

# 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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## EVALUATING ELLINGTON by Mark Tucker

This issue of the Newsletter lacks the usual "Behind the Beat" column; its regular contributor was too busy writing the following piece. Mark Tucker, now an assistant professor teaching in the music department of Columbia University, is also at work revising his doctoral dissertation—The Early Years of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington, 1899–1927—for publication by the University of Illinois Press.

Listening to the New York Philharmonic on a radio broadcast last summer, I was troubled. Zubin Mehta had just led a stirring performance of Tchaikovsky's *Fifth Symphony*, and the audience at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires responded warmly. It was time for an encore. "The Giggling Rapids," Maestro Mehta announced, "by Duke Ellington." Wild applause—but was it for the piece, a movement from *The River*, Ellington's 1970 suite commissioned by the American Ballet Theatre? Doubtful. It was probably for Ellington himself, or for the fact that an American orchestra was honoring one of its own.

Now, *The River* has its moments, and I imagine it must have been an effective vehicle for Alvin Ailey's choreography. But the score is one Ellington's lesser efforts—representative for him in the way, say, that *Wellington's Victory* is for Beethoven. On the heels of Tchaikovsky's *Fifth*, "The Giggling Rapids" sounded like the work of an amateur. Beyond the cruel juxtaposition was the Philharmonic's unsatisfying performance: swoopy strings and overbearing brass bore little relation to Ellington's special sound world, with its subtle blend of timbres and richly dissonant voicings. And the Philharmonic's stiff, Teutonic phrasing insured a minimum of swing. This was music by the great American composer Duke Ellington? It sounded more like Leroy Anderson on a bad day.

posers Orchestra and the Northwest Indiana Symphony performed *Les Trois Rois Noirs*, an unfinished late work completed by Duke's son Mercer, and last summer at Carnegie Hall the ACO under Peress played (and recorded) its first all-Ellington program. Another late, unfinished work—the opera *Queenie Pie*—was stitched together posthumously and produced in several East Coast cities; soon it will be on Broadway, starring Patti LaBelle. Then there are the repertory ensembles that attempt to recreate the sound, style, and spirit of Ellington's band, among them the American Jazz Orchestra (New York), Red Wolfe's Echoes of Ellington (Minneapolis), Gordon Grinnell and the Mellotones (San Diego), Doug Richards's Virginia Commonwealth University Jazz Orchestra (Richmond), and Andrew Homzy's L'Orchestre de Jazz (Montréal).

These developments spring from a common conviction that Ellington's music should not just be preserved on recordings but heard live in concert halls and theaters. They also illustrate a growing regard for Ellington as a serious composer—something he did not enjoy during his lifetime, when the public viewed him as a famous bandleader and critics often typecast him as a jazz musician. In 1965 he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in music but was turned down by the committee. (Ellington's reaction was typically class: "Fate doesn't want me to be

\* \* \*

Ellington's status is on the rise, to be sure, and audiences are hearing more of his music all the time. The current wave of interest started, I believe, around 1981 with *Sophisticated Ladies*, the Broadway musical that presented familiar Ellington pieces in glossy new arrangements. (This past fall the show traveled to Moscow to begin a two-year world tour.) Symphonic adaptations by Luther Henderson and Maurice Peress of six Ellington works, available through G. Schirmer, Inc., are turning up more often on concert programs. Recently both the American Com-

An Ellington score for *Main Stem* (1942). The musicians mentioned are Lawrence Brown, trombone; Ben Webster, tenor sax; and Juan Tizol, valve trombone. Reproduced courtesy of the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

EVALUATING ELLINGTON (*continued*)

too famous too young." He was sixty-six at the time.) Since his death in 1974, however, Ellington's stock has risen. Gunther Schuller, in *AmeriGrove*, offers a typical assessment, calling him "the most important composer in jazz history." Others go further, pronouncing him "one of America's greatest composers, regardless of idiom,"<sup>1</sup> or simply "our greatest composer."<sup>2</sup>

Such statements raise questions about both Ellington and our ways of viewing him. What makes Ellington a great composer? Which are his best compositions? What kind of critical framework do we have for evaluating his work?

Ellington's greatness might be measured by standards applied to European composers. In fact, writing in 1974, Gunther Schuller argued for Ellington's honorary membership in the club of European immortals:

If I dare to include Ellington in the pantheon of musical greats—the Beethovens, the Monteverdis, the Schoenbergs, the prime movers, the inspired innovators—it is precisely because Ellington had in common with them not only musical genius and talent, but an unquenchable thirst, an unrequitable passion for translating the raw materials of musical sounds into his own splendid visions.<sup>3</sup>

Not quite satisfied with this rationale, Schuller continued: "What distinguishes Ellington's best creations from those of other composers, jazz and otherwise, are their moments of total uniqueness and originality. . . . Ellington's imagination was most fertile in the realm of harmony and timbre, usually in combination." Schuller then cited some of these moments: the opening of *Subtle Lament* (1939), the second chorus of *Blue Light* (1939), the first bridge of *Jack the Bear* (1940), the harmonies of *Clothed Woman* (1947).

Schuller's attempt to define Ellington's greatness reveals some difficulties in the endeavor. If Ellington's most original contributions lay in the realm of "harmony and timbre, usually in combination," how can his music survive in the repertory once the distinctive tone colors (of his original orchestra members) have disappeared? Moreover, while Beethoven, Monteverdi, and Schoenberg all have their "moments of total uniqueness," their high reputation also rests on well-defined aspects of compositional craft and their ability to control large-scale structures. Does Ellington measure up here? Schuller doesn't say. He does, however, draw an analogy between Ellington and another composer who showed an uncanny understanding of harmony and timbre: "What Chopin's nocturnes and ballades are to mid-nineteenth-century European music, Ellington's *Mood Indigo* and *Cotton Tail* are to mid-twentieth-century Afro-American music."

Another approach to evaluating Ellington might be to decide which are his most important compositions. After all, if Ellington is to live on in the concert hall, he should be represented by his best work. Ellington did write some symphonic pieces—*The River* is one, *Night Creature* and *The Golden Broom and the Green Apple* two others. Judging from recent performance trends, these are works that future audiences have a good chance of hearing. Yet they have not often been singled out for

acclaim. Instead, critical opinion has tended to cluster in two camps. One includes writers like Schuller and Martin Williams, who praise the three-minute "miniatures" composed by Ellington for 78-r.p.m. recordings, especially during 1939–1942. The other includes such younger writers as Stanley Crouch and Gary Giddins, who, while acknowledging the achievements of the "miniatures," defend the extended compositions and suites from the 1940s and after—works like *Black, Brown, and Beige*, *Such Sweet Thunder*, and *The Latin American Suite*. In his notes for an all-Ellington concert at Lincoln Center last August, Crouch stated that the program (featuring such rarely heard works as *Suite from Anatomy of a Murder* and *Suite Thursday*) countered what he called "the longest reigning misconception in jazz criticism"—that

Ellington's greatest period was the four year streak of three-minute masterpieces he and his orchestra produced between the years 1939 and 1942. . . . Between 1942 and . . . 1974, Ellington went on to deepen the clarity and conception of his craft, very nearly creating something every decade that was superior to all high points in his previous work.

By contrast, in his forthcoming book *The Swing Era*, Schuller apparently takes a stern view of certain works championed by Giddins and Crouch.

\* \* \*

Suppose we step aside from the critical lines of fire and pose another question: What information is needed to undertake a thorough evaluation of Ellington? Certainly we need a *catalogue raisonné*, and we need access to the music either in recorded or written form. We also must learn more about Ellington's compositional method, since by all accounts it was unusual. Here's the rub: except for a few dedicated collectors, most of us lack this basic information.

There is still no complete list of works for Ellington; the estimates for his output range from fifteen hundred to three thousand pieces. Erik Wiedemann, a musicologist at the University of Copenhagen, has been compiling an Ellington catalogue for some years now, but until he finishes, probably the best list is at the back of Ellington's autobiography, *Music is My Mistress* (Doubleday, 1973).

As for discographical control over Ellington, major work has been done by researchers outside the United States, most notably Benny Aasland in Sweden (*The Wax Works of Duke Ellington*), Dick Bakker in Holland (*Duke Ellington On Microgroove*), and the Italian team of Luciano Massagli, Liborio Pusateri, and Giovanni M. Volonté (*Duke Ellington's Story on Records*).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, each month brings newly discovered Ellington radio broadcasts and live recordings—also previously unissued studio material. And new pieces keep turning up, too. For example, on the recent *Duke Ellington: The Private Collection* (LMR CD 83000–83004), there appears *Do Not Disturb*, a work recorded in 1956 but formerly known in a different version as *Le Sucrier Velour*, a movement of the 1959 *Queen's Suite*.

(continued on page 7)

## I.S.A.M. MATTERS

**Assistantships that pass in the night.** Emily Good, I.S.A.M. Research Assistant since the fall of 1986, has moved on—to freelance research work and a post in the Music Research Division of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. Taking her place is **K. Robert Schwarz**, a doctoral candidate in the C.U.N.Y. Ph.D. in Music program. Rob's byline—over music criticism in the *New York Times*, *High Fidelity*, and other music periodicals—is well known, particularly in connection with new music.

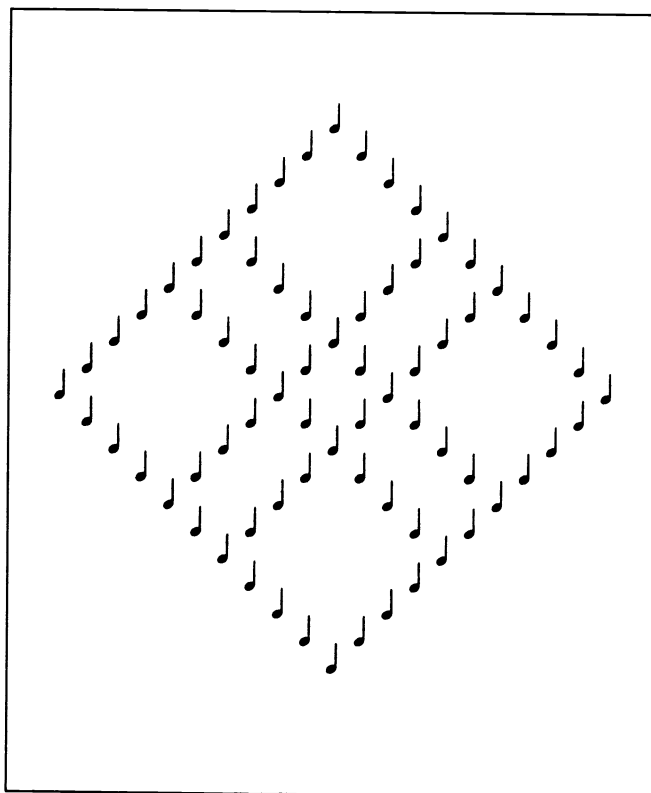
**Hot off the press** (as of October): I.S.A.M. monographs by James Lincoln Collier and Charles Hamm, both based on lectures delivered by the authors as I.S.A.M. Senior Research Fellows: Collier's *The Reception of Jazz in America: A New View* (Monograph No. 27; \$11) and Hamm's *Afro-American Music, South Africa, and Apartheid* (No. 28; \$11). . . . and not yet in-press but getting there: two monographs now in production at I.S.A.M.—James Heintze's complete revision, expansion, and updating of an early I.S.A.M. monograph, *American Music Before 1865 in Print and on Records* (1976); and Thomas McGeary's *The Music of Harry Partch: A Descriptive Catalogue*.

**Former Fellows.** Continuing our survey of former I.S.A.M. Senior Research Fellows and what they've been up to since their fellowship terms:

**Martin Williams** joined Smithsonian Press in 1981 and is an acquisitions editor there; he has sparked the planning of a series of biographical and critical handbooks on American composers (The Smithsonian Library of American Musicians). He continues to work on recordings, too: he collaborated with Gunther Schuller in selecting and annotating *The Smithsonian Collection of Big Band Jazz* (1983), oversaw a revised edition (1987) of his epochal *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, selected the contents of *Singers and Soloists of the Swing Bands* (1987), and with the pianist John Eaton has compiled and annotated the collection *Great Jazz Pianists* (forthcoming). In 1985 a revision of his book *The Jazz Tradition* (Oxford) appeared, and the following summer, his challenging article (in *American Music* 4/2) "On Scholarship, Standards, and Aesthetics: In American Music We Are All on the Spot."

Regrettably, **Russell Sanjek** died in June 1986 after a long battle with cancer. But he had completed work on his magnum opus—*American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years*—and with the help of his son Roger Sanjek, who completed the editing and proofreading, Oxford University Press published it, in three volumes, earlier this year.

**Edward Berlin** continues to dig in the dark corners of ragtime's history. He was the principal adviser on ragtime for AmeriGrove, and in the fall of 1986 he was named contributing editor of *Black Music Research Newsletter*, to which he regularly contributes the column "On Ragtime." He is at work on *A Scott Joplin Handbook* for the Smithsonian Press series mentioned above; rumor has it that he has also become an expert on the whorehouses of Sedalia, Missouri, in which Joplin may have played.



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## BOOK NOOK

Milton Babbitt's prose is generally thought to be so complex and technically arcane as to be almost impenetrable. On the other hand, anyone who has heard Milton Babbitt *speak* knows that he does so with crystalline clarity, engaging warmth, disarming informality, and ebullience—if also with death-defying velocity, urgency, and sheer mass: whole paragraphs, not just words or sentences, tumble from his mouth like autumn apples from a bushel basket. This is the Babbitt who comes through in a new collection of lectures by him, *Words about Music*, edited by Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (University of Wisconsin Press; \$21.50).

Babbitt was in Madison for two weeks in the fall of 1983 and lectured to various kinds of audiences—a graduate seminar concentrating on his music, another graduate-student class studying the history of music theory, a group of sophomores in a twentieth-century music course, and a general audience. These lectures were taped and transcribed, and from the transcriptions Dembski and Straus (with Babbitt's help) put together this splendid book. Babbitt's legendary status, among those who know him personally, as a wonderfully warm and witty human being and an astonishingly successful and beloved teacher is here documented in print, in his own outpourings—as rich and varied and bountiful as from any cornucopia you've ever imagined. *Item* (the first sentence in a lecture on "Contextual Counterpoint"): "I'm going to get into some pretty hairy technical things during this session, merely because they do reflect things that are going on in the music." *Item* (in the midst of a lecture on "Professional Theorists and Their Influence"): "Rameau is a marvelous example of an autodidact. You know what the trouble with autodidacts is—they have such lousy teachers!" *Item* (in response to a student's suggestion for a bass line to put under a chorale-melody phrase): "Okay, why not? It's one of those things that anybody might do who's been around, playing a little double bass pizzicato with a little walking bass à la Irving Berlin. But why do you want C-B-A there? What would it get you?"

Chapters 1 and 6 ("The Twelve-Tone Tradition" and "The Unlikely Survival of Serious Music") are, in turn, personally historical and ruefully ruminative. Chapter 5, the one on theorists, touches on various figures besides Rameau, especially Schenker. Chapters 2-4—on "Contextual Counterpoint,"

"Large-Scale Harmonic Organization," and "Questions of Partitioning"—make up the theoretical core of the book, as the editors say, and "do assume a basic knowledge of atonal and twelve-tone theory"; yet, even if more technically demanding than the other chapters, they are still a pleasure to read—as is the entire book.

—H. W. H.

## ON THE DISTAFF SIDE

The objective of *The Musical Woman, An International Perspective, Vol. II, 1984-1985*, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont (Greenwood Press; \$65), is both political and moral. Despite the paradox of its separatist approach, its focus on women in non-performing musical professions aims at integrating them into the mainstream of musical life and thought. It sets out to change attitudes, revise history, and encourage women in professional work (especially in areas traditionally male-dominated).

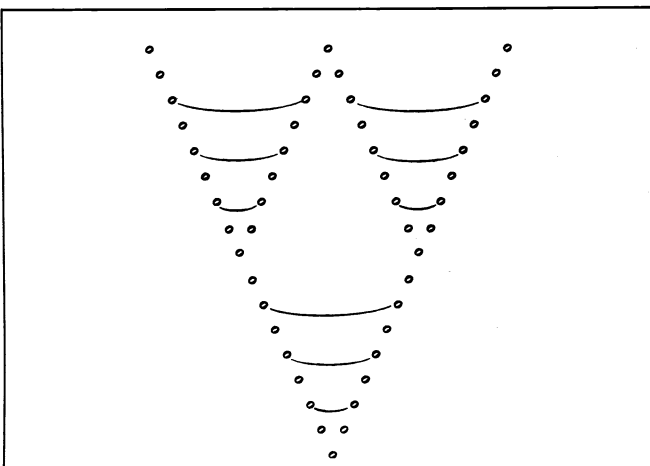
This volume has the same basic format as the earlier Volume I but a larger scope and new features. Both major sections—"Gazette" and "Essays"—are expanded. "Gazette," which reports on women's activities internationally, adds to its inventory of performances, prizes, awards/commissions, publications, and recordings lists of films and books, conductorships, and obits. "Essays" includes also interviews (e.g., with orchestra manager Joan Briccetti) and frank first-person commentaries (by critic Karen Monson and arts manager Susan Wadsworth).

The "international perspective" of the book's title is reflected in articles on women musicians in Mexico and such individuals as Toshiko Akiyoshi, Germaine Tailleferre, and Dame Ethel Smyth. Most of the entries, however, are weighted towards the U.S.A.

The West Coast figure Mary Carr Moore (1873-1957) is the subject of a new study by Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson: *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (University of Michigan Press; \$28). Their book is a welcome addition to documented studies not only of women musicians but of music-making outside Eastern centers.

Moore's birth into a wealthy family led by a literary, social-activist mother was propitious, yet the bourgeois codes she inherited slowed her growth as a composer, and her richest creative period came only after two failed marriages and the end of maternal chores. Stimulated by Arthur Farwell's Americanist ideals, Moore attempted to forge a unique native music by choosing populist topics and experimenting with borrowed Indian materials (or invented "Indianate" ones), but her work deviates little from the Germanic style she sought to escape from. Later, she incorporated expressionist and post-Romantic elements, though backing away from further innovation; in Smith and Richardson's interesting chapter on "The Ultra-Moderns" they depict Moore's aversion to Roy Harris's "green persimmon" music and hint at a rift between Moore as native of Los Angeles and an immigrant faction led by Schoenberg.

—Diana R. Hallman  
C. U. N. Y.



## NEWS AND INFORMATION

• The arrival of Frog Peak Music's 1988 catalogue proves that the **West Coast experimental tradition** is still going strong, the announced demise of *Soundings* notwithstanding. A vividly eclectic mixture of sober theorizing and far-out iconoclasm, Frog Peak's catalogue includes items that are either published or distributed by the feisty, irreverent "Composers' Collective." Worth noting are James Tenney's theoretical treatise of 1975, *Meta + Hodos and META Meta + Hodos* (\$15); Larry Polansky's distillation of his Mills College course on *New Instrumentation and Orchestration* (\$15); and music by Philip Corner, Daniel Goode, David Mahler, Larry Polansky, Jarred Powell, Wendy Reid, David Rosenboom, and others. (See especially Mahler's *Scorecard*, an exploration of the undoubtedly obvious "basic affinities shared by Baseball and Music" [\$10]). Frog Peak Music's catalogue may be obtained by writing Box 9911, Oakland, CA 94613.

• *American Music at the Smithsonian*. That's the title of a **new quarterly newsletter** from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Issue No. 1 (Summer 1988) announces a major exhibition, scheduled to open in the spring of 1991 and described as "a comprehensive treatment of the story of America's music." Heading the planning is a quadrumvirate of members of the Smithsonian's Department of Social and Cultural History: Jim Weaver, Spencer Crew, John Hasse, and J. R. Taylor.

• A **Roger Sessions Society, Inc.**, has been formed under the leadership of Barry Salwen, a pianist identified with Sessions's works. Annual dues are \$20, payable to the society at 14 Rodman Place, New Hempstead, NY 10977.

• An especially sharp and sensitive article on Irving Berlin (sparked by his hundredth birthday—yes, hundredth!—on 11 May) is "**Genius Without Tears**," by **Josh Rubins**, in the *New York Review of Books* (16 June 1988), pp. 30–33 . . . Berlin is also the central focus of *Sheet Music Exchange*, VI/5 (October 1988), mostly given over to **Vince Motto's** informal but useful and extensive "**Irving Berlin Catalog: First Draft Worksheets**," totaling almost one hundred pages (including several indexes). You can order the issue for \$5 from The Sheet Music Exchange, P.O. Box 69, Quicksburg, VA 22847.

• The University of Michigan Press has initiated a **Michigan American Music Series** under the editorship of Richard Crawford. The first book in the series is *Jazz from the Beginning*, a personal memoir by the jazz woodwind player Garvin Bushell (b. 1902) as told to Mark Tucker (no stranger to readers of this newsletter). Tucker has whittled down (and shaped up) more than sixty hours of Bushell's taped recollections into a fast-paced, readable, and fascinating book of about two hundred pages—a model of the oral historian's art.

• **David Horn**, the redoubtable author of the invaluable annotated bibliography *The Literature of American Music* (1977)—a supplement to which, longer than the original book, has recently been published by The Scarecrow Press—is director of a new Institute for Popular Music at the University of Liverpool.

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## BOOK NOOK II

"It is harder to review a good book than a bad one," Ned Rorem once wrote (about Charles Rosen's *The Classical Style*). Faced with Rorem's own *Settling the Score* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$27.95), his first collection of essays devoted entirely to music, I can only echo him. *Settling the Score* is so filled with witty, lucid, and wise observations that it seems less a book than a distillation of a life in music. And how is it possible to review a life?

Dating from 1949 to 1987, the sixty-three essays may disappoint those who know Rorem only from his wonderfully candid diaries. Replacing their sassy gossip and sexual escapades, however, is music criticism on a level that is surpassed (at least in America) only by Virgil Thomson's. Like Thomson, Rorem enjoyed a French training, and it shows in his prose—occasionally more purple than Thomson's, but with the same virtues of clarity, concision, and simplicity.

*Settling the Score* is divided into seven topical sections. Not surprisingly, the largest are devoted to "American Composers" and to "Debussy, Ravel, and Poulenc." Composers unfortunate enough to be neither American nor French, popular music, and performers all receive less attention. Rorem's normally cool prose turns particularly personal when analyzing the music of Ravel and Poulenc, when celebrating the careers of Bernstein, Copland, and Gershwin, or when lamenting the death from AIDS of *Opera News* editor Robert Jacobson.

Rorem has his axes to grind, and grind them he does. His condemnation of serialism is ferocious: "A modernistic brand of ugliness that everyone hated without admitting it is no longer being manufactured with the hope of being unpopular." Yet it is the larger aesthetic of modernism, and in particular its obsession with originality, that Rorem really despises. "Originality is a hollow virtue; everything's new under the sun," he writes. And one detects more than a hint of resentment when he asks himself, "How do you feel, after lonely years of treading a diatonic tone row, when atonal philanderers now garner publicity by skulking home to weigh themselves on a C Major scale?"

Although he once wrote warmly about the Beatles, Rorem now has no use for popular music: "Today I reject it utterly, and fear it." Rorem's "fear" arises from his conviction that the press and the public have blurred the boundaries between "popular" and "serious" so insidiously that fans of Vivaldi find solace not in Rorem's songs but in Michael Jackson's. And where does this leave the composer? "Composers such as myself . . . resemble that genus of tree frog, newly discovered in Guyana, which for millennia went about its business without bothering human beings."

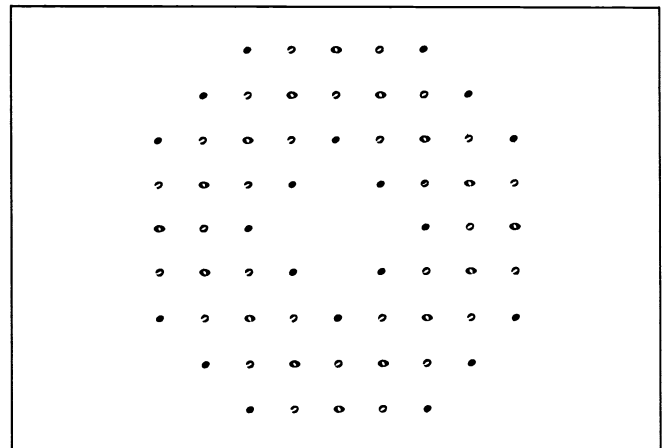
Yet Rorem's pessimism is hardly an accurate reflection of the composer's own career. His 65th birthday (23 October 1988) provoked a veritable orgy of celebratory performances and recordings, and increasingly his large-scale instrumental works are finding favor. In our post-modern era, Rorem's finely crafted, understated, nostalgic utterances are attracting an ever-larger audience. Tree frogs, no matter how novel, rarely receive such public acclaim.

—K.R.S.

**Stop! Look! Listen!** If you're looking for the original performance materials of that Irving Berlin musical or of the Gershwins' *Oh, Kay!*, Cole Porter's *Red, Hot and Blue!*, or Rodgers and Hart's *Heads Up!*, you're in luck! The materials relating to stage works by those four composers or teams can be found in *Catalog of the American Musical* by Tommy Krasker and Robert Kimball (442 pages; \$60 cloth, \$35 paper). For each musical and for each individual song in it, the compilers list the location of original scripts, piano-vocal scores, orchestral scores, and parts; they also indicate the work's present rental status. Once you learn a few abbreviations, the volume is easy to use, and it should be indispensable for performers and scholars searching for documents that are often scattered among various collections. Published by the National Institute for Opera and Musical Theater, the book was funded in part by the NEH and the American Express Company. A second volume, on the works of other composers, is planned.

—R. Allen Lott

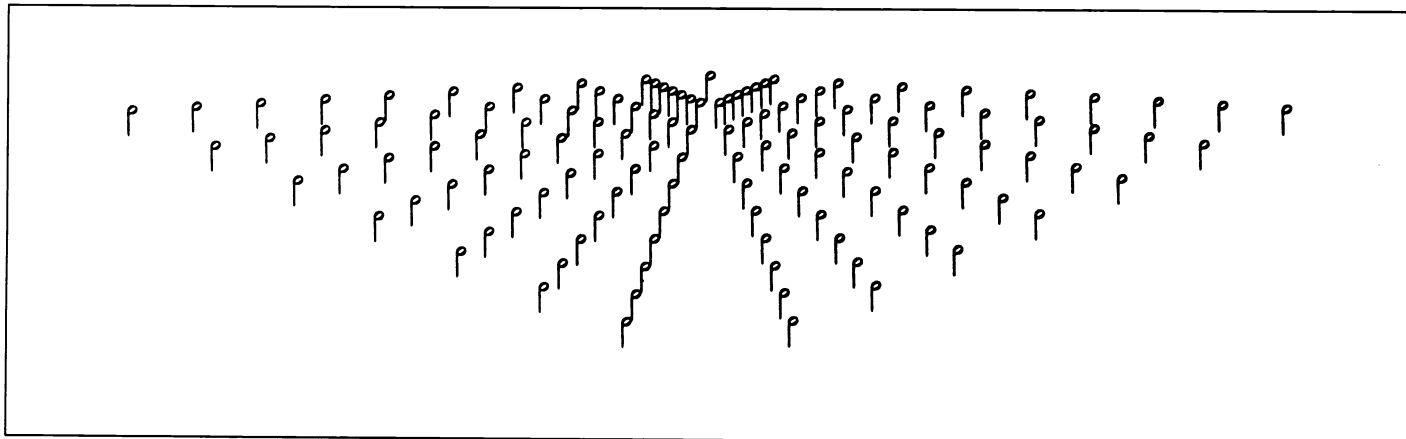
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



**Tale of T-Bone.** Helen Oakley Dance's involvement with jazz dates to the 1930s, when she wrote perceptive criticism for *Metronome* and the *Chicago Herald-American*, represented various artists, and produced recordings, including an important series of Duke Ellington small-group dates. In *Stormy Monday: The T-Bone Walker Story* (Louisiana State University Press; \$24.95), Dance brings her expertise to a study of Aaron "T-Bone" Walker (1910-1975), a major figure who straddled the fields of jazz and blues and who influenced everyone from B. B. King to the Allman Brothers. Neither conventional biography nor straight oral history, *Stormy Monday* is a polyphonic narrative, cross-cutting between past and present, in which the author interweaves her own voice with those of Walker, his friends, and family members. This ingenious method allows Dance to go outside the immediate frame of Walker's life and examine the people and places that shaped his art. Following Walker's career from Texas roadhouses in the 1930s to blues festivals and concert halls in the '60s, Dance shows him in various guises—the show-stopping performer, the innovative guitarist, the avid gambler, and the loyal friend and family man. Her book is like Walker's music itself: gritty, direct, and compelling.

—Mark Tucker

Columbia University



## EVALUATING ELLINGTON (*continued*)

A good guide to the complex maze of Ellington's recording activity is W. E. Timmer's *Ellingtonia: The Recorded Music of Duke Ellington and His Sidemen*, 3rd ed. (Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Institute of Jazz Studies and the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988). This 534-page volume tells what Ellington recorded, with whom, and when, but provides no information about reissues. Its index, which tallies the number of recordings per title, can be interesting. The most frequently represented "Ellington" piece on disc is Billy Strayhorn's *Take the 'A' Train*, for which Timmer has 1017 entries!

Musicologists do not live, however, by discs alone. Schuller acknowledged this at the end of his AmeriGrove entry for Ellington: "Serious study of Ellington's oeuvre has also been hampered by an almost total absence to date of his orchestral music in published form." While the statement still stands, help may be on the way. The most significant event in recent Ellington history was the Smithsonian Institution's acquisition of his personal library, including hundreds of original manuscripts, thousands of orchestral parts, and many sketches. These materials had been inaccessible, locked in a New York warehouse and a bank vault. Now, through an appropriation from Congress and the persistent efforts of John Fleckner, head of the Smithsonian's Archives Center, and John Hasse, curator in its Division of Musical History, Ellington's music has come "home"—to the city of his birth. It may be years before all the materials are catalogued and available to scholars. But eventually it will be possible, through comparing what Ellington wrote in scores with what was changed in parts and played on recordings, to learn much more about his compositional process, and to carefully assess his personal contribution, as well as that of Billy Strayhorn and individual orchestra members.

\* \* \*

How did Ellington see himself? That is hard to know, since he rarely let his guard down in public. But he once offered a revealing statement that might stand as his artistic credo:

We are children of the sun and our race has a definite tradition of beauty and glory and vitality that is as rich and powerful as the sun itself. These traditions are ours to express, and will enrich our careers in proportion to the sincerity and faithfulness with which we interpret them.<sup>5</sup>

Ellington here, in 1938, was speaking of a pantheon that consisted not of Bach and Beethoven but of "Bert Williams, Florence Mills and other immortals of the entertainment field." The challenge for historians of American music, it seems to me, is not to determine whether a figure like Ellington measures up to Beethoven, but to learn more about Bert Williams and Florence Mills, and to understand why Ellington would be proud to be viewed in their company. The investigation will direct us not to Lincoln Center but to Harlem's Lincoln Theater; not to Chopin nocturnes but to the songs of Will Marion Cook; not to nineteenth-century European aesthetic principles but to the Afro-American sources which inspired Duke Ellington and which continue to enrich and redefine our culture.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Francis Davis, "Large-Scale Jazz," *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1987), 76.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Ellison, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 217.

<sup>3</sup>Gunther Schuller, "Ellington in the Pantheon," reprinted in his *Musings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 47.

<sup>4</sup>To determine the availability of these discographies, contact Oak Lawn Books, Box 2663, Providence, RI 02907.

<sup>5</sup>Duke Ellington, "From Where I Lie," *The Negro Actor* 1/1 (15 July 1938), 4.

### CALL FOR PAPERS

The annual Scott Joplin Ragtime Festival will be held in Sedalia on June 1-4, 1989. For information, write Box 1117, Sedalia, MO 65301. Proposals for papers or presentations may be sent to Dr. Edward Berlin, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, NY 11364.

## CHARLES IVES AND HIS FATHERS: A RESPONSE TO MAYNARD SOLOMON by J. Peter Burkholder

A meeting on 22 October of the Greater New York chapter of the American Musicological Society (chaired by Dennis Slavin of Baruch College, C.U.N.Y.) was given over to a panel discussion, "Charles Ives: Trying to Answer Some Questions of Veracity," reacting to an article by Maynard Solomon in the Fall 1987 issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. The panel members were J. Peter Burkholder (Indiana University), Paul C. Echols (Mannes College of Music), J. Philip Lambert (Baruch College, C.U.N.Y.), James B. Sinclair (Yale University), and Mr. Solomon; H. Wiley Hitchcock was the moderator. Professor Burkholder's prepared statement invited publication; we are pleased to print it here, with his permission.

Few articles published in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* have garnered as much attention in the media as Maynard Solomon's article "Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity." Most of the ink spilled on it has focused on Solomon's argument that Ives falsified the dates of many of his compositions in order to appear more of an innovator than he actually was. But it seems to me that the central question Solomon raises is not whether Ives "fiddled with the truth," as the headline over Donal Henahan's article in *The New York Times* (21 February 1988) put it, but why Ives sought to present himself as he did.

Solomon's article shows us a composer who is trying to escape influence. In Ives's own later writings, particularly in his *Memos*, written in the 1930s in response to requests for information about him and his music, Ives tries to show that he was not influenced by the major composers of his time. He credits many of his innovations to the influence of his father, an unknown all-around musician but, significantly, not a composer. He characterizes his study with Horatio Parker, one of the major American composers of the time, as something he endured, a temporary drag on his creativity. He asserts that he rarely went to concerts after college, and he denies having heard or seen the music of his most famous European contemporaries. It is clear from this pattern of claims and denials that the Ives of the 1930s wants to avoid being perceived as having been influenced by other composers.

Compare the picture Solomon presents to the traditional view of Ives as a composer who was in fact *not* influenced by other composers, and particularly not by those whom he criticizes. This view takes Ives at his word and makes him into an American original—which is a very naive stance.

It is naive, first of all, because we now know enough about the psychology of influence to realize that artists often deny or overtly reject their most significant influences. Wagner attacked Rossini and Meyerbeer, but completely absorbed their theatricality; Debussy rejected Wagner, but was deeply influenced by his music; and a recent (1985) dissertation by John Jeffrey Gibbens shows that Ives in turn was influenced by Debussy, a composer he castigates.

Second, what composers say about their own music should never be taken as gospel; their statements are often self-serving, and they tend to reinterpret their past works to fit their present image. Richard Taruskin has shown, for instance, that *The Rite of Spring* incorporates many Russian tunes, yet Stravinsky later claimed that it contained only one authentic folk tune. Stravinsky put the tunes into the piece because he was writing a Russian ballet for a Russian company at a time when things Russian were the vogue in Paris; he later lied about them when it was to his advantage to appear a cosmopolitan rather than a nationalist composer.

Finally, much of what Ives says is wrong or misleading. Ives subscribed to regular concert series, and there are enough accounts of Ives attending concerts to make it unlikely that he ever deliberately avoided them. It is clear from the types and quality of pieces that Ives wrote at Yale and just after that his studies with Parker were a major step forward in his development as a composer, without which he could not have achieved what he did. Ives owned and presumably played through music for piano solo or piano and violin by Debussy (*Children's Corner*), Fauré, Glazunov, Percy Grainger, Vincent d'Indy, John Ireland, Fritz Kreisler, Edward MacDowell, Daniel Gregory Mason, Max Reger, Albert Roussel, Florent Schmitt, Cyril Scott, Scriabin (six etudes and sonatas no. 4, 5, 8 and 9), and Stravinsky (Berceuse from *The Firebird*), to include only works that he is likely to have acquired before 1920. Though some of these names may strike us as conservative, together they represent a good sampling of the prevailing tastes of the first two decades of the century. This does not sound like a composer who was out of touch with contemporary developments. (To be fair, it was probably true, as Ives wrote in 1931, that he had "never heard nor seen a note of Schoenberg's music" and had "not seen or heard any of Hindemith's music" [*Memos*, pp. 27 and 29]. There is certainly no evidence that he had.)

The area we know least about is what Ives learned from his father. Did George Ives actually invent a quarter-tone machine, or force his son to sing in one key while being accompanied in another? I have no idea. We do have many sketches and small pieces by Charles Ives, experiments in everything from polytonality and neotonality to atonality, which can be rather securely dated to before George's death in 1894. But what George's role in these would have been is unclear, even from Charles Ives's own recollections; he attributes these ideas less often to his father than to himself, commenting only that his father was willing to tolerate them: "Father was not against a reasonable amount of 'boy's fooling', if it were done with some sense behind it" (*Memos*, p. 46). George Ives's surviving notes on music theory show that he thought for himself about theory and came to his own conclusions. Brewster Ives recalled in 1969 that his father (Charles Ives's younger brother) knew of George Ives's "experiments with music" and that his grandmother (Ives's mother) often told her grandchildren about George and "how he pioneered in music" (Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered*, p. 72). So there is evidence from several sources that George Ives was open-minded and had an experimental bent. For the details of what he did, however, we have almost no evidence beyond Charles Ives's testimony. Solomon's article thus provides an important corrective to the received wisdom, by showing that we can't be very certain about something that we thought we understood. I also find very fruitful Solomon's contention that, whatever the truth of George Ives's musical experiments, the relationship between father and son was a good deal more conflicted than Charles Ives's idealized picture of it.





George Edward Ives, ca. 1890

We do know that at least some of the things Ives attributed to his father's influence he actually got someplace else. My favorite example, because it is both so concrete and so revealing, is the idea of alternating measures of 3/4 and 4/4, attributed to George Ives in the *Memos* (p. 140) and used by Charles Ives only once, in the third movement of his cantata *The Celestial Country*, written in 1898–99. But this movement is modeled directly on the third movement of Horatio Parker's *Hora novissima* (1893), in which Parker uses alternating measures of 3/4 and 4/4 in exactly the same place in the movement and in exactly the same way; Ives got the idea from Parker, not from his father.

This example is emblematic. Ives did owe a great deal to Parker and to European composers and was influenced by them very deeply, a fact which has been obscured by his emphasis on the influence of his father and our naive acceptance of Ives's picture of himself. I am not suggesting that Ives was *not* deeply influenced by his father, for of course he was; rather, it is Ives's insistence on this influence to the exclusion of all others that should give us pause. Why did Ives picture himself this way in the *Memos* and in his other published writings from the mid-1920s until the end of his life? Why did so many musicians and critics choose to believe him? And why all the fuss about Solomon's article?

Before addressing these questions, let us contrast the picture Ives paints of himself in the *Memos* with the image he sought to project at least through 1920, the year he published his *Concord Sonata* and *Essays Before a Sonata*. In his music and in the *Essays*, we see a composer who is *not* afraid to be influenced, who indeed insists upon his debt to his precursors, and who seeks to distinguish his work from theirs.

In his First Symphony, completed in 1898, Ives sets out to prove that he can compete with European symphonists on their own turf. He compels us to compare his work to other recent symphonies by alluding directly to them, most notably to two symphonies premiered in late 1893, less than five years earlier, and already among the most popular in the repertoire: his slow movement begins with an English horn solo reminiscent of the English horn tune in the slow movement of Dřorák's *New World Symphony*, and his finale includes a passage that is directly based on a moment in the triumphant third movement of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. Yet when Ives borrows most directly, he also improves on his models, cutting down the repetition and avoiding the predictable phrasing of their themes, and intensifying their compositional procedures to create a more elaborate, more thematically unified, more contrapuntally complex score than theirs. Through his allusions, Ives challenges us to compare his work with the great symphonies of his time; by improving upon his models, at every level from melody to structure, Ives aims to convince us that his symphony stands up to that comparison and may even be better.

The Second Symphony again alludes directly to European models, but its themes are all paraphrased from American tunes, as Ives simultaneously asserts his American identity in a European form and demonstrates his individuality as a composer through his virtuoso ability to rework existing musical material into new shapes. The Third Symphony does not allude to specific models, but borrows European symphonic procedures to create a new form, in which the theme, an American hymn tune, is stated complete only at the end, after a long Beethovenian development based on motives drawn from it. Here Ives further demonstrates his originality by creating a form that is at once thematic and wholly non-repetitive, dependent on European models and yet also fresh and new. *Three Places in New England* and the *Holidays Symphony* are as Romantic in conception as any tone poem by Smetana or Strauss and frankly invite comparison with them, yet Ives's tone poems are distinctive both in what they seek to depict and in their musical procedures. Perhaps the best emblem for Ives's relationship to his Romantic precursors is in the *Concord Sonata*: the opening motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony sounds out boldly on the first page, yet when we hear the same motive at the end of the last movement, it sounds like Ives, as indeed it is—part of a quotation from the theme of the sonata's third movement.

Throughout his career, we see Ives in his music claiming the European tradition as his own while asserting his individuality within the tradition ever more forcefully at each new stage, until he reaches a truly extraordinary music. This pattern is not one of Ives's evolution alone, but of the career of every other

## CHARLES IVES AND HIS FATHERS (continued)

important composer of his generation, from Mahler and Debussy to Bartók and Webern: starting from the common territory of nineteenth-century Romanticism, each extended past practice in new directions, asserting his individuality against the overwhelming weight of past achievements, until he arrived at something extraordinary and unique.

And this is the picture we get of Ives in his *Essays*: a composer in the European tradition, trying to assert his nationality and his individuality within that tradition. He identifies himself with the spirit of Bach, Brahms, and especially Beethoven; yet he insists that despite the great achievements of the past, there is room for new contributions. He says that "the best product that human beings can boast of is probably Beethoven; but, maybe, even his art is as nothing in comparison with the future product of some coal-miner's soul in the forty-first century" (pp. 88-89). Ives aspires to the status of a composer in Beethoven's image, but he is also eager to clear space for himself by asserting that even Beethoven can be improved upon.

At the same time, he rejects the approaches of many composers of his own generation. This too is an effort to clear space for himself, to distinguish himself from those whose music is most like his and to assert his own superiority. He writes program music, as do Strauss, Debussy, and John Alden Carpenter, but he objects to their subject-matter as decadent or trivial, and insists on a more elevating purpose for music. He rejects the repetitiveness of Ravel and Stravinsky and defends his own practice of constant motivic development without exact repetition. He contrasts his own use of gospel hymns with composers who incorporate black American or American Indian music without understanding the spirit behind the music they borrow or the culture that produced it and thus create only superficially American music, rather than music that captures something authentic about the American spirit and the American experience.

Here, Ives is *not* a composer who claims not to be influenced, but a composer who states his influences boldly, both the ones he seeks to emulate and the ones he rejects, and who asserts his own superiority. Note that he does not claim *priority*—he does not suggest that he invented program music, or was the first to draw on American vernacular tunes, or wrote his symphony before Dvořák wrote his—rather, he seeks to show that he does what others have done, only better.

So what is going on in the *Memos*? Why does Ives try to deny that he was influenced by Parker and by his contemporaries?

Recall that in the early 1930s Ives was still in need of advocates to promote his music, and that his strongest promoters at the time were members of the avant-garde. Ives's greatest advocate during this period was Henry Cowell, who was himself primarily an experimental composer (at least until the mid-1930s) interested in the development of what he called "new musical resources." Cowell saw in Ives an innovator, an experimenter from an earlier generation, a pioneer in new musical techniques. I interpret Ives's *Memos*, written in the early 1930s at the prompting of Cowell and other ultra-

modernists for information about Ives's music, in part as an attempt to live up to the image Cowell and others had of Ives as a great innovator. Here Ives emphasizes the experimental aspects of his music, while Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, who earned only praise in the *Essays*, come in for criticism as "too cooped up" (p. 100), with "too much of the sugar-plum for the soft-ears" (p. 135). (That Cowell had a major impact on the image Ives sought to project in the *Memos* can be surmised by comparing Cowell's writings on Ives from the late 1920s and early 1930s with those of Henry Bellamann, an even earlier friend and champion of Ives and his music: while Cowell stresses Ives's independence from the European tradition as an aspect of his American character, Bellamann notes Ives's strong roots in the past.)

There is a striking inversion in Ives's evaluation of his music in these *Memos*, for the very pieces that he tried hardest to get performed before 1918, major concert works from *The Celestial Country* and the first three symphonies through the Third Violin Sonata, *Decoration Day*, and *The Saint-Gaudens in Boston Common*, are hardly discussed (and, in the case of the First Symphony and Third Violin Sonata, are actively insulted), while technical problems in his small and mostly ephemeral musical experiments, which Ives clearly regarded as less important at the time he wrote them, are discussed at disproportionate length.

This inversion is at one with the stunning inversion of influence, attributing to his biological father the role in forming his artistry that belonged, at least in part, to his metaphorical fathers, his artistic precursors. The literary critic Harold Bloom, in his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, has applied the notion of the Oedipal conflict to the way younger poets must wrestle with their precursors "so as to clear imaginative space for themselves" (p. 5); in a forthcoming book, Joseph Straus has applied Bloom's ideas to modern composers from Schoenberg to Bartók. In his music, and in his *Essays*, we can see that Ives is engaged in the same struggle, competing with his strong precursors on their own ground. In the *Memos*, however, he achieves their virtual annihilation by denying any important influence from any composer and attributing everything important in his music to his father. Anything important in his music that cannot be credited to his father, he passes over without discussion.

In the *Memos*, Ives set out to disinherit himself from European music, calling all sorts of composers names and attacking most viciously the composers from whom he had learned the most or whose music resembled his (whether through influence or mere accident). He needed someone, some guide, of course: to claim to be a complete original is too unbelievable. So he credited his originality to his father George—not just his use of individual techniques such as polytonality and quarter-tones, but the very stance of open-mindedness that made him so original. Ironically, he used his biological father to obscure his great debt to his artistic fathers. Here is where Maynard Solomon is right on the money. This is what we should be talking about: Ives's successful attempt to have everyone perceive him as a great original, coming out of nowhere, with no one but George at his back.

Why has this view of Ives been so widely accepted? Partly, of course, because it is the view set forth in the first biography of Ives, co-authored by Henry Cowell and his wife Sidney Cowell. Moreover, this view of Ives has been useful for American avant-garde composers from the 1920s through the 1960s and '70s, who see in Ives a model for their own work. It has been useful also for those music historians who continue (against all reason) to see the history of music as a history of innovations, and so find an easy niche for Ives as a pioneer in the wilderness. Finally, it has been useful for nationalistic flag-waving to have a composer whose work apparently owes so little to European sources. The main reason Solomon's article has caused such a stir is that it calls into question this view of Ives as the great American innovator—which is also why I think it is such an important contribution.

The question that remains is this: what did Ives do and when did he do it? Solomon argues that many of the dates Ives assigned to his pieces are questionable, and implies that every jotting needs to be reviewed with a new skepticism. I think this is healthy. Many of Ives's pieces went through several states, and it would be good to reconstruct the evolution of each piece from first sketch to finished copy. However, I do not think that the essential chronology of Ives's life and works is going to change a great deal. Many pieces and manuscripts can be dated fairly accurately without reference to Ives's own annotations. Certainly many pieces went through a long process of revising and reworking. Yet as both Wayne Shirley and James Sinclair have pointed out, based on their research as editors of some of Ives's major orchestral works, the essential conception of a piece is usually its most radical aspect and is almost always present from the first sketch.

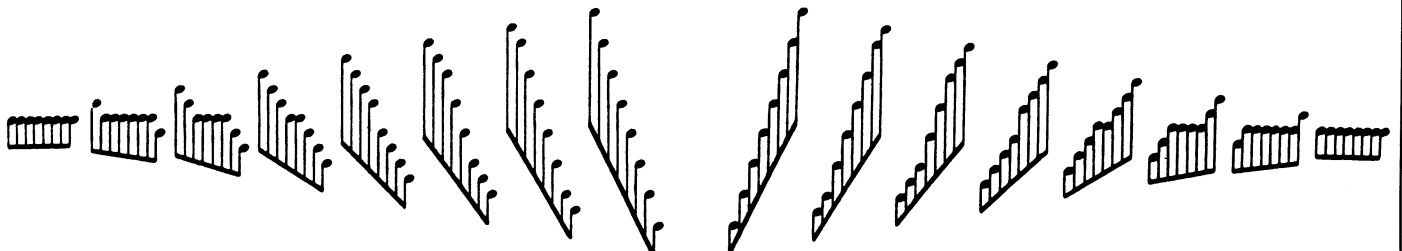
What we will see when the air clears, I believe, is not a self-made man, but a self-reliant one, a composer who owed a tremendous debt to Parker and the Brahmsian tradition he represented, but who moved far beyond that to incorporate many influences Parker explicitly rejected, including the programmatic tradition of Wagner and Strauss, the French schools of Franck, d'Indy, Roussel, and Debussy, Russian influences from Glazunov, Scriabin, and the Stravinsky of the *Firebird*, American vernacular music, and the experimental attitude he credits to his father—absorbing some of these influences, reacting against others, until he made himself into one of the great composers of his time, whose lasting reputation will rest not on the priority of his innovations, but on the superiority of his creations.

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## COUNTRY AND GOSPEL NOTES *by Charles Wolfe*

(Here beginneth a new regular column of this newsletter. Its contributor, a well-known authority in studies of the vernacular musics named in his title, teaches at Middle Tennessee State University, where a new Center for Popular Music is thriving.)

If there is a last frontier in the burgeoning study of pop and folk music, it must be the complex field of gospel music. Broadly divided into what the NARAS ballots like to refer to as "soul" (black gospel) and "southern" (white gospel), the music has been part of American culture since the turn of the century. Yet it has attracted the smallest critical bibliography of any major genre. Black gospel has fared the better of the two, with a handful of memorable articles and at least two standard monographs, Anthony Heilbut's *The Gospel Sound* of 1977 (revised in 1985) and Laurraine Goreau's massive study of Mahalia Jackson, *Just Mahalia, Baby* (1975). White gospel has spawned nothing as good as Heilbut or Goreau, only a rather lengthy list—perhaps twenty-five titles—of "inspirational" biographies, works produced by journalists for fans. Although tedious and often lacking in perspective, some of these books do offer insight into the world of gospel music, among them *The James Blackwood Story* (Whitaker House, 1975) and George Severly Shea's *Then Sings My Soul* (World Wide Publications, 1968).

Fortunately, a renaissance of sorts seems under way in gospel-music research. Two new periodicals are providing venues for writers in both fields. One is *Rejoice!*, a well-done slick magazine published by the Center for Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi (\$11.95 a year); its scope ranges from quartet music to various forms of black gospel to the "Christian rock" of DeGarmo and Key. Less eclectic in its approach is *Precious Memories* (Rt. 1, Box 1876, Young Harris, GA 30582; \$12.00 a year), devoted to country, bluegrass, and shape-note gospel. Additionally, a new generation of researchers is busy documenting black quartet traditions; they include Doug Seroff, Ray Funk, Lynn Abbot, Ray Allen, and Robert Laughton. Though much of their research has appeared only in record liner notes and esoteric publications, it will eventually find its way into mainstream forums. Laughton, working with Cedric Hayes, has in final draft form a comprehensive gospel discography, and another team of researchers is tinkering with an almost-complete black gospel bibliography.

One of the first formal fruits of this new generation of researchers is Kip Lornell's *"Happy in the Service of the Lord: Afro-American Gospel Quartets in Memphis"* (University of Illinois Press; 171 pages, \$19.95). Through an impressive series of oral interviews, discographical research, and social history, Lornell pieces together a superb history of gospel quartet singing in one city. Memphis was not the kind of hotbed for quartet singing that Norfolk, Birmingham, or Houston was, but it had a rich complex of other musical forms, with which gospel often interacted. Much of the book documents the careers of the city's most famous quartet, The Spirit of Memphis, an ongoing group that was founded as early as 1928. Emerging from a well-entrenched folk quartet tradition, The Spirit of Memphis became increasingly professionalized in the 1940s, with well-organized tours, radio programs, and hit recordings. Such commercialization—by no means unique to The Spirit of Memphis—affected style, repertoire, and even motivation, and created complex stresses on a number of artists who saw gospel not as a vocation but as a sacred calling. "Some of these groups

really made it big, but we are still the more humble gospel," says Willie Neal (of the Dixie Nightingales), one of the dozens of singers Lornell interviewed.

Lornell concludes his study in the 1950s, when general interest in black quartets began to wane. His book should serve as a model for future researchers: it combines in a wonderfully readable fashion the best of the new gospel research, extensive first-hand interviews, sophistication about how the music works at both folk and commercial levels, and keen sensitivity to the people involved with the music.

## ITTY BITTY BOOK AND DISC REVIEWS

- Finally! the long-awaited third edition of *America's Music* by Gilbert Chase (University of Illinois Press; \$29.95)! Revised, updated (to some extent, but Chase is not particularly interested in or knowledgeable about new music of the past two decades), and augmented with additional illustrations and music examples, a serviceable discographical essay by William Brooks, and a thoughtful foreword by Richard Crawford (putting Chase and his seminal book—first published almost thirty-five years ago!—in context against the background of earlier American-music historiography).

- D. W. Krummel's *Bibliographical Handbook of American Music* (University of Illinois Press; \$24.95) is an absolutely indispensable tool for any American-music scholar (or buff). Essentially a substantial expansion of the author's AmeriGrove article "Bibliographies" (and its seven-column list of titles), the book provides an overview of the "literally hundreds of bibliographical sources of varying degrees of respectability" for the study of American music. Citing (and commenting on) 760 titles, Krummel here groups these in subcategories under four main headings: "Chronological Perspectives" (AmeriGrove's "Access by Period"), "Contextual Perspectives" (AG's "Access by Place"), "Musical Mediums and Genres" (AG's "Access by Content"), and "Bibliographical Forms" (AG's "Access by Bibliographical Form"). Thus, nestling in topical and subtopical contexts, the lists of books are much easier to use than AmeriGrove's single bald, chronological list (though that has its own different virtues). A name-and-subject index adds yet more to the book's utilitarian value.

- Roland Hanna, like Tommy Flanagan and Barry Harris, is a Detroit-born pianist with an affinity for the music of Thelonious Monk. He demonstrates this convincingly on *Roland Hanna and George Mraz Play for Monk* (Musical Heritage Society CD, MHS 512192H), abandoning his usually rich-textured and rhapsodic style in favor of leaner lines and a harder attack. In *Rhythm-A-Ning*, Hanna and bassist Mraz splinter Monk's witty theme into dissonant fragments before soloing on the harmonies. And in *Reflections*, their gently loping tempo helps turn Monk's moody ballad into a pleasant amble through the park.

—Mark Tucker  
Columbia University

## REGARDING RECORDINGS

## SEXY SEXTETS

In a time of "minimalism" and "new romanticism," Milton Babbitt's music should have fallen out of fashion. But accounts of his demise, some wishful in tone, have been greatly exaggerated. Even though he remains, in his words, "an unreconstructed and not-have-to-be-born-again twelve-tone composer," he and his music have continued to gain in stature and recognition (a 1982 Pulitzer citation and a 1986 MacArthur fellowship are the most prominent of his recent honors).

At the same time, a new generation of performers has taken up the challenge of his music. A recent recording of *Sextets* (1967) and *Joy of More Sextets* (1987) on the New World label (NW-364) features two superb young musicians, pianist Alan Feinberg and violinist Rolf Schulte. Both are steeped in Babbitt's idiom; both have technique to spare. In their hands, the playful and lyrical elements in Babbitt's music, too often obscured in other performances by a desperate scramble simply to play the notes, shine through. As performers, they complement each other nicely. Feinberg's playing is suave and refined; Schulte's is searingly intense (keep a fire extinguisher handy). Together, they make a passionate and convincing case for this music.

While *Sextets* inhabits the somewhat austere musical world of middle-period Babbitt, *Joy of More Sextets* confirms a trend in his music of the last ten years toward greater accessibility. Not that Babbitt has compromised his deeply held views about music. He is still determined "to make music be as much as it can be rather than as little as one can get away with," and the deeper levels of musical structure are as carefully controlled as ever. At the same time, the musical surface of the more recent works is full of easily grasped repetitions. Babbitt will never write "easy-listening" music, but these repetitions are helpful landmarks for listeners trying to hear a path through his work.

—Joseph N. Straus  
Queens College, C.U.N.Y.

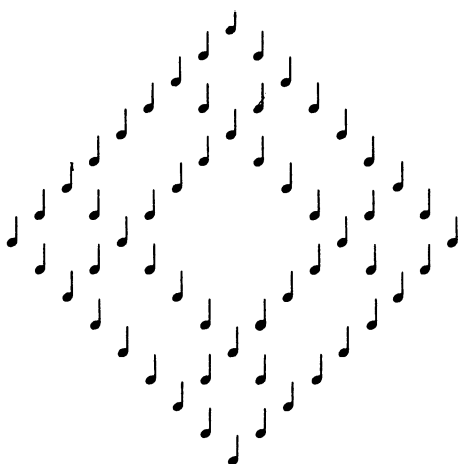
The piano roll was a favored means of recording ragtime in the early days when piano playing on discs was infrequent. Today, those without player pianos who want to recapture this sound of the past can turn to **Biograph Records**. Biograph first reissued ragtime piano rolls in the early 1970s, on LP. Now it has renewed its efforts on CDs, using new "performances" which incorporate the authentic sounds of the pedals being pumped and other mechanical workings. *The Entertainer* (BCD 101) contains three rolls hand-played by Scott Joplin ("Maple Leaf Rag," "Something Doing," and "Weeping Willow Rag"), followed by eleven pieces by Joplin machine-cut in the 1960s for roll collectors. *Elite Syncopations* (BCD 102) repeats the same "Maple Leaf" roll (but at a faster tempo), adds two other Joplin-played rolls ("Magnetic Rag" and W.C. Handy's "Ole Miss Rag") and the machine-cut *Silver Swan* from around 1914, and fills out the disc with twelve recent machine-cut rolls of works by Joplin. *The Greatest Ragtime of the Century* (BCD 103) is a misnomer since it includes stride, blues, and boogie-woogie along with ragtime. However, it contains sixteen excellent hand-played rolls: the same three by Joplin as on BCD 101; three each by Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, and Eubie Blake; two by James P. Johnson; one by Jimmy Blythe; and a duet by Blythe and Charles Clark. The piano-roll authority Michael Montgomery provides informative notes, with assistance on the first two discs from the equally expert Trebor Tichenor.

—Edward A. Berlin  
Queensborough Community College, C.U.N.Y.

## TRACY'S BACK, WITH JAN AND GIL!

"Musical experiences this special . . . are not supposed to occur that often . . . but the disc is [here] for all to hear, and everyone should. It's perfect." I agree one hundred per cent with those words of Peter G. Davis, in a *New York* review (14 November 1988) of the album *Songs of America* (Nonesuch 79178), by mezzo-soprano Jan DeGaetani and her longtime collaborator, pianist Gilbert Kalish. Davis goes on (and I'm grateful to him for saying, in part at least, exactly what I would have anyway): "No one has ever made a record like this before: a group of 28 American art songs surveying the repertory between 1860 and the present, a collection as various and colorful as the country it celebrates." And Davis continues with raves about the "gorgeous Stephen Foster rarity" *Beautiful Child of Song*; the "limpid rendition" of Carrie Jacobs-Bond's *I Love You Truly*, full of "respect and honest sentiment"; two songs by Charles Ives "recently discovered" [*recte* "recently edited," by John Kirkpatrick]; others by living composers (such as Babbitt, Bolcom, Cage, Carter, Copland, Crumb, Rorem, and Schuman); and "mementos . . . by valuable composers in danger of being forgotten" (Rebecca Clarke, Ruth Crawford, Irving Fine, Sergius Kagen, and others). What Davis does not mention—and it deserves mention—is that the album was produced by Teresa Sterne, who virtually created the marvelous Nonesuch catalogue some fifteen years ago, was fired (to the dismay of many) about ten years ago, but is now, fortunately for us, producing as a free-lancer new recordings by some of the very artists in whom she saw early promise, back when. Brava, Tracy! and bravissimi, Jan and Gil!

—H.W.H



REGARDING RECORDINGS (*continued*)

## NIXON ON DISC

Penetrating in its musical characterization, sensitive in its matching of lyrics and music, and eclectic in its orchestral design, John Adams's *Nixon in China* is a musical gem which pleases more with each listening. Well received by audiences in Houston, New York, Washington, DC, and Amsterdam (and by PBS viewers nationwide), *Nixon* is now available in an original-cast recording (Elektra/Nonesuch 79177, all formats). Those who follow new music will remember that collaborators Adams (music), Alice Goodman (libretto), and Peter Sellars (stage direction) set about to fashion a heroic opera based on real yet mythic figures of our own time.

The attractive booklet accompanying the recording contains essays by Goodman and Michael Steinberg, the libretto, background material on the artists, and many photographs (including several full-page pictures from President Nixon's 1972 journey and numerous thumbnail photos from the opera). Goodman's essay reveals the historical research that went into the work and exhibits the same clarity and poise as her couplets (rhyming and non-rhyming) in the libretto.

Steinberg comments in his essay:

We can read a few opera librettos with pleasure away from their music, and *Nixon in China* is one of them. [But] what we encounter and respond to is not the text itself, but the text as the composer read it and wanted us to hear it. It is the music that delivers the words.

The music that Adams delivers is eclectic. It calls to mind the jagged rhythms of Stravinsky (especially *The Rite of Spring*), the arpeggios of Glass (especially *Akhmaten*), the textures of Reich, and even the leitmotifs of Wagner; and the music given to Mao in Act I is reminiscent of the mechanical clock in *Boris Godunov*. But these are mainly orchestral matters: none of the other composers wrote melodies like those in *Nixon*; the vocal style is Adams's own, though in his characterization of the operatic figures his use of melody is reminiscent of Mozart. For example, Chou En-Lai speaks wise, dignified, and patient words, while Nixon voices glib concern for media attention and exudes self-importance; Adams's music reflects the personality of each. Similarly, the Wagnerian bravado demanded of Madame Mao, who in real life was a former actress, sounds appropriately like Hollywood overkill.

The vocal highlights in the recording are Carolann Page's turn as Pat Nixon at the Gate of Longevity and the chorus in the opera's opening scene. Sanford Sylvan as Chou En-Lai is pleasing and vocally consistent. John Duykers as Mao Tse-Tung sometimes sounds strident (apparently in keeping with the composer's intent and the high tessitura he demands of the part). As Mao's wife, Trudy Ellen Craney is the only soloist with vocal problems, though she becomes more secure after a shaky start. (She was ill during the recording sessions, according to a friend of the composer.) Under Edo de Waart, the Orchestra of St. Luke's provides a solid, occasionally brilliant accompaniment.

—Leslie Lassetter  
C.U.N.Y.

• The combination of charm and rigor that typifies the music of **Arthur Berger** is perfectly embodied in the five chamber works, dating from 1941 to 1972, on *An Arthur Berger Retrospective* (New World NW 360-2). Berger's earlier Stravinskian/Coplandesque manner and its later assimilation of Schoenbergian serial techniques and Weberian textures are both heard to good advantage in crystalline performances by such skilled chamber players as Joel Smirnoff, violin; Joel Krosnick, cello; Gilbert Kalish and Christopher Oldfather, piano; David Starobin, guitar; and members of the Boehm (woodwind) Quintette. Carol J. Oja provides impeccable, crisp, helpful liner notes.

• **New Albion Records**, the voice of the American West (especially for new music), continues to delight with unusual releases that complement those appearing from Eastern record companies. *Item*: an album with three major pieces by **Lou Harrison** (NA 015CD): *La Koro Sutro* (1972), for chorus, gamelan, harp, and organ; *Variety Trio* (1986), for violin, piano and percussion; and *Suite for Violin and American Gamelan* (1973), composed cooperatively with Richard Dee. Choicest of these is *La Koro Sutro*—a big piece (nine sections, about half an hour long) to a Buddhist text put into Esperanto; it has a mantric inwardness and a stunning climactic movement that piles up layer after layer of inter-resonant just-intoned pentatonic lines.



. . . *Item*: the album *Litania* (NA 008CD), featuring the Singapore-born pianist **Margaret Leng Tan** (the first woman to be awarded a Juilliard School D.M.A. degree) and other musicians performing five works of the last two decades by the Japanese composer Somei Satoh (b. 1947). Satoh's music is spellbinding, a unique amalgam of traditional Japanese modes of expression and atmospheric allusion on the one hand, Western textures and technology on the other. Tan is unique in her combination of Oriental sensibility and sympathy to Occidental vanguard techniques. They make *some* pair! (Tan also writes generous, essential liner notes for the recording.) . . . *Item*: an extraordinary display of new instrumental virtuosity and extended techniques, by trombonist **Stuart Dempster**, on the album *In the Great Abbey of Clement VI* (NA 013). The title refers to the pieces *Standing Waves—1976* and *Didjeridervish*, which Dempster made (and recorded) in 1976 in the hyper-resonant abbey chapel—up to 14 seconds of sonorous decay time!—of the Pope's Palace in Avignon. A third piece, *Standing Waves 78/87*, is "a re-creation through a computer of the Abbey experience." This album is not recommended for anyone uninterested in sheer sounds (as opposed to dialectic composition) or lacking in patience (the sounds here unroll very, very slowly) . . . If your dealer doesn't stock New Albion recordings, hide him/her and order directly from 584 Castro #515, San Francisco, CA 94114 (tel. 415/621-5757).

## WHAT'S THE SCORE? (Notes on Some New Ones)

• All hail the power of Walker's name! let singers prostrate fall! Shape-note singers, that is: back in print is **William Walker's** *Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, that extraordinary four-shape tunebook first published in 1835 and still in use (if only in the annual Big Singing in Benton, Kentucky). Glenn C. Wilcox's photofacsimile (1966) of the 1854 edition—the last to be overseen by Walker himself—is here reprinted, including Wilcox's affectionate introduction as well as his valuable errata list and indexes (of first lines, of tune names, and of meters). (The lead-sentence above? Why, a borrowing [with adjustments] from Oliver Holden's venerable *CORONATION* (1793), found on p. 299 of Singin' Billy's book, alongside 339 other tunes out of the First New England School and the revival- and folk-hymnody traditions.) The publisher is the University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0024; the price, \$20.

• The half-title page of Volume I reads *A Choice Collection of the Works of Francis Johnson/Premiere Edition/MCMLXXXIII*, that of Volume II . . . *MCMLXXXVII*. Don't let it faze you. This is not a first publication of music by some callow twentieth-century youth; it's a generous selection of facsimile reprints—plus illustrations and text—of about forty compositions by **Frank Johnson** (1792–1844), the keyed-bugle virtuoso and bandmaster, and probably the leading musician in Philadelphia after Alexander Reinagle's death in 1809. Edited by C. K. Jones and L. K. Greenwich II, the boxed pair of hardcover volumes—published by Point Two Publications (157 West 47th Street, New York, NY 10036; \$66.95)—is clearly a labor of love and well-meaning industry. Never mind that the narrative text is overblown and mostly jejune, the musical analyses models of embarrassingly naive overkill; just the gathering-together of this many works by Johnson—marches, songs, cotillions, galops, quadrilles, and other dances, almost all published as sheet music now difficult to find—makes this a publication well worth its price. And adding to the book's value are loads of other interesting reproductions as well—of drawings, newspaper columns, sheet music covers, maps, portraits, and so forth.

## SYMMETRIES ! ! SEIRTEMMYS

Those intriguing musical graphics spotted here and there among the previous pages are excerpts from a collection of compositions by **Tom Johnson** published in 1981. Its title-page, reprinted here with his permission (as are the musical excerpts), looks like this:

SEIRTEMMYS SYMMETRIES JOHNSON TOM	SYMMETRIES JOHNSON TOM
TOM JOHNSON SYMMETRIES	TOM JOHNSON SYMMETRIES

In his preface, Johnson explains, "Contemporary music has basically been about asymmetry . . . I began to wonder why symmetry had been abandoned so completely. . . . I observed that people like [the minimal artists] Sol Lewitt and Agnes Denes were bringing about a healthy renewal [and I decided] to try to compose symmetrical pieces in a rather strict way." Working with a music typewriter, Johnson produced a series of works whose whole constructive premise is symmetry. His printed collection presents these "in purely visual form . . . their purest form, [which] leaves you to imagine aural parallels for yourself."

\* \* \*

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• Dance, anybody? Country dance, we mean. Jeremy Barlow, director of the Broadside Band (England), has brought together all 535 country-dance tunes from the 18 editions of John Playford's *Dancing Master* (1651–ca. 1728) in an elegant paperback volume: *The Complete Country Dance Tunes* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 1985; 136 pp.; \$19.95). From the scholarly standpoint, his work is unimpeachable: helpful background narrative, clear descriptions of the Playford editions, precise explanation of the editorial method used here, performance suggestions, facsimiles of six pages of early editions; then, following the tunes themselves (presented in the order they appeared in *The Dancing Master*, edition by edition), a detailed critical commentary, and, finally, a generous index of titles and original spellings. *American* music? Well, not quite; but this was the dance music of British Colonial America, and many tunes live on to this day in country and bluegrass music, so it's ours as much as England's.

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