NEWSLETTER

INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN AMERICAN MUSIC

Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York - H. Wiley Hitchcock, Director

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A MAVERICK TURNS SEVENTY *by William Brooks*

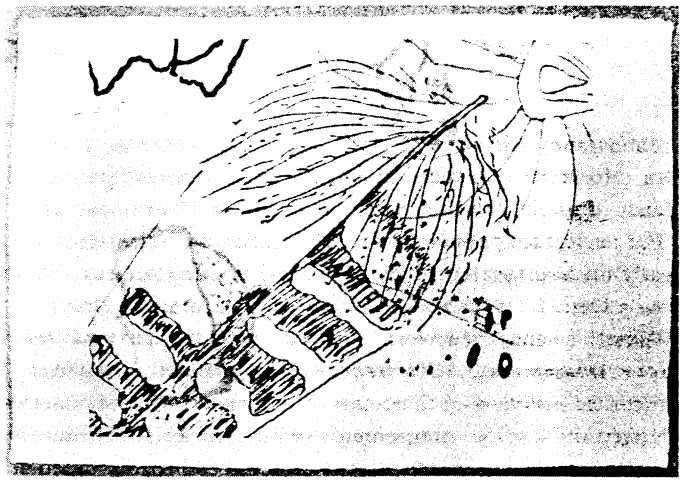
William Brooks, I.S.A.M. Senior Research Fellow for spring semester 1983, contributed such a provocative piece to TriQuarterly's *"A John Cage Reader" (Spring 1982) that we invited him to jump the gun on his I.S.A.M. appointment and write a salute this fall to John Cage on his seventieth birthday. Cage has been decorated, lauded, and applauded all over the globe this year. His most recent award was a prestigious one indeed:* Commandeur de l'ordre des arts et des lettres, *the French government's highest honor for distinguished contribution to French cultural life. The same award went to his colleague and collaborator, Merce Cunningham. Within recent memory, only one other American, Ansel Adams, has been so honored.*

Everyone has his favorite John Cage stories. One of mine springs from an early 1960s lecture, at which a thoroughly incensed matron, barely containing herself, asked truculently, "Mr. Cage, are you a charlatan?" Cage paused, pondered, and replied with great seriousness, "No, I was born in 1912."

Right, on both counts, of course; and 1912 makes this Cage's seventieth year. The landmark has been celebrated constantly over the past twelvemonth, with a frequency and festivity that must have made Cage wonder if he'd ever see seventy-one. In New York, Allan Miller and Vivian Perlis mounted a day of "wall-to-wall" Cage notable not just for the many performances of Cage's scores but also for well conceived interpolations by friends and progeny (including a lovingly crafted microtonal tribute from Morton Feldman). Most of the European centers have mounted festivals of some size, and even some American institutions have organized celebrations. But it's reassuring to find that the true bastions of culture (including, for example, nearly all the major orchestras) have not yet been breached: they've carefully overlooked this anniversary. Cage, it would seem, is not yet in danger of being tolerated.

That Cage is a celebrity there can be no doubt. But he is so well known as a personality, and his thought has had such far-ranging impact, that it's often forgotten he is at root a composer, a shaper of sound. While the ideas will continue to resonate, and the personality will be preserved in innumerable films, recordings, and videotapes, the magnitude of Cage's contribution will in the end be measured by his music.

And what an astounding body of music it is! In range, diversity and import it is probably unsurpassed by that of any other twentieth-century composer. In retrospect, it's the variety that first catches the ear: tonal pieces, atonal pieces, noise pieces; notes chosen by taste, notes chosen by chance; works in conventional notation, proportional notation, graphic notation; pieces with hundreds of remarkable sounds, pieces with naught but silence.



John Cage. From *Seventeen Drawings by Thoreau.* Color etching (Courtesy of Crown Point Press, Oakland, California)

But this extraordinary range has been traversed (not bounded) with an unfailing constancy of purpose. Though Cage has spent much of his life demonstrating that in the world of sound all is possible, his work has also proven that nothing is attained without discipline. It is discipline, not serendipity, that regulates Cage's aesthetic, and to fail to acknowledge this is to grossly misrepresent the music. Virtually without exception, every piece Cage has made is a disciplined response to problems posed by its predecessors.

Sometimes the response is dramatic and inspired: the prepared piano permitted percussion music to be played when there were no percussion instruments to be had. At other times, the problem is insignificant and the solution trivial; only the consequences are far-reaching. In the late 1940s, for example, Cage was composing by means of magic squares and became dissatisfied with the fact that the squares could be of any size (although they must contain an odd number of units). He

A MAVERICK TURNS SEVENTY *(continued)*

looked for something more fixed, more rigorous, and found it in the eight-by-eight matrix of the *I Ching*. This led to chance operations, which in turn precipitated a reconsideration of the fundamental nature of musical form.

Then again, in some circumstances the continuity of Cage's work has been more subtle, less practical. Many pieces in recent years have a surprising quality of familiarity: they recall works from two or three decades ago, even though the composing means is now completely different. One of Cage's many obligations this birthday year was to fulfill a commission from the Cabrillo Festival; the result, a major orchestral work titled *Dance/4 Orchestras*, was recently broadcast over National Public Radio. It's a graceful and engaging piece—a dance indeed—which has its closest affinity not with other recent music but with the *Sixteen Dances* from 1951. As always, it displays unshakable integrity and consummate craftsmanship and raises, with Cage's usual clarity, complex questions about the nature of repetition.

Birthdays, especially seventieth ones, are often times for looking back, and many musicologists have seized on Cage's to sketch retrospective assessments of his music (like this one!). Fortunately for us all, Cage himself is as firmly oriented to the future as always. The wonderful thing about his future is that—again as always—it includes the past, more and more clearly. To return is not to repeat, and Cage's recent music suggests ways of getting new handles on the old baggage we carry around. It presents us afresh with his seventy years: what a boon to us all these have been!

Happy birthday, John! And many happy returns!

Bibliography Hits the Big Top. Wondering where to turn for information on such ephemeral entertainment forms as fairs, carnivals, and the circus? How about other important (but neglected) popular diversions—burlesque, minstrel shows, early musical theater, stage magic, and floating palaces, to name but a few? Chances are the answer can be found in Don B. Wilmeth's handy new work, ***Variety Entertainment and Outdoor Amusements: A Reference Guide.*** Wilmeth provides a historical overview of these and other major forms of American variety and outdoor amusements (which he defines as non-folk, money-generating entertainment directed to broadly based and unsophisticated audiences), evaluates available literature, and presents a checklist of research sources. His historical essays are engaging and informative, tracing the development of each genre either to its demise or its present-day incarnation. The extensive chapter bibliographies list books (general, specific, and reference works), periodicals, and graduate theses; the valuable bibliographic essays contain comments on the thoroughness and accuracy of the sources, suggestions of areas in need of further research, tips on private and public collections of source materials, and even mention of literary works (prose and poetry) containing evocative descriptions of various entertainment forms—particularly useful for capturing the flavor of some of the more elusive amusements. Happily, Wilmeth is aware of the role of music in popular entertainment; he discusses music in several chapters and includes numerous musicological studies in the bibliographies. This excellent and useful reference work will be a boon to anyone working in the nascent but exciting and growing field of American popular culture (Greenwood Press, 242 pp; $35)

—*Katherine K. Preston* (Graduate School of CUNY)

Flash! Just before press time, we got hold of a set of galleys—uncorrected proofs, without music examples or illustrations—of Charles Hamm's ***Music in the New World***, to be published in mid-January by W. W. Norton. Here is a first reaction.

The Rockefeller Foundation, which supported the 100-disc "Recorded Anthology of American Music" issued by New World Records, also supported in part the writing of this book, which now provides a magnificent context for the anthology. But it is more than that: it is a brand-new, comprehensive history which, as the author rightly notes, deals with "a wider range of music than in any earlier histories of music in the United States." It is a big book, about 700 pages long, with hefty chapters ranging, not quite chronologically, from "1: The Music of the Native American" to "20: The Age of Rock." It is an ecumenical book, dealing even-handedly with all the kinds of music Americans have absorbed, made over, and made up, omitting only music which "did not change in significant ways in the New World" (that of the Moravians or the Spanish missions, for example). It is a generous book, an examplar of the New Musicology that is concerned not just with music per se but equally the cultural context within which it is produced. It is a scholarly book, with careful documentation and ample quotation of sources on every page. It is a pathbreaking book in several ways, not least in referring the reader constantly to recordings as well as scores (and not solely to "NWR" issues, although of course, given the genesis of the book, they are the principal ones cited). And finally (well, as "finally" as one can be in a hasty account of a quick read-through of galley proofs) it is a thoughtful book, with fresh insights offered, unnoticed relationships pointed out, and surprising—and usually persuasive—conclusions often reached. (W.W. Norton; $25.00)

I.S.A.M. MATTERS

I.S.A.M. Director **H. Wiley Hitchcock** is on a year-long sabbatical leave under a PSC-CUNY Research Award and an NEH Fellowship for Independent Study and Research. He is in New York this fall, working steadily as co-editor (with Stanley Sadie) of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music in the United States* (and, we might add, cheerfully fielding questions from the I.S.A.M. team). Springtime will find him in Paris at work on a critical study of the career and music of Marc-Antoine Charpentier (?1650-1704), a study that will round out his research of some thirty years.

Edward A. Berlin and **William Brooks**, I.S.A.M. Senior Research Fellows for fall '82 and spring '83 semesters, respectively, are giving exciting seminars. Berlin's, not surprisingly, is titled *The Age of Ragtime* and is focusing on analyses of individual rags in an effort to clarify their musical evolution and relationship to other genres. Rudi Blesh and Max Morath have been among his invited guests. Bill Brooks's course, *Charles Ives in New York*, will be rooted in a study of Ives's Fourth Symphony and will grow out from there to encompass most of Ives's New York compositions. Both Berlin and Brooks will be giving public lectures in the spring (dates to be announced).

The **monographs and other publications** continue to roll off the press. *American Music Recordings: A Discography of 20th-Century U.S. Composers*, edited by Carol J. Oja and prepared by a diligent team of I.S.A.M. researchers (including R. Allen Lott, Bruce MacIntyre, Terry Pierce, and Judy Sachinis) under a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, is newly released. In 368 multi-column pages it lists over 13,000 record releases of "serious" music by 20th-century Americans. . . . Two monographs were published over the summer: Martha Manion's *Writings About Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography* and Stephen Spackman's *Wallingford Riegger: Two Essays in Musical Biography*. . . . Currently in production is *Life and Death of a Small Magazine*, by Minna Lederman, editor of *Modern Music* (1924-36). And a number of other manuscripts are on deck, in roughly the following order: Frank Hoogerwerf's *Confederate Sheet Music Imprints* (which consolidates, supplements, and updates the sheet-music listings in Marjorie Crandall's *Confederate Imprints* of 1955); Russell Sanjek's inside story of the popular-music industry, *From Print to Plastic: Publishing and Merchandising America's Popular Music (1900-1980)*; and William Lichtenwanger's voluminous catalogue raisonné of the music of Henry Cowell. . . . Copy for John Rockwell's *American Music Criticism Today* is expected soon.

Finally, we turn to a sad topic: This issue of *I.S.A.M. Newsletter* is dedicated with love and great admiration to **Frances Solomon** of the I.S.A.M. family who died unexpectedly on 13 October 1982. Since 1974—nearly all the years of the Institute's existence—Mrs. Solomon diligently prepared camera-ready copy for I.S.A.M. newsletters, monographs, and other publications. She took great price in her work and, as an avid music-lover/record-listener, always *read* manuscripts at the same time she typed them. We miss her terribly.

DISC DIGEST

Vintage and Fresh-Pressed Carter. Two new recordings from Composers Recordings, Inc. contrast early and recent music by **Elliott Carter.** The early orchestral music (CRI-SD-475) includes the *Suite from Pocahontas* (1939), Symphony No. 1 (1942), and *Holiday Overture* (1944), while the more recent works (CRI-SD-469) are *Syringa* (1978) and a reissue of the Concerto for Orchestra (1969).

In comparison with his later orchestral and chamber works, Carter's early orchestral music is little-known and seldom-performed. The style is basically neoclassical and mostly diatonic—reminiscent of Piston and Copland. The same strong sense of rhythmic independence and flexibility, which emerges so dramatically in the multi-layered later works, is, however, present in these early pieces. For this listener at least, the real discoveries are the first movement of the Symphony and the dramatic and exciting *Holiday Overture.* Paul Dunkel conducts the American Composers Orchestra in the excellent performance.

Syringa is an outstanding example of Carter's recent style, and this recording is its first. A cantata for mezzo-soprano, bass, and eleven instrumentalists, this work is a simultaneous setting of two texts about the Orpheus myth. The mezzo-soprano sings, in a flat, declamatory style, a poem by John Ashbery, while the bass (often with guitar obbligato) sings ancient Greek Orphic texts in a dramatic and melismatic manner. The effect is one of temporality and eternity combined, suggesting the nature of time. The performance, by Jan DeGaetani, Thomas Paul, Speculum Musicae, and The Group for Contemporary Music, conducted by Harvey Sollberger, is accurate, effective, and lyrical.

Opposite *Syringa* is a reissue of Columbia's now out-of-print recording of the Concerto for Orchestra, performed by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Leonard Bernstein. The Concerto, like *Syringa*, presents simultaneous streams of contrasting musical material—four movements are played more or less at the same time. It is one of Carter's largest and most difficult works, and the performance is far from perfect. But since a new recording is not likely to appear soon, this reissue is very welcome. (Composers Recordings, Inc.; $7.95)

—*Jeffrey Miller* (Brooklyn College)

A Humdinger. *Songbirdsongs,* a recent addition to the rapidly growing Opus One catalogue, contains nine songs for piccolo, ocarina, and percussion (in various combinations) by **John Adams** (not the John Adams of San Francisco minimalist fame but a younger one who works as an environmentalist in Alaska). Written between 1974 and 1979, while Adams was wandering from Georgia to Alaska, the songs are hauntingly lovely, full of the freshness and innocence of the great out-of-doors. Some even bring one back, for just a moment, to Judy Collins's *Whales and Nightingales.* (Opus One 66; Box 604, Greenville, ME 04441)

How Christmas Sounded 100 Years Ago. A century-old Christmas tree decoration—a cherubic chromolithographed paper angel strung on tinsel ribbon—is the perfect jacket illustration for ***Herald Angels: Christmas Music in Pennsylvania 1820-1920.*** This charmer of a recording is the work of the Union County Historical Society, with counsel from composer-musicologist Jackson Hill of Bucknell. A double vocal quartet, with a pianist on hand, sings songs of the past century with a sweet-sounding artlessness that is just right. Some of the texts are familiar, but not the music, which comes from such publications as *Echo to Happy Voices* (1869) and H.R. Palmer's *Song King* (1872). The album is beautifully produced with complete texts and a substantial brochure describing Pennsylvania Christmases in a more innocent era. (Available from Oral Traditions Project, Court House, Lewisburg, PA; $7.95 + $1.25 handling)

Today's Americana. Almost overnight, ***Hear America First,*** a new series of recordings of contemporary American music, has appeared and quickly reached a total of six releases. The project began as a concert series on—appropriately enough—4 July 1972, and its first disc was released in 1980. All in all, the offerings in the series are conservative, not experimental, with several names most prominent: Charles Ives (Volume 1 contains the *"Concord" Sonata,* reviewed here last spring, and Volume 5 the First Piano Sonata), Virgil Thomson (Volume 4 includes his piano music), Joseph Fennimore (Volumes 2 and 6 are devoted to his works; Fennimore, a former Thomson pupil, is director of the recording project), and Ivar Mikashoff (pianist for the *"Concord" Sonata* and the Thomson album). Music of James Willey is on Volume 3.

Among the highlights are James Fennimore's warmly lyrical works, showing more than a little shaping in the Thomson mold. His *Quartet (after Vinteuil),* on Volume 2, for clarinet, viola, cello, and piano is a round-toned, romantic tribute to the old music teacher in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* and his piano music is given a spunky performance by Juana Zayas on Volume 6. Although the disc devoted to Virgil Thomson's piano music is disappointing on the whole—mostly because of heavy-handed, often imprecise playing by Ivar Mikashoff and a poor recording quality that leaves the piano sounding grainy and almost brittle—there are ten minutes of pure fun on Side B: sixteen Thomson portraits, all composed in 1981. They average only 37 seconds apiece, but each of those seconds is action-packed, showing the tensile, snapshot quality of Thomson's portraits at its height. (Spectrum Division of Uni-Pro Recordings, Harriman, NY 10926)

Cadenzas & Variations (New World Records 313) contains some vigorously firm-bowed playing by violinist Gregory Fulkerson, in his recording debut. His programming is nicely varied: Aaron Copland's Duo for Violin and Piano, Philip Glass's Violin Solo Music from *Einstein on the Beach,* Leo Ornstein's Sonata for Violin and Piano (Op.31), and Richard Wernick's *Cadenzas and Variations II.* ($9.98)

SNIPPETS AND SNAPSHOTS

Go West, Young Critic. American music was the number one topic at a ***National Symposium of Critics and Composers*** last July in Santa Fe. In honor of its tenth anniversary, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival sponsored the symposium as part of its "Celebration of American Music."

How did they define American music? Well, the invited composers were standard-bearers Copland, Harbison, Rochberg, Rorem, Schuman, Wernick, and Wyner, all of whose music received festival performances (with premieres of works by Harbison and Wyner). Down the road at the opera, Rochberg's controversial rendition of Melville's *The Confidence Man* was given its premiere. Songs by Ives and Foster and a piano piece by Dahl also crept onto concerts, but in the final tally American music occupied less than twenty-five percent of the programs. And nowhere within hearing were any sounds from Santa Fe's own rich culture of American Indian and Hispanic music.

The daily symposiums had grandiose-sounding titles such as "Authenticity in Performance," "Purposes and Problems of Daily Music Criticism," "The Place of Cultural Chauvinism in the U. S." (retitled during the session as "The American Sense of Cultural Inferiority"), "Historical Issues in 20th-Century Music," "Critical Priorities," and "American Composition Today: The Direction of Diversity." In addition to the composers mentioned above, the participants included America's leading music critics and several musicologists. The level of discussion was heady, stimulating, and challenging, even if Ned Rorem's "Thirteen Ways . . ." (see page 6 in this issue) momentarily silenced the critics.

—*Susan Feder* (Grove's Dictionaries)

Dixie Displayed. This past summer, **The Historic New Orleans Collection** mounted an exhibit titled *In Dixie Land I'll Take My Stand: Confederate Music of the Civil War,* which included forty pieces of sheet music printed in New Orleans during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. Dr. Alfred Lemmon of the Collection's staff describes its holdings, in general, as "ranging from the broadside announcement of the first performance at the famed French Opera House to the family correspondence of Louis Moreau Gottschalk and an extensive collection of programs of New Orlean's musical activity. The sheet-music collection concentrates exclusively on music printed in New Orleans (primarily in the last century)." For a free checklist of *Dixie Land's* contents, write: Manuscripts Division, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal St., New Orleans, LA 70130.

Poppea* Goes Punk.** Since we seem to want to contemporize all our sacred idols—from Christ to Mozart—it shouldn't come as any surprise that ***L'Incoronazione di Poppea, the last of Monteverdi's great operas, has been reinterpreted in a throbbing, throaty rock production (based on the Malipiero edition!) by the New York Lyric Opera Company at the New York discothèque, Xenon. The production ran from 17-27 November. Ohimè!

Oops! In the spring issue of this Newsletter, the title of Sam Dennison's marvelous new book, ***Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music*** (reviewed by Edward A. Berlin), was mutilated to read, *Slander My Name.* Somehow we confused our crimes. Sam Dennison's response was so gracious and witty that we print it here by way of saying "We're sorry."

When Sam's "scandalize" was called "slander,"
This comment he made in all candor:
"It may be O.K.
To do it that way,
For 'slander' might even be grander."

Ed "scandalized" Sam with his "slander,"
But after he'd taken a gander,
Said, "Sam, don't you see,
It's no myst'ry to me;
The typist can't read what I hand her."

Strike Up the Band. In case you find yourself near the Dallas Historical Society (from 5 January to 13 February 1983), the New York State Museum in Albany (7 March to 29 May), or the Milwaukee Public Museum (25 June to 14 August), march on in to see ***Oom Pah Pah: The Great American Band***, a lively exhibit of photographs, instruments, and memorabilia chronicling the many-faceted role of the band in American life. The exhibit was organized by Mary Black of the New-York Historical Society and is sponsored by Philip Morris Inc. and the Miller Brewing Company. Frank J. Cipolla and Raoul Camus served as consultants.

Melville and Music. Last spring, Wayne Shirley of the Library of Congress, ever alert to an intriguing bit of trivia, was browsing through Herman Melville's *Mardi and a Voyage Thither (An Allegorical Romance)* of 1849 when he came upon an organological gem: a reference to "hamboning," or as Mr. Shirley describes it, "the process of using one's body as a percussion instrument, otherwise known as 'patting juba.' "

In the quotation that follows, the book's narrator is bemoaning how Jarl, his current shipmate, isn't the "sprightly" type he so enjoys:

> I longed for something enlivening; a burst of words; human vivacity of one kind or another. After in vain essaying to get something of this sort out of Jarl, I tried it all by myself, playing upon my body as upon an instrument, singing, holloing, and making empty gestures, till my Viking stared hard; and I myself paused to consider whether I had run crazy or no.
>
> —From the reprint by Capricorn Books, New York, 1964, p. 31.

Money, Money, Money. The Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, continuing good works until its last gasp, has awarded a grant of $31,000 to Yale University's **Oral History, American Music,** directed by Vivian Perlis. The grant will fund the videotaping of eight American composers.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A CRITIC *by Ned Rorem*

Following is a paper read by Ned Rorem at the National Symposium of Critics and Composers, held from 23 July to 2 August 1982 in Santa Fe. We are grateful to Vivian Perlis, who participated in the conference, for calling our attention to this piece and to Mr. Rorem for permission to publish it here before it appears in his new volume of writings, to be released next year.

I

Critics of words use words. Critics of music use words.

Those thirteen syllables, penned a decade ago, are as pertinent as any I can make on the matter.

If the final comment on a work of art is another work of art, might some critical prose equal, as art, the art it describes? Yes, but that very prose is independent of the art it describes.

The best critical writing is superfluous to its subject, and musical criticism is the most superfluous of all.

II

The music reviewer differs from fellow reviewers in that he deals with ephemerae and hears mostly the past.

Concerts are one-shot deals. If a Rubinstein or a James Galway "ran" for five months, like Gielgud or Lena Horne, would they pack them in every night? Unlike the painting or movie or theater or dance critic, the music critic writes epitaphs rather than birth notices. Since what he reviews won't be repeated, how can his readers profit?

Meanwhile fellow reviewers are immersed in new works. Oh, they do consider retrospectives of old masters like Picasso or Tennessee Williams, Balanchine or Ingmar Bergman, but they speak of "revivals" of O'Neill or of Oscar Wilde. We musicians do not speak of even a Beethoven revival since Beethoven is our rule.

The music critic is thus prey to the ennui of the Eternal Return and to the anxiety of being unneeded. But if he cannot aspire to high art so long as he deals in other people's art, he can be a useful citizen by committing himself to the music of today and letting the chips of the past fall where they may.

III

Some of my best friends are critics; but the basic rapport with, for example, Virgil Thomson or the late William Flanagan has always been compositional. Flanagan-as-critic was a purveyor of free tickets; Thomson-as-critic was the best in the world and hence free of rules. But that was in another time.

The *New York Times*'s policy was to fire reporters who were found to be practising musicians. Thomson's *Tribune* policy was to hire only practising musicians. The *Tribune* wrote from the inside out, and sometimes the writer was female. The *Times* still writes from the outside in and is represented solely by males.

Whether composers make the best music critics is debatable; but composers, even bad ones, know better than anyone how music is made—providing they have heard their works in good performance.

Ned Rorem (Courtesy of Boosey and Hawkes)

IV

The critic as composer manqué is an old notion. The composer as critic manqué is more amusing. As one who straddles each profession I grow schizoid. But both composer and critic are different from "real" listeners. The drabbest Reviewer is necessarily more responsible than the brightest Music Lover in that he must formally set—or rather, reset—the tone of a concert. When I must report on a concert, I listen differently than when I am the General Public. Indeed, I hear my own music differently according to the occasion.

As a sometime critic my duty is to every composer. As a full-time composer my duty is only to myself. In theory, all composers, even the despicable ones, are my brethren, while all critics, even the adorable ones, are my foes. I carry an enemy within me.

V

Some of my best friends are performers. But since composer and performer mostly face in opposite directions in our day, those friends are among the five percent who care about me and my (sometimes despicable) brethren. They are a race apart and the pariah of critics who, merely to earn a living, are more concerned with who plays than what's played. Even the listings in their periodicals name minor performers but not major premieres.

A soprano friend claims her long career is now but a mass of yellowing newsprint. Is the critic's career more? Does not his stardom, his power, stem from a ubiquity which, like the soprano's, must continually be reaffirmed? Nothing dates like yesterday's paper.

VI

3 August 1980. Back from New Mexican glory, I open newspapers for the first time in weeks to rewitness, not unexpectedly, exhaustion corroborated by Renata Adler in her already notorious dressing-down of Pauline Kael in the *New York Review of Books*: "No serious critic can devote himself frequently, exclusively, and indefinitely to reviewing works most of which cannot bear, would be misrepresented by, review in depth." And so sometimes these reviewers theorize, as when Tom Johnson adjacently in the *Village Voice* describes in 300 words the whole history of contemporary music as a "quest for freedom" without once explaining: freedom from what? From the past? But the simplest observer knows that the most rigorous censorship has never squelched art so much as obliged artists to confect alternative molds, whereas electronic studios, while presumably supplying composers unlimited palettes, have come up with nothing very worthy.

Meanwhile in the *Times*, during his second week as the world's most powerful music critic, Donal Henahan bemoans the sterile outcome of the promising sixties: "We [who is we?] continued to harbor the pitiable hope that the next turn of the cards would bring us another Bach, another Mozart, another Mahler." Why always the Germans? Why not another Debussy, or Ives, or Britten? But of course there is never "another." Artists are the only non-duplicatable commodities that exist. Even in America. While Henahan extols the past as ever true, and Johnson berates the past as ever false, both bark up the wrong tree in assuming than any work of art is "like" any other, even by the same artist.

Now, what Renata Adler says about critics (whom she does not subsume in the artist category, though it's usually done these days) is equally applicable to artists. The latter on schedule must come up with new works, if not with new ideas, or die of hunger. It has always been so. An artist refashions the same notion over and over and disperses it always for a price. Not only Andy Warhol, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Georgia O'Keefe, and Francis Poulenc but Braque, Tolstoy, Michelangelo, and, yes (whisper the name), even Mozart. Artists have only four or five ideas in their whole lives. They spend their lives sorting out those ideas in order to make them communicable in various guises.

VII

A critic must be able to tell—and then to tell you—the first rate from the second rate. In every field except music this question has been settled so far as the past is concerned, and concentration centers on the moment. Music critics' chief business should be the discouragement of standard masterpieces. At this point his function is moral: to warn against being beguiled by trends.

Most new music is bad, and it is the critic's duty to say so. But let him say so with sorrow, not with relish. The glee with which some of our head critics declare "I told you so" as yet another premiere bites the dust is no less contemptible than Casals belittling Stravinsky in order to sit on the Russian's throne. The great unwashed in heeding these spokesmen become exonerated from what should be a normal need for today's music.

VIII

The most honest description of the creative process is: making it up as you go along. The most honest description of the critical process is: judgment according to kinetic reaction. Neither process is casual. But for every Henahan, who at least knows what he hates, there is one who is not sure what he likes. Do we even know what we believe? If so, how to react to the belief? The not knowing has itself become in America a kind of belief. We like to talk about music more than to listen to it; it is made in order to be reviewed, does not exist if it is not discussed.

IX

Gide's quip, "Don't be too quick to understand me," obtains to us all, since we don't even understand ourselves. A composer doesn't want to be understood; he wants not to be misunderstood. Of course, Gide could also have said, "Don't be too quick to misunderstand me."

Can a living composer be a sacred cow? Can a living composer become a fallen idol? If one never sees raves for, say, Virgil Thomson's non-operatic works, neither does one see reviews that are less than deferential. Why? Meanwhile, even a Harold Schonberg gives Elliott Carter the benefit of the doubt. Why? And whatever became of the unanimous championing of George Crumb? If you explain that, well, lately Crumb hasn't written much to review, then why not review the eighty-seventh performance of an old piece, as you do with Verdi?

If critics are tastemakers, why has none blown the whistle on the concept of greatness—whatever that may be—as absolute and irreversible? Perhaps Beethoven's Ninth is trash. Perhaps Babbitt and Sessions are antiseptic bores who, if they appeal to executants, appeal through challenge and not pleasure. (And I do allow the role of ugliness-as-pleasure in art: Mozart and Ravel, at their highest, contain ugliness. But when all is ugly, nothing is ugly.)

X

If critics, along with Philistines, applaud the emperor's new clothes, some recognize the real thing when they hear it. But what critic will put his finger on the *absence* of the real thing?

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A CRITIC *(continued)*

Who ever questions the repertory of American song recitalists singing in all languages but their own? More interesting, who ever remarks on how our national inferiority complex extends even to those few composers who still write songs? Why are the texts of Crumb and Bowles almost all in Spanish, those of Perle and Weber almost all in German, of Harbison and Thorne in Italian, of Harrison and Glass in Esperanto and Sanskrit? Should these men claim to "feel" their music in these languages, I would reply: You have no moral right to feel these languages before exploring the gnarled thrills of your native tongue, your gift and yours alone. What a waste! Can you name one European who has forsaken his language to compose only in American?

XI

The same Donal Henahan who knows what he hates has on four occasions reviewed my cycle, *War Scenes*, with four conflicting verdicts: memorable, bad, good, forgettable.

Have I ever learned about my own music through reviews of it? No. No more than through annotators who sometimes point out trouvailles I never knew were there. I've never altered a piece because of a critic. Unlike a performer, a composer is always ready: his performance is "honed," cannot be improved. A good write-up, alas, seems never to assure further performances.

Can I as a critic criticize myself as a composer? Yes, during the composing process. But no, during the performance. Unless the performance is years later . . . at which time I am no longer the composer of the piece performed.

XII

Does public criticism otherwise affect me? And what do I stand to lose by voicing these opinions before critics?

Bad reviews make me feel worse than good reviews make me feel good, but no reviews are saddest. Although I've never read anything about myself that I've agreed with or even understood, bad or good, I still prefer good to bad, since friends and foes might read it. But mainly I am ignored by the press. If the punishment for complaining is to be further ignored, I have nothing to lose.

Why be paranoid about a career that has prevailed for three decades? Yet what is there to think when, for instance, the *Village Voice* and the *New Yorker* show good will toward certain composers they disdain, listen to tapes of others whose concerts they've missed, while leaving my three decades quite unrecorded? Perhaps they have nothing to say about work that is devoid of device; expressivity in itself is not food for comment. When the fatted calf is killed for those prodigal brethren coming back to the C-major fold, no one attends me precisely because I've always been a good boy. In longing for proofs of love, I have held back, literally wept. In flailing out in prose I have shown myself naked and been answered with derision. To combat critics on their terms is a losing game. The frustration of being nonexistent keeps us awake, while the critics arise fresh in the day to hand out or withhold yet again their merits and demerits based on who builds a better mousetrap. The critic forever has the last word. Or, as the case may be, the last silence.

XIII

In *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* Wallace Stevens wonders

> . . . which to prefer,
> The beauty of inflections
> Or the beauty of innuendoes,
> The blackbird whistling
> Or just after.

In music there is no "just after." A critic will never recapture the sound. The writings of even a Proust, a Shaw, a Tovey may be music—evocative, penetrating, ambiguous yet inevitable—but they are not *the* music. We can recall being in love but we cannot revive love-making except while making love. Sometimes when we finally hear a piece so wonderfully extolled by a critic we find no link. Stevens has it both ways but only within his poem, and our memory of his poem *is* the poem. Similarly, the memory and therefore the criticism of music lies only within the music.

WHAT'S NEW IN BOOKS

Music in the Schoolhouse. Music teachers traditionally have been more interested in the here and now of music education than in reading about their predecessor's accomplishments. As a result, many are largely ignorant of their professional roots. James Keene's ***A History of Music Education in the United States***, tracing music education in this country from colonial times to the present, is an extremely valuable addition to the limited number of books on the subject presently on the library shelf. The author has obviously done extensive research and has unearthed a great deal of interesting historical information, all served up in minute detail. Indeed, stricter editorial discretion and the deletion of considerable extraneous material would have made a good book better than it is.

Trends in music education have always been influenced by the educational philosophy in vogue at any particular time in history. Keene delineates the theories of Pestalozzi, Herbart, Spencer, and Dewey and shows how their work affected the course of music instruction in American schools. He also provides interesting insights into the efforts of many pioneer figures in American music education. Lowell Mason, for one, emerges from these pages not only as a notable educator but as a shrewd, and at times rather unscrupulous, businessman. The author's account of the growth of the music publishing industry in the late 1800s and its influence on music education is of great interest because little has been written on the subject. The development of school instrumental and choral ensembles in the early decades of the present century is also well documented.

The book should be required reading for all music teachers, not only because it conveys a sense of continuity with the past but because it encourages us to look with a more critical eye at what passes for music instruction in many of our schools today. (University Presses of New England, 396 pp; $30)

—*Emile H. Serposs* (Brooklyn College)

On the Offbeat. The name **Conlon Nancarrow** is floating about a great deal these days, with the recent 1750 Arch recordings of his player-piano music, his appearance at New Music America in San Francisco last year (his first visit to the United States since 1947), his recent $300,000 award from the MacArthur Foundation, and tales of his current European concert tour. But who is this composer? Most of us have never seen him, let alone had a chance to meet and talk with him. He grants few interviews, and far-off Mexico City has been his home since 1940.

Perhaps the most personal, detailed portrait of Nancarrow to date is found in Peter Garland's new ***Americas: Essays on American Music and Culture 1973-80***. It is one essay amidst a pastiche of Garland's fresh and open musings about his heroes (Lou Harrison, Conlon Nancarrow, Harry Partch, and Dane Rudhyar), his personal musical vision, and his travels. But it's by far the best. We learn about Nancarrow's tastes in music and literature and about his working methods—all intimate, revealing insights. (SOUNDINGS Press, 948 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501; $15)

Rockin' Again. Whether rock-and-roll is your hobby, consuming passion, or bread-and-butter, you will welcome the new, expanded edition of ***Mystery Train*** by Greil Marcus. *Mystery Train* first appeared in 1975 to considerable critical acclaim and is still a delight to read.

Through an examination of rock's heroes and villains, Marcus presents an overview of American popular music and its role in contemporary society. This is no dry, sociological tome, however. Marcus's writing about rock is alternately flamboyant and reflective, peppered with anecdotes, and always absorbing. He zeroes in on six influential artists and deftly captures their individuality: the emotional power and eccentricity of "ancestors" Harmonica Frank and Robert Johnson, The Band's intuition, Sly Stone's flamboyance, Randy Newman's delicate irony, and Elvis Presley's clay-footed grandeur.

The section about Presley is most facinating. Written before his death, it encompasses all aspects of Presley's impact. We are shown his enormous appeal and communicative power, as well as the less savory, more commercial side of his success.

There is an extensive examination of the shock waves and glut of Presleyana generated by Presley's death in 1977. And the excellent "Notes and Discography" section has been revised and updated.

Mystery Train is an ambitious book that succeeds in conveying the "possibilities, limits, openings, [and] traps" of American culture as reflected in the works of rock artists. (E.P. Dutton, 320 pp; $7.95)

—*Theresa Muir* (Brooklyn College)

America on Stage. In his latest book, ***American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd***, Gerald Bordman perceptively traces the history of this much-neglected repertory through the various transformations in its subject matter, musical style, critical appraisal, and popularity. Beginning with the early importations of Offenbach and Gilbert and Sullivan, which provided an impetus for a native product, he discusses the works of Sousa, Herbert, Friml, Romberg, and Kern as well as those of many lesser-known figures. Bordman's contention that the musical play of the last forty years developed logically from operetta is illustrated by the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Bernstein, and others. The frequent underlying cynicism of recent works, as compared to the unrestrained romanticism of earlier ones, is clearly not to Bordman's taste. But despite his personal preferences, Bordman's judgments are no less telling. Some readers might be disappointed, given the subtitle, that Stephen Sondheim receives barely more than a page and *Sweeney Todd* a mere two sentences and that Bordman's persistence in focusing on a work's tuneful hits often disregards the music's dramatic role and effectiveness. That aside, the book is penetrating, lively, and authoritative. (Oxford University Press, 206 pp; $15.95)

—*R. Allen Lott* (Graduate School of CUNY)

BLACK AMERICANA

Art Songs by Black Composers, a magnificent new recording by the School of Music at the University of Michigan (SM-0015, 2 discs) contains a variety of songs by both past and present composers, ranging from Florence Price's impressionistic *Night* to David Baker's jazzy *Early in the Mornin'*, from Margaret Bonds's pastoral *Three Dream Portraits* to Harold Swanson's bluesy *Death Song.* Sung by such stalwarts as George Shirley, Hilda Harris, Laura English-Robinson, and many others, the songs are beautifully presented. This is a long-overdue recording that should be in everyone's library. (School of Music LPs. The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; $15.50)

Speaking of materials for every library . . . Eileen Southern's new ***Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians*** is a must. There are 1,500 entries covering composers of art music as well as jazz musicians, writers, and others who have contributed to black music history. The articles are as lucidly written as one would expect from a scholar such as Southern. There are also appendices categorizing individuals by historical period, birthplace, and musical occupation. (Greenwood Press, $49.95)

For information about the works of selected black American composers, turn to Alice Tischler's ***Fifteen Black American Composers: A Bibliography of their Works*** (written with the assistance of Carol Tomasic). Another of the excellent Detroit Bibliographies in American Music, this volume includes many celebrated black composers whose works have never before been listed in bibliographic form: Edward Boatner, Margaret Bonds, Edgar Clark, Arthur Cunningham, William Levi Dawson, Roger Dickerson, James Furman, Adolphus Hailstork, Robert Harris, Wendell Logan, Carman Moore, Dorothy Moore, John Price, Noah Ryder, and Frederick Tillis. Besides a brief biography of each composer, there is a list of works (including library locations). (Information Coordinators, $19.75)

From the University of California Press comes David Evans's ***Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues.*** As Evans explains in the preface, "This book is a study of the processes of folk blues tradition and composition, subjects which folklorists and blues researchers have largely neglected in favor of other aspects of research." Everything you need to know about the blues is here, including folk and popular blues, the blues singer, and many traditional blues songs. There are eighty musical and lyrical examples, extensive notes, and a large bibliography. (University of California Press, $29.95)

—*Rita H. Mead*

BEHIND THE BEAT *with Mark Tucker*

We are pleased that Mark Tucker (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) has agreed to contribute to this Newsletter an on-going column on jazz, rock, blues, funk—any and all forms of American vernacular music. His inaugural topic: transcriptions of jazz.

Jazz on Paper. From its beginnings jazz has reached people mainly through their ears. This is not such a bad way for music to travel. But it is not quite good enough if this music is to be widely studied, analyzed, taught, and—sometimes as a result of these activities—respected in a print-oriented culture such as our own. Unlike most jazz musicians, teachers and scholars have long needed reliable notated versions of jazz performances to help them learn the language. Help is on the way, slowly but surely. The steady rise of jazz education and scholarship over the last two decades has contributed to a growing number of jazz transcriptions. Unfortunately, these transcriptions vary a great deal in both surface manner and musical accuracy and are scattered among many publications. Two useful steps would be to compile an annotated bibliography of jazz transcriptions and to establish a central distributing or networking service for circulating unpublished transcriptions among musicians and scholars around the world. Until then, here are a few sources of published, transcribed jazz I have found to be accurate, instructive, and of considerable musical interest.

Heading the list, in more ways than one, is James Dapogny's magnificent ***Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton: The Collected Piano Music*** (Smithsonian Institution Press/G. Schirmer, 1982; $23.95). This volume is a milestone in American-music scholarship: the first complete collection of transcribed and edited works, in one genre, by a major jazz composer. The magnitude of the task of transcribing forty piano solos from recordings of the 1920s and '30s (yielding over 400 pages of music) might alone assure the importance of this work. But Dapogny has done more than merely put his ear to the grooves. He has worked out an original, systematic way of notating Morton's music, with special attention to phrasing, rhythm, and form, and he has done so with an incredible degree of detail, accuracy, and musical understanding. Alternate versions of the pieces are transcribed and placed after each main score for handy comparison. There are detailed notes describing performance matters and editorial decisions and brief essays on Morton as composer and pianist. Also included are a biographical sketch, chronology of compositions, useful glossary of terms, sheet-music facsimiles, and previously unpublished photographs of Morton. More than a collection of superb jazz transcriptions, Dapogny's *Morton* is a sensitive, scholarly, finely wrought tribute to an important American composer and performer.

Four pieces by **Duke Ellington** have been transcribed by David Berger and Alan Campbell (published in both scores and parts by United Artists Music, 1979; $20 each). The works—*Ko-Ko, Concerto for Cootie, Harlem Air Shaft,* and *Main Stem*—all date from 1940 and '42 and have been cited repeatedly by writers on jazz for their striking compositional features. Unlike Dapogny's work, which combines the best features of scholarly and performing editions, these scores are geared parts for stage band) and are rather short on analytical or otherwise descriptive details. Brief notes give basic information about the performance on which each transcription was based. But little sense of the Ellington orchestra's subtleties of rhythm, intonation, and tone color come through in these notated versions. (An exception is the close attention paid to Ellington's special muting techniques for brass instruments.) Still, it is a considerable achievement to have any Ellington "scores" at all.

Transcribed solos—unlike the complete scores or fully notated transcriptions mentioned above—are fairly common, having been for some time a primary method of learning how to improvise (players first memorize, note-for-note, famous solos by master musicians). Often these transcriptions provide little more than the bare notes, and even then they can be inaccurate, simplified, or rhythmically misleading. A collection of saxophone solos that is none of the above is ***The Artistry of John Coltrane*** (United Artists Music, 1979; $4.95). Don Sickler has transcribed eight solos from two Blue Note albums Coltrane recorded in the late 1950s. While these solos do not represent a particularly high point in Coltrane's artistic career, they are instructive in suggesting some of the more adventurous melodic and tonal directions the saxophonist was to take in the early 1960s. Moreover, they are good transcriptions. Sickler has taken care to capture the subtle nuances of Coltrane's articulation and rhythmic sense, and he even includes a kind of running harmonic analysis of Coltrane's lines, indicating what chords the saxophonist was "thinking about," as opposed to the given harmonic scheme of the piece. In his introduction, Sickler provides a key to his transcription symbols and makes perceptive analytic comments on Coltrane's style.

Jazz-piano transcriptons are very tricky to get right. One collection I've long used and admired is ***Bill Evans Plays,*** which captures six Evans solos—and beautiful ones at that—from the mid-1960s (the second of four Bill Evans volumes, published beginning in 1965 by Ludlow Music, Inc.; order from Songways Service, Inc., 170 Northeast 33 St., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334; $3.95). One attractive feature is that the transcriptions include complete solos, not just a few choruses from an improvisation, so one can trace the development of a solo, comparing the different choices Evans makes at analogous places throughout each piece. For insights into this pianist's distinctive style, especially his left-hand voicings and scalar/melodic patterns, I know of no better place to go (other than the recordings, of course).

The functions of jazz transcriptions and the methods of transcribers vary quite a bit, as well they might. But as jazz settles more comfortably into classrooms, libraries, and scholars' dens, so will the quantity and quality of jazz transcriptions necessarily increase. Do we look ahead with anticipation—or mild dread—to the day when there on the shelf, wedged between volumes of Meyerbeer and Monteverdi,

THE HUTCHINSON FAMILY, 1841-45; OR, THE ORIGINS OF SOME YANKEE DOODLES

By Dale Cockrell

The following is a slightly abridged version of a paper read by Dale Cockrell (Middlebury College) at the Sonneck Society meeting in Lawrence, Kansas last April. Professor Cockrell is planning an edition of the Hutchinson Family's journals, two of which exist.

Some time in the autumn of 1841, Judson, John, and Asa Hutchinson left their family farm in Milford, New Hampshire and made a short tour of neighboring villages and towns. They gave concerts in schoolrooms, churches, or wherever they could find listeners willing to pay 12½ cents for admission. To gather attention the boys posted a bill announcing their "Grand Music Entertainment" consisting of "Popular Glees, Catches, Songs, &c." (See Plate 1) At the very head of this first Hutchinson Family poster appeared a rhymed quatrain, penned supposedly by Judson:

> When foreigners approach your shores,
> You welcome them with open doors;
> Now we are come to seek our lot,
> Shall Native talent be forgot?

The sense of this rhyme continued to sound through the group's early advertising, as in a poster for a concert in Portsmouth on 9 February 1842: "It is with some degree of confidence that this family appeal to the patronage of the citizens of Portsmouth, being themselves Natives of the Granite State, and only claiming a portion of that patronage which is often lavished upon foreigners of inferior merit." And further down: "Now, citizens of Portsmouth, will you come and hear the Native-born Yankee Singers, under these favorable circumstances, and judge for yourselves?"

Family Concert.

When foreigners approach your shores,
You welcome them with open doors;
Now we are come to seek our lot,
Shall Native Talent be forgot?

The ÆOLIAN VOCALISTS

(THREE BROTHERS.)

Respectfully announce to the citizens of this town that they will give a

☞Grand Musical Entertainment,☜

VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL.

At On

When they will introduce a Variety of

Popular Glees, Catches, Songs, &c.

☞Admittance 12 1-2 cents only! Doors open at 6 1-2 o'clock—performance commence precisely at 7. Front seats reserved for the Ladies.

Tickets at the Door, and at

Plate 1. *Hutchinson Family Handbill* (Courtesy of the Wadleigh Public Library, Milford, NH)

It would appear from these advertisements that the Hutchinsons viewed themselves as specially American and unique for it. In fact, concerted musical performance in America up to 1841 had been dominated by Europeans, most obviously in opera and art music. The one area where American performers had prevailed—minstrelsy—was so different in style and content from the respectable and upstanding Hutchinsons that the relationship was seldom drawn.

This "American" theme, established from the very first by the Hutchinsons themselves, set the tone for contemporary critical appraisal of the singers over the next several years. In fact, of the nearly one hundred reviews of Hutchinson Family concerts located in a study of newspaper files from the period 1841-45, an easy majority emphasize the Family's "native-ness." The New York *Tribune* of 25 October 1843 reported, for example, that when

> . . . they reached the finale . . . the silence was broken by one simultaneous, universal acclamation of prolonged and rapturous applause, shaking that immense edifice to its very foundations. . . . When it was announced by one of the Managers of the [American Arts and Agriculture] Fair that this talented band of brothers were all "*native American production*" the air was again rent with deafening thunders of applause.

And Philadelphia's *Saturday Museum* rhymed in 1844:

> Not from the shores of England
> Or the vine clad hills of France;
> Have they come to us with the gift of song,
> With the light and mazy dance.
>
> But they hail from the lofty Granite hills,
> And afar they boldly roam
> A minstrel band of our own free land,
> From a free and northern home.

For the Baltimore *Patriot* of 29 January 1844, "M" wrote of the Hutchinsons' music and how it

> . . . appeal[s] to other, and I had almost said higher, feelings.
>
> Their songs are so truly American, the love of country and of home is so alive and so real with them, that we catch from them the very spirit of patriotism.
>
> It is fresh and unsophisticated nature, speaking to us in honest and homely language, and in its freshness and truthfulness lies its greatest charm. We seem to see before [us] the children of those uncultivated but true-hearted men, who needed only their innate scorn of oppression, to rouse them to the resistance of tyranny, and our hearts burn within us as we listen to the homely but spirit-stirring tune, which so often led them on to victory.

The Baltimore concert of 27 January 1844 to which "M" was referring contained a new song by Francis M. Brown, with words by General George P. Morris, titled "Once Upon a Time, or the Origins of Yankee Doodle." The tune to this song, of course, was the "homely but spirit-stirring" "Yankee Doodle" which, as legend had it, often led Revolutionary War Soldiers on to victory. It is perhaps significant that "M" moved seamlessly from a discussion of the Hutchinsons' songs, to patriotism, and on to the tune "Yankee Doodle." In his mind, there must have been little distinction between them. All were as American as apple pie: songs about mother and home, patriotism, and Yankee Doodle . . . and the Hutchinson Family.

Clearly the Hutchinsons and their music were valued because they were somehow American. Why was this so? What about the Hutchinsons' style was especially American? What perspective does this knowledge give us on the history of popular song in the United States?

* * *

Throughout the reviews cited, there is a constant and discernible strain of American chauvinism. The 1840s were a decade when American power and pride blossomed, and many elements of the newly matured society were of a mind to criticize anything foreign and replace it with "Made in America." In the popular musical world, perhaps the Hutchinson Family and the minstrel shows were the first to benefit in a handsome way from this new spirit.

It is not surprising, then, that many contemporary discussions of the Hutchinsons' style began by comparing them to "foreign" styles then in vogue among certain parts of American Society. The New York *Tribune* of 2 November 1843:

> The Hutchinsons have a melody of their own, simple and truthful, the cultivation of which will render them eminent, independently of foreign embellishments. Their pieces touch the heart of multitudes, who would be unaffected by the more splendid performance of our opera singers, and they thus render essential service by awakening in them a love of song.

And the Salem *Daily Gazette* of 6 May 1845 lauded

> . . . their *simplicity*. They are emphatically New-Englanders. They have none of the pretension, the foolish grimaces, and airs that so disgust us in some public performers, but they stand up in their simple, national attire, and *sing*, not *act*.
>
> Their songs have the same characteristics. We have heard enough of the cadenzas, the trills, the flourishes, of Madame A, Signor B (we except, of course, the exquisite bird singing of our own Mrs. Lemon) and now turn with delight to the simple and unadorned airs of our own people. . . . We hope and believe that our friends will *always* prefer simplicity and nationality to borrowed ornament.

So the Hutchinsons were seen to be "American" in part because they sang in a "simple" style, as opposed to a complicated, affected "European" style.

> A bravura or a shake would be as much out of place in the touching simplicity of the performance, as a wreath of French flowers on the grave of the pure and true-hearted Mary. (New York *Tribune*, 25 October 1843)

The Boston *Morning Chronicle* of 12 April 1844 queried:

> . . . who can regret the "Casta diva" of Castellan—admired but not felt—when he feels moved and melted by the simple melodies of the Hutchinsons and sees around him that "Tears will unbidden start?"
>
> Whoever wishes to hear music—living music—will certainly attend.

In examining the songs of the Hutchinsons from this period, one notices, in fact, very few of the melodic or harmonic characteristics associated with nineteenth-century Italian opera or German art song. They are instead rather "simple," with diatonic melodies of limited range and contour, and harmonies that only rarely venture outside the tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic progression.

But "simple," for the Hutchinsons, most certainly did not mean the sound we associate today with traditional folk ballads—a style that rural New Englanders in the 1840s must surely have known. In fact, one of the very few traditional ballads that the Family sang at all, "Springfield Mountain," often appeared in their programs with the disclaimer: "As Sung in the Old-Fashioned Continental Style."

From contemporary views of the Hutchinsons, one gathers that their singing style was mellifluous, emphasizing pure vowels and a rich tone, with good intonation; it did not encourage forced sounds, nor was it harsh or nasal. (The Exeter *News Letter* wrote, "the Hutchinsons seem to have discovered that the nose is of no more use in singing than in conversation.") The sound was one we might today call "sweet" or "simple," as the 1840s did, if we were not simply to consider it "normal" and "middle-of-the-road," as the 1840s obviously did *not*.

This kind of sound is particularly well suited to achieving a smooth blend. Given the Hutchinsons' SATB voicing, the long and strong tradition of four-part New England hymnody and glee-singing, the example of the popular Rainer Family from the Tyrol, and a natural tendency toward mutual harmonic enrichment of their voices (perhaps due to a common genetic makeup), the Hutchinsons could have been expected to cultivate such a blend. John Hutchinson in his autobiography, *The Story of the Hutchinsons* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1896), in fact spoke often of the importance of the blend to the quartet, of endless "practicing for perfect accord

THE HUTCHINSON FAMILY *(continued)*

and harmony" (I, 229). It must have worked, for he later boasted that the "blending of the voices was so perfect that it seemed quite impossible for the audience to distinguish the several parts" (II, 304-05).

The critics agreed. The Boston *Daily Bee* (15 September 1842) wrote of the Hutchinsons' first performance in Boston: "Their voices harmonized admirably and in the execution of trios and quartettes, so perfect were the tune and time kept by them that the performance seemed the utterance of a single voice." "J. H. B." in the Washington *Daily National Intelligencer* (3 February 1844) stated:

> . . . it is the perfect blending of harmonious voices, the practical skill, the admirable expression, the intonation, the articulation that delights the ear . . . we have had nothing like it here. . . .

The Hutchinsons' sense of vocal blend was nothing completely new, although John noted it "was rare in those early days" (I, 64). But incorporation of the blend into an enormously popular, commercial music idiom obviously was. In fact, the Hutchinsons in the long run are probably most responsible for taking the SATB blend and bringing it into the mainstream of American popular song. Not only is the format of the various "family," "brother" and "sister" acts of the last fifty years—the Osmonds, the Brothers Four, the Andrews Sisters—beholden to them but also, very likely a sweet sound, one based on a rich vocal blend.

Since the roots of American popular song may lie as deep in its poetic heritage as in its musical (viz., the "songs" of Robert Burns and Thomas Moore), it is not at all surprising that another element in the new American "simplicity" of performance was clear articulation of the lyrics. The *Daily Gazette* (of Salem) wrote that "their enunciation is distinct so that the sentiment is seldom lost." The *Journal of Commerce* said, "the singers pronounce our language like good scholars; they enunciate and emphasize with excellent and cultivated, though not *perverted* taste . . . Here is their forte, as it is Russell's."

The reference to Henry Russell is particularly appropriate. In his autobiography, *Cheer! Boys, Cheer!* (London: J. Macqueen, 1895), Russell time and again attributed success to an ability to make the words understood. He spoke of the great influence that Edmund Kean, the actor, and Henry Clay, as orator, had on him, precisely because their words were delivered with such articulate force. After Russell returned to his native England in 1842, the Hutchinsons took his innovation and made of it a tradition and an especially significant characteristic of American popular song.

* * *

Although the Hutchinsons' manner of performance seems not to have changed much during their career, their repertory did change considerably, even from year to year.

At the very beginning this repertory consisted almost exclusively of glees, taken usually from George Kingsley's *Social Choir*, the *Orphean Lyre*, the songs of the Rainer Family, more rarely from Henry Russell. One typical program, for the concert at Portsmouth in early February 1842 mentioned earlier, consisted almost entirely of these sorts of pieces.

Part I

We Hail Thee, Mirth
Hail, Smiling Morn
Wild Hunt of Lutzow
I'm Afloat
Ship Wreck
Ye Shepherds Tell Me
Shun the Wine Cup
Going to Cape Ann

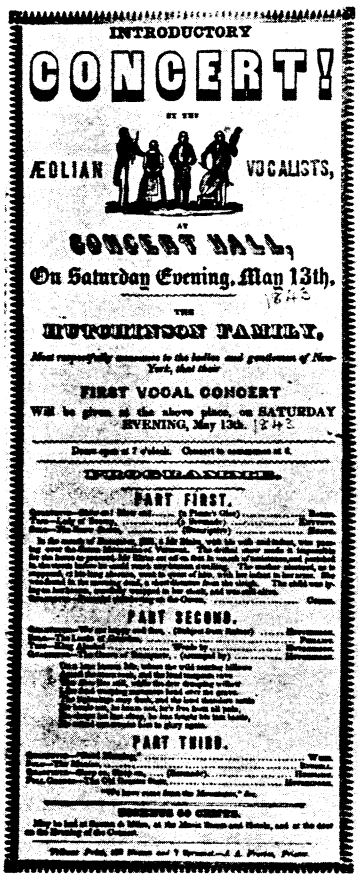
Part II

Hark, Hark each Spartan Hound
Charms of Celia
Near the Lake Where Drooped the Willow
The Old Total Society
Freight, Brothers Freight
Poor Tom's Lament (Cutting Eye-Teeth)
Crows in a Corn Field
Little Farm Well Tilled

Many of these songs are not especially American in subject matter; in fact the titles alone often suggest a European heritage.

By the time of their first appearance in New York City, on 13 May 1843, more than a year after the Portsmouth concert (see Plate 2), the Hutchinson Family's repertory had come to include some pieces with distinctly American subjects, for example "The Snow Storm" (based on a true Vermont story) and "The Old Granite State." Yet Old World glees still made up an important part of the program: "Blow On! Blow On! (A Pirate's Glee)," "Lady of Beauty," "Peaceful Slumbering on the Ocean," the Rainers' "We Are Happy and Free," "The Lords of Creation," "Good Morning," and "Sleep On, Sleep On."

The next year showed a more significant shift in repertory; in fact, 1844 brought a kind of maturity to the Hutchinsons' programming. Their music was not to be significantly different in type over the next several years, except that songs of a political nature became more and more important. A program both typical and exemplary of this new attitude is that for a concert at New Haven, Connecticut, on 22 April 1844. It was divided into three sections (beginning and ending with a quartet) and provided opportunities for an occasional solo. The lyricists were George P. Morris (with three pieces), Henry John Sharpe, other lesser-knowns, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (for a touch of class). This lineup was also fairly typical—all were Americans.


INTRODUCTORY

CONCERT!

ÆOLIAN VOCALISTS,

CONCERT HALL,

On Saturday Evening, May 13th,

THE

HUTCHINSON FAMILY,

FIRST VOCAL CONCERT

PART FIRST.

PART SECOND.

PART THIRD.

Plate 2. *Hutchinson Concert Program,* 13 May 1843
(Courtesy of the Wadleigh Public Library, Milford, NH)

The composers were also American: the Hutchinsons themselves led the program with four pieces; Lyman Heath, a longtime friend of the Hutchinsons from Nashua, had three; others had only one, except for Henry Russell, who placed two—the ballad "Rockaway" and the highly melodramatic "The Maniac." Russell, although English-born, would not have been considered an exception to the program's all-American cast for he had lived in the New World more than ten years and was considered by all, including English audiences, to be a naturalized American; both of these songs had been written in the United States for American audiences. (Dempster would have been considered "American" for the same reason as Russell.)

The subject matter ranged over a broad spectrum including the patriotic, the idyllic, nostalgia, death, mother, home, wanderlust, religion, "aspirations of genius," romantic idealization, comedy, histrionics, social problems, politics, and family life. Most of these could serve as categories worthy of treatment in an account of mid-nineteenth-century American life; articles and whole books have been written about them. Taken together, they represent a potpourri of topics likely to engage typical American audiences—"their selection of pieces is such as to please by turns, people of all tastes," wrote the Portsmouth *Journal.*

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Here is yet another example of the position so commonly taken in the press towards the Hutchinson Family. The paper this time is the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* of 4 December 1846.

> We do wish the good ladies and gentlemen of America would be truer to themselves and to legitimate refinement. With all honor and glory to the land of the olive tree and the vine, fair-skied Italy—with no turning up of noses at Germany, France, or England—we humbly demand whether we have not run after their beauties long enough . . . The music of feeling—heart music as distinguished from art music—is well exemplified in such singing as the Hutchinsons' . . . . With the richest physical power—with the guidance of discretion, and taste, and experience—with the mellowing influence of discipline—it is marvellous that they do not entirely supplant the stale, second hand, foreign method, with its flourishes, its ridiculous sentimentality, its anti-republican spirit, and its sycophantic tainting the young taste of the nation! We allude to, and especially commend . . . this school of singing . . . because whatever touches the heart is better than what is merely addressed to the ear. Elegant simplicity in manner is more judicious than the dancing school bows and courtsies, and inane smiles, and kissing of the tips of a kid glove a la Pico. Songs whose words you can hear and understand are preferable to a mass of unintelligible stuff. . . . Sensible sweetness is better than all distorted by unnatural nonsense. . . .

The author of this piece was the paper's new editor, Walt Whitman.

John Hutchinson wrote: "Perhaps it is scarcely necessary to point out that not only during our foreign tours were we recognized as in the strictest sense, 'American singers,' but that during our long career, we were never anything else" (II, 287-88). Audiences by the thousands, ultimately millions, and critics by the score certainly saw and heard something different in the Hutchinson Family from the very first. That this something was branded "American" time and again would be merely incidental were it not for the fact that a catalogue of the Hutchinsons' "unique" qualities ("sweet" sound, blending voices, clear enunciation), programming (sentimental material cheek-by-jowl with the meaningful, bumptiously patriotic with serious, comic with socially concerned), and aggressive merchandising of their product, all taken together, could apply to much of American popular music for the next one hundred years. Not only were the Hutchinsons speaking to and with their own epoch, in an original voice, they were establishing a style and format that would serve American popular song in good stead up until the mid-twentieth century.

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