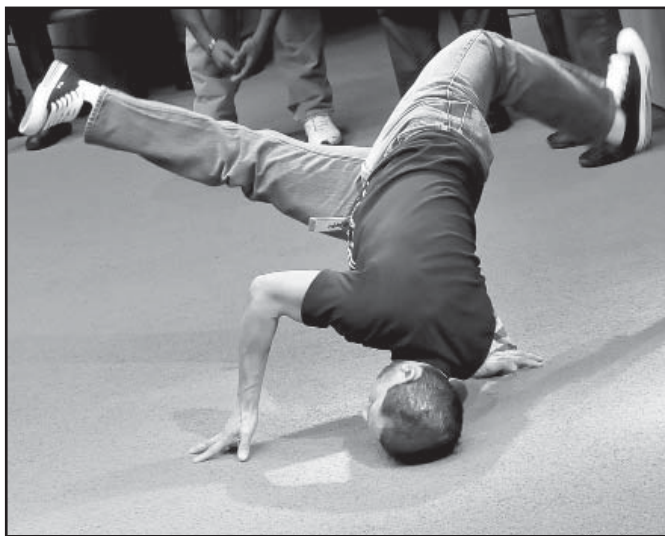
⁵ "About two-thousand ...," "A special train ...": *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 February 1881; "... in response ...," "The ladies ...": *Jefferson City Daily Tribune*, 3 February 1881; "Evergreens and cut flowers ...": *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 3 February 1881; "A good string band ...": *Jefferson City Daily Tribune*, 3 February 1881; "On the second floor ...," and listing of dances: *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 3 February 1881.

⁶ Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, 443.

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*Richard Santiago of Brooklyn's Dynasty Rockers
Photo by Enrique Martin*

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