

NEWSLETTER

INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN AMERICAN MUSIC

Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York - Carol J. Oja, Director

Volume XXV, Number 1

Fall 1995

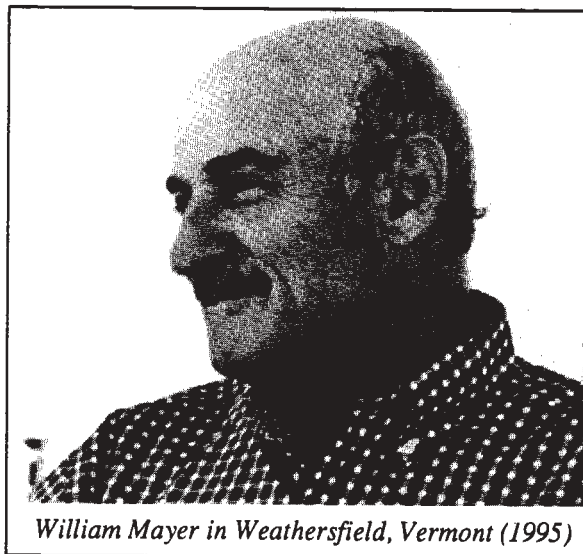
QUIET REBEL: WILLIAM MAYER AT SEVENTY

When William Mayer speaks, the words tumble over themselves exuberantly. He leans into a conversation with his shoulders, trim as a welterweight, looking easily two decades younger than he is. His voice seems always to verge on laughter. After half a century as a composer and advocate for fellow artists (at various times secretary and treasurer of the MacDowell Colony, secretary of the National Music Council, and chairman of CRI records), he still overflows with enthusiasm, proffering scores and recordings of his own works with a mixture of boyish glee and self-deprecation. This is the William Mayer heard in the cartoon-like "music drama" *Brief Candle* (yes, all three lines of text and six minutes of music), the zany *Yankee Doodle Fanfare* for woodwind quintet, and the orchestral *Overture for an American*, commissioned by the Chautauqua Institute to celebrate the Theodore Roosevelt centennial in 1958. For an American, sure; by an American, clearly. In these works, Mayer has that recognizable mid-century American sound: clean, spacious, bustling, colloquial, optimistic.

But there's another William Mayer beneath what he calls the "protective coloration." It is revealed in the frequently performed *Andante for Strings*, the more recent *Inner and Outer Strings*, and the mercurial *Dream's End* for six players. These works have an elegaic core; they speak gently but restlessly of loss. The "real" William Mayer emerges most fully, however, in his largest achievement, the opera *A Death in the Family*, based on the book by James Agee.

A Death in the Family was first staged by the Minnesota Opera in 1983, winning an award from the National Institute of Music Theater as the outstanding new American opera of the year. The piece had a long gestation; it began not with a commission, but with a "kernel of emotion; a color, tincture, essence of an idea waiting to be born . . . an inner obligation." Agee's book concerns a young Tennessee family—son innocent and sensi-

tive, wife pious and dutiful, husband loving but profligate—and the events surrounding the latter's death in an auto accident. The story struck a personal chord for the composer, who lost both his parents by age nineteen. Basing his interpretation partly on Tad Mosel's stage adaptation, *All the Way Home*, Mayer crafted his own libretto, later revising the piece for a 1986 production in St. Louis.



William Mayer in Weathersfield, Vermont (1995)

A Death in the Family locates the mournful, nostalgic story in a phantasmagorical frame. The narrative is often nonlinear, layering diverse incidents and characters (and their equally diverse music) in ways that only opera can make comprehensible. Mayer's score blends blues, gospel, foursquare hymnody, and mountain balladry into an idiom that might be called "American lyricism," delicately suspended in a tonally ambiguous sound-world that stresses the dreamlike quality of the storytelling. The opera begins, for example, in a haunted, faraway mist of violin harmonics. And in a scene in which the

husband Jay shares a tender farewell with his wife Mary, simple diatonic material—four steps of a descending major scale—spins a lovely line that wrenches the emotions.

(continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

	page
Juan Flores on New York Caribbean Sounds	8
<i>Recent Books</i>	
Steven Feld and Charles Keil's <i>Music Grooves</i>	11
Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.'s <i>The Power of Black Music</i>	14
Lee Davis's <i>Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern</i>	15
<i>CDs and CD-ROMs</i>	
Country and Blues	4
Jazz: Vintage to Contemporary	6
Hymns and Ives	7

Mayer calls *A Death in the Family* "a work of memory." The original version employed a narrator, the son Rufus (now grown up), who spoke sparingly but was onstage throughout. This device was cut from the St. Louis production, but the composer regrets the loss. "The narrator was like a filter for memory. He provided distance. Without him there's a danger of sentimentality. What seemed at the time a logical choice removed some of the poetry of the work. The audiences at the first production identified with him, because these are *everybody's* lost realms. He allowed us to see the story through a prism. The essence of the opera is that it's a work of memory."

William Mayer's own memories take him back to his parents, both of whom were artistic: his father was an amateur violinist, and his mother a professional writer. Like his father (whose favorite song was Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are"), the young composer developed an enthusiasm for show music. Though he went on to study with several eminent musicians, Mayer claims not to have benefited much from their instruction. He cites his work with Felix Salzer, a strict Schenkerian for whom pitch-based structure was paramount. "When I showed him some madrigals I had written, he said, 'They're appealing, but of course they rely on color and timbre.' I asked myself, 'Why can't music be organized by color and timbre?' And Salzer rarely mentioned rhythm. Pitch reigned supreme. Interestingly, my music is noted for its timbre and rhythm." (Mayer doesn't rule out the Schenker approach entirely, though. "It's useful when you're in trouble, when you've written yourself into a corner and don't know where to go next.") Another teacher, Otto Luening, emphasized the overtone series. His orchestration lessons stressed, for example, that the clarinet should be kept below the oboe in the orchestral texture. Typically, Mayer insisted on doing the opposite whenever possible, but Luening taught him the virtue of conciseness. One teacher to whom Mayer does acknowledge a significant debt is Roger Sessions. "I was used to listening homophonically. He taught me to hear beyond the vertical sounds. Still, remember that my earliest love was show music. Certain sonorities have a whole world to themselves. No amount of linear thinking can prevent a chord from being itself."

Like many other American composers, Mayer gained wide exposure on CRI recordings. He served on the label's board for twenty years, four of them as chairman. He credits CRI with providing a much broader range of American music than was previously available and with creating a sense of permanence, since no recording is ever deleted from its catalogue. (Currently CRI is repackaging its older material on CD.) "CRI was how contemporary composers got exposure," Mayer says. "Air play is what counts, not high volume record sales. The catalogue is also a terrific research tool for libraries. CRI has a great history of first recording composers who later went on to fame and to bigger labels: Ives, for instance, and Crumb. We got the prestige; the money went elsewhere!" Today CRI is only one of many labels attending to the contemporary composer, but a few decades ago it was still a plucky pioneer.

Mayer currently spends much of his time in Weathersfield, Vermont, where his studio cabin (redolent of the nearby MacDowell Colony) sits atop a mountain and offers a long view of the Connecticut River's Weathersfield Bow. A glance at Mayer's library reveals a passion for literature, one reflected in a leaning towards vocal works: settings of Keats in *The Eve of Saint Agnes* and *La belle dame sans merci*, both for chorus, and of Dylan Thomas in *Fern Hill* for soprano, flute, and harp, as well as numerous songs. A visitor to the Mayer household breathes an atmosphere of vigorous creativity: his wife, Meredith Nevins Mayer, an artist, matches him in youthfulness and buoyancy. Their son Steven, a concert pianist, is known for championing twentieth-century music, and daughters Jane and Cynthia are successful journalists.

When Mayer talks shop, he delivers a cascade of metaphors about those moments when it feels as if "there's a place in your back that itches and you can't quite reach it. Something's wrong . . . you can't rest until you get it just right. It taunts you. Then the most exciting thing is the breakthrough, when the right solution comes in through the back door; . . . it's like a Japanese paper flower which you hope will unfold. You're frustrated when it doesn't, but overjoyed when it does." He does not consider himself a prolific composer, despite a six-hour-a-day work schedule and a substantial list of compositions in most of the traditional media. "I have lots of ideas but lots of trouble finishing pieces," he says. He works mostly on commission, citing several advantages: "One, the good feeling that someone really *wants* that piece. Two, knowing the performers beforehand. Three, a guaranteed performance. Four, deadlines. Five, there's nothing like being paid."

Is it better to be William Mayer at age seventy than it was, say, at fifty or thirty? "Actually, it used to be very difficult for a composer like me, in the days when people looked down on your music if it didn't squeak, grunt, or groan. Things changed, but what interested the critics was the converts. You had to have a conversion to get attention." (He diplomatically neglects to mention names.) "If you're going to write fresh music, it has to be within the music itself, not some external quality. We composers are too hard on ourselves, searching for novelty but devaluing freshness of approach." He adds, sotto voce, "I guess my whole life has been a quiet rebellion."

—Zeke Hecker

Composer Zeke Hecker teaches English at Brattleboro Union High School in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Two excerpts from *A Death in the Family*, including the Butterfly Aria, appear on *Voices of Lost Realms* (Albany 068), along with the Three Madrigals, *La belle dame sans merci*, and *Fern Hill*. Also on that disc are *Abandoned Bells* for solo piano, played by Steven Mayer, and *Inner and Outer Strings*, led by Gerard Schwarz. Another important work, *Octagon* for piano and orchestra, is featured on CRI CD 584, with soloist William Masselos and Kenneth Schermerhorn conducting the *Milwaukee Symphony*. For information on Mayer's published works, contact Music Associates of America, 224 King Street, Englewood, NJ 07631; telephone 201-569-2898.

I.S.A.M. MATTERS

Should African-American composers feel compelled to write music that directly reflects their "blackness"? This question, along with broader issues of cultural identity and the creative process, fueled discussions at **Composing Black**, an I.S.A.M. symposium marking the centenary of the birth of African-American composer William Grant Still. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the 18 November 1995 gathering brought together an eclectic group of composers and writers including Dwight Andrews, Don Byron, Gunther Schuller, Tania León, Robert O'Meally, and Michael Harper. Violinist Diane Monroe, known for her work with the Uptown String Quartet, performed works of Still and David Baker, as well as "Vibes," a composition of her own that skillfully melded ethereal harmonies with hot funk and jazz. Stay tuned for highlights of the symposium in our Spring 1996 issue.



Diane Monroe at Composing Black. Photo by Ray Allen.

The politics of musical style and cultural identity were the focus of another I.S.A.M. conference, **Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Music and Identity in New York**. On 28 and 29 April 1995, scholars and musicians representing the city's diverse Spanish-, French-, and English-speaking Caribbean communities gathered to discuss music traditions ranging from West Indian calypso to Puerto Rican rap. Manny Oquendo and his Latin-jazz ensemble, Libre, provided *la música caliente*. Excerpts from Juan Flores's keynote address are found on page 8 of this issue.

This coming spring I.S.A.M. will host a related series of concerts focusing on **Caribbean Jazz**. Coproduced with the World Music Institute and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the series will feature Haitian voodoo jazz with the Dernst Emile Ensemble (9 March 1996), West Indian steel pan jazz with Rudy Smith (23 March), and Latin jazz with the Fort Apache Band (18 May). For further information and tickets call 718-951-5655.

At the recent joint meeting of the American Musicological Society and the Center for Black Music Research, held here in New York, I.S.A.M. hosted a reception for minority undergraduates who were visiting the conference to explore possible careers in musicology. Most of the students came from historically black colleges, and all were there as part of a multifaceted outreach effort by the AMS's Committee on Cultural Diversity.

I.S.A.M.'s **Schoolltime Series**, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, continued this fall with presentations of Andean music by Guiermo Guirrero and Tahuantinsuyo, and West Indian steel pan music with Arddin Herbert and the CASYM Steel Orchestra. More than two-thousand Brooklyn schoolchildren visited the campus for the lecture-demonstrations.

I.S.A.M. director Carol Oja is currently a fellow at the National Humanities Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, where she is completing a book titled *Experiments in Modern Music: New York in the 1920s*. In her absence, Ray Allen is acting director of I.S.A.M. and Jeff Taylor is guest editor of the Newsletter.



*Composer and clarinetist Don Byron.
Photo by Cori Wells Braun.*

COUNTRY AND GOSPEL NOTES by Charles Wolfe

The last year or so has seen a virtual explosion of slickly packaged CD-ROM products. Subjects range from all-purpose multimedia encyclopedias like *Encarta* to tech manuals for the Starship Enterprise. On the surface, such CD-ROM packages, with their ability to include sound, graphics, text, and even musical scores on one disc, would seem a natural way to present music, and, indeed, companies like Microsoft have produced impressive packages on Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, and other classical composers. Fewer have documented American art music, much less American popular and vernacular traditions. It is hard to survey this new and developing field systematically; there seems to be no Schwann catalogue or regular serial listing of new CD-ROM products. However, starting with this column, I will examine these sets from time to time and encourage suggestions from people who have used them.

Unlike books or regular CDs, CD-ROMs can be evaluated in several ways. Tech purists may concentrate on the graphics and screen designs; more traditional readers may focus on the sheer amount of printed information available and its quality. Others may look at the music samples or the musical illustrations shown on the screen. Another approach would be to gauge the degree of interactivity: how much freedom does a user have in choosing areas of the subject to explore? And of course computer neophytes will be concerned with ease of program setup and operation.

One of the first companies into the CD-ROM pop-music field is a Connecticut-based company called Queue, Inc. They have produced, among other items, *A History of Country Music* and *A History of the Blues*. Both are available on Mac and MS-DOS formats. Both offer chronological surveys of their subject driven by a series of photos and illustrations, and accompanied by a narrated sound track with musical examples. The user can interrupt the program at any time, go to an index, or reverse steps to an earlier sequence. The sound track text can also be brought up on the screen. With a certain amount of maneuvering, the user can view additional textual material: in the case of blues, a series of artist biographies; in the case of country, an essay on how the country-music business developed. The two sets are fairly straightforward and seem based on the old familiar filmstrips common in earlier days.

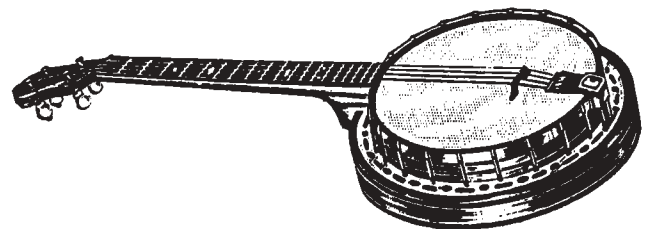
A History of Country Music closely follows the version outlined years ago by Bill C. Malone, but with some odd gaps. Though country songs are accurately characterized, there are too few specific examples (unlike the blues package, which quotes lyrics and even offers parts of scores). There is a noticeable gap between the early 1950s (with Hank Williams) and the development of "hard country" in the 1960s. The most important classic country singer, George Jones, does not even appear in the text or index. Far too much time is given to the folk revival, which actually had a minimal impact on country music. Bluegrass is discussed, but not the founding father of the genre, Bill Monroe. There are odd gaffes in the text: the concertina is presented as

a regular member of the classic country stringband, and gospel music is defined as "a type of gospel music sung by white people." And finally, the story seems to end in the early 1980s, with no reference to the powerful youth movement that was about to occur and no hint of figures most familiar to students today: Garth Brooks, Vince Gill, Reba McEntire.

In all fairness, the Queue country-music set does use a visually impressive series of illustrations and pays close attention to the social context of the music. The same is true of the blues set, except that it treats its subject in much better detail. It is divided into four parts (country is sectioned into two): Roots, 12-Bar, Classic, and City. A student with no notion at all of the blues could definitely learn something from this package—both in sociological and musical terms.

A second company entering the field is SelectWare, which has produced blues, jazz, and rhythm-and-blues sets for its "MusicRom Perspectives" series. Each set contains ten or eleven complete vintage music performances; biographies and "liner notes" for each track; brief overviews by scholars like Sam Charters and Ron Wynn; interviews with a key figure of the genre (in the case of the R&B set, the Impressions' Jerry Butler); a history of a key record company (usually the one providing most of the tracks heard on the set, Vee-Jay for the R&B, Delmark for jazz); and the appropriate discography section from the *All Music Guide*. Unlike the Queue products, the listener can enter the program at a number of points. The initial screen shows a den with a series of icons representing the music, the "reflections" interview, the AMG, and others; a click on the appropriate icon, and the reader can go at once to whatever is most interesting. Though designed for the old Windows 3.1, and requiring five MB of hard disk space, the Jazz and R&B sets run nicely on the new Windows 95.

Impressive as these sets are, they scratch the surface of the potential for pop and vernacular presentations in this format. As interest in American music continues to develop in schools, there is no reason why much more detailed packages, with more creative interaction, should not be produced. Why not one on Gershwin or Ives, or one on Bill Monroe or Bob Wills? It would seem a matter of the programmers—who now appear to have the upper hand—getting with the right scholars, writers, and educators.



For information on the Queue catalogue, write: 338 Commerce Drive, Fairfield, CT 06432. SelectWare is produced by Compton's New Media and available in most software stores.

OLD GEMS IN NEW SETTINGS

Since its 1987 acquisition by the Smithsonian Institution, the Moses Asch/Folkways Collection has gone through major changes. Presently known as Smithsonian/Folkways, the recording company is issuing new material and keeping all of the back catalogue in print, as well as reconfiguring and repackaging important older recordings. Curator Tony Seeger has overseen the transformation from a jumble of casually labeled boxes into an orderly research collection and record company housed in the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies. Having worked with him on the project, I write to report on two new releases of particular interest: *Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley: The Original Folkways Recordings, 1960-1962* (SF 400029/30) and *Lead Belly's Last Sessions* (SF 400068/71).

Of the two, the Watson and Ashley Collection offers the most new material. This double CD package includes twenty previously unreleased selections, including instrumental tunes such as "Ramblin' Hobo" and "Brown's Dream." For many folk music fans who came of age in the late 1950s and initially learned about this music through interpretations by the Kingston Trio and others, the live performances of Watson and Ashley in the Northeast (and eventually elsewhere across the United States) marked their first experience with "old time" southern musicians. In addition, this release will introduce listeners to the string bands, solo performances of Anglo-American secular tunes, and occasional *a cappella* gospel hymns that can be found in the northwest corner of North Carolina.

The Smithsonian/Folkways rerelease of recordings by Huddie "Lead Belly" Leadbetter traces other roots of the post-war folk music movement. Lead Belly's impact can be charted in two ways: through the work of musicians such as Pete Seeger, who knew him well, and through his own recorded legacy. Beginning in the summer of 1933, with a half-dozen field recordings made by the Library of Congress, Lead Belly left a large and varied body of recorded material. The ninety-six selections on this compilation include two previously unreleased cuts. They are accompanied by both new notes and a reprint of an essay about Lead Belly published in 1953 by Frederic Ramsey, Jr. (who recorded this material in the fall of 1948).

Despite the title of this new collection, it doesn't actually contain Lead Belly's final recordings. But it does reissue his last studio sessions, similar in their length and depth to what Alan Lomax attempted for the Library of Congress some ten years before (field recordings of Lead Belly were made as late as the summer of 1949). Although these performances may not match the musicianship of the material Lead Belly recorded between 1933 and 1937, they do provide a stimulating overview of his repertory. Ramsey clearly wished to document the breadth of what Lead Belly normally performed: work songs, blues, newly composed topical songs, play party ditties, gospel hymns, dance tunes, and American ballads. Taken in the context of Huddie Leadbetter's entire career, *Lead Belly's Last Sessions* is perhaps the most comprehensive single package of his work to date.

—Kip Lornell

1985 Academy Award Nominee the Wizard of the Strings

A Film Portrait of Roy Smeck

"For those who remember vaudeville, **The Wizard of the Strings** is a wonderful chunk of nostalgia and for those who missed the era, it's a delightful introduction to this forgotten portion of pop culture."

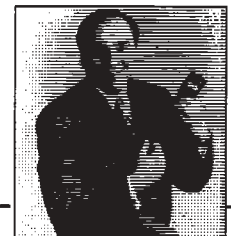
Michael Blowen, *Boston Globe*

"**Roy Smeck** is an incredibly gifted artist who practically stood alone in the pioneer days of audio and film recording. If you've ever even thought about playing a stringed instrument you should own this video!

Les Paul

"This documentary of vaudeville star and string instrument genius, **Roy Smeck**, is not only an important historical statement, but also a deeply moving and joyous portrait of a warm and uniquely interesting artist.

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BEHIND THE BEAT with Mark Tucker

These days the bins of record stores overflow with old and new jazz on CD. Who can keep up with the great flood of releases? Not this wary consumer. But here are a few recent titles of note—starting with one you probably won't see in your local Tower.

Capitol Duke. A list of immortal Ellington recordings would not include *Bunny Hop Mambo*, *Blue Jean Beguine*, and *Frivolous Banta*. All three turn up on *The Complete Capitol Recordings of Duke Ellington* (MD5-160), available from the mail-order company Mosaic (35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902-7533; phone 203-327-7111). This set chronicles the composer and bandleader's activity in the mid-1950s, a period seen by many as a low point in a career otherwise notable for consistent artistic highs. After losing key players in 1951—saxophonist Johnny Hodges, trombonist Lawrence Brown, drummer Sonny Greer—Ellington seemed to fall into a creative funk, padding his repertory with current pop tunes, recycling old compositions, and performing more arrangements than usual by writers outside the band. Still, the first Capitol session in 1953 produced *Satin Doll*—the coolly understated version here remains the best ever recorded—and soon after came the superb album *Piano Reflections*, spotlighting Ellington's keyboard skills. But what to make of all the other Capitol sides? How many present-day Ellington fans enjoy the syrupy vocal features for Jimmy Grissom, prefer the 1955 *Harlem Air Shaft* to the 1940 original, or can listen without flinching to *Echo Tango*, a kitschy fusion of Tyrolean melody and Latin American rhythm?

Curiously enough, despite a musical menu that veers wildly between the ordinary and the *outré*, this set gives plenty to relish. Tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves and trumpeters Ray Nance and Clark Terry display beauty and intelligence whenever they solo. The band swings powerfully on up-tempo numbers and produces a sumptuous tonal blend on ballads. Ellington's piano interjections add spice to bland arrangements, and there is something almost poignant in Jimmy Grissom's efforts to convey smoldering passion while singing pedestrian lyrics. Every now and then a haunting composition like *Orson* or *Serious Serenade* suggests that Ellington and co-composer Billy Strayhorn never completely embraced Capitol's hit-making agenda. Uneven but never dull, the Capitol sides show Ellington temporarily unsure about which way to turn. He found his way by leaving the label in 1955, after making one last session that yielded the aptly titled *Discontented Blues*.

Guitar and Organ Gold. DCC Compact Classics continues to expand its 24-karat gold series with rock and jazz reissues from the 1950s through the 1970s. At \$30 per disc they are no bargain, but audiophiles in search of sonic nirvana may find them enticing. Wes Montgomery's *So Much Guitar* (GZS-1078), originally recorded for Riverside in 1961, places the guitarist in first-rate company (including pianist Hank Jones and bassist Ron Carter) for a satisfying set of straight-ahead jazz. Those who mainly associate Montgomery with his celebrated octave technique will enjoy the varied artistry on this disc, especially his

crisp single-note lines, inventive background figures, and gentle lyricism on the unaccompanied Alec Wilder waltz, *While We're Young*. . . . For another taste of classic jazz from the early 1960s there's *Bashin': The Unpredictable Jimmy Smith* (GZS-1072), featuring the organist in both big band and trio formats. Oliver Nelson's strutting, brassy arrangements provide a perfect foil for Smith's soulful statements on the Hammond B-3. Highlights include a sanctified blues treatment of *Ol' Man River* and electric interplay between organist and band on the gospel-flavored *Step Right Up*.

Vintage Garner, New McKenna. A welcome Erroll Garner retrospective is underway at TelArchive, which is offering two LPs per CD and supplying brief new liner notes with each package. Producer for the series is Martha Glaser, who served in the same role when the sessions were first recorded. A follow-up to last year's inaugural disc, *That's My Kick and Gemini*, the second volume pairs albums from the mid-1970s, *Magician and Gershwin and Kern* (CD-83337). On this latest release, the pianist receives customary support from bass, drums, and (occasionally) conga. Listening to Garner is like attending a revival service. He delivers his musical message with force and utter conviction, shaking the body with rhythmic locomotion and stimulating the mind with inspired improvising. In a way, Garner's choice of vehicles doesn't much matter. Whether interpreting a Gershwin standard, a period piece like Burt Bacharach's *Close to You*, or an original blues or ballad, the pianist thoroughly "Garnerizes" it all.

The forceful impact of Garner's musical personality can still be heard today among contemporary players. One is the New England-based pianist Dave McKenna, who often incorporates a technique pioneered by Garner in which the left hand strums accompanying chords beneath the right hand's horn-like solo lines. McKenna has made over a dozen recordings for the Concord label. The latest, *Easy Street* (CCD-4657), features a programming device borrowed from McKenna's live performances, in which he strings together songs based on the same subject—like the "street" medley of seven pieces on this disc that begins with *Broadway* and ends with *On the Street Where You Live*. This may sound contrived, but McKenna makes it work in person since one tune segues smoothly into the next and the whole group seems (and probably is) dreamed up on the spot. The effect of spontaneity is lost on this CD, though, since each song is set off by itself as an independent track. Still, McKenna is in fine form—if slightly more subdued than on previous recordings—and the best comes last: an exquisitely slow and dreamy version of *Gone with the Wind* followed by McKenna's own laconic original, *Theodore the Thumper*.

Parker & Co. To commemorate Charlie Parker's seventy-fifth birthday year, Verve has put out an attractive compilation of historically important sides, *Charlie Parker with Strings: The Master Takes* (314 523 984-2). The remastering is excellent, and

(continued on page 13)

FOLKISH ELEGANCE, ELEGANT AMATEURISM

Among the past year's pleasures have been three unusual CDs. Most recent, a disc of choral monophony—no, not chant; rather, traditional Shaker hymns—with Joel Cohen directing the Boston Camerata, the Boston Schola Cantorum, and members of the Shaker community at Sabbathday Lake, Maine (*Simple Gifts: Shaker Chants and Spirituals*, Erato 4509-98491-2; rel. 1995). Second, another disc of unaccompanied choral music—but partsongs—composed by William Duckworth in 1980-81, and sung by The Gregg Smith Singers, assisted by the Rooke Chapel Choir of Bucknell (*Southern Harmony*, Lovely Music LCD 2033; rel. 1994). Third, a disc of music by Ives (his Second Symphony) and Bernstein (Three Dances from *On the Town*) performed by the Yale Symphony Orchestra under James Sinclair (*Live at Woolsey [Hall]*; rel. 1995; available from the YSO, 201945 Yale Stn., New Haven, CT 06520, for \$15 [net] as a contribution to the orchestra).

What these discs have in common is a lot of *friendly* music, gloriously and enthusiastically performed. Cohen's singers immersed themselves in the ambience of the "Shaking Quakers" and were in turn nurtured musically by the tiny Maine community; the result is a joyous recording of folkish music, elegantly presented. It begins with *Come life, Shaker life*—traditionally repeated several times, each time faster—and ends with *Simple gifts*, made famous by Copland's *Appalachian Spring* variations; in between are thirty-two other Shaker songs.

Duckworth is a "downtown" composer of postmodern predilec-

tions. Born, however, in North Carolina in 1943, he grew up with shape-note hymns such as those in William Walker's mid-nineteenth-century collection, *The Southern Harmony*. And each of the twenty movements of his work named for that collection is based on a hymn in it. Like Joel Cohen, Duckworth immersed himself in hymnody: "Every day, before I started writing, I would put myself in the right frame of mind by singing [from] *The Southern Harmony* for at least an hour." The result makes one think of a fine preacher, reading the daily gospel, then glossing it, explicating it, reworking it in his own words.

James Sinclair, too, has immersed himself in a body of music—that of Charles Ives. A skilled editor of Ives's works and an unparalleled conductor of them (regularly, with the chamber Orchestra New England he directs), in 1994-95 he was director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, a student group. The performance of Ives's Second Symphony he directed last March in Yale's Woolsey Hall is, in this Ives devotee's opinion, by far the best ever—on recordings or off. Everything is *perfect*: the tempos are absolutely on target, and they all complement each other; the textures are clean and crystalline: one hears things never heard before; the overall, long-line, large-shape formal conception is totally convincing, unique. And how on earth did he get those students up to tempo in the last movement? (Also, on the CD being considered here, the Bernstein bonus is crisp, swifty, and stylish.) A singular experience!

—H. W. H.

New Music References From Scarecrow Press

Studies in Jazz

RED HEAD

A Chronological Survey of "Red"

Nichols and His Five Pennies

Studies in Jazz No. 21

Stephen M. Stroff

210 pp. 1996 ISBN 0-8108-3061-2 \$32.50

BENNY GOODMAN

Wrappin' It Up

Studies in Jazz No. 23

D. Russell Connor

180 pp. photos 1996 ISBN 0-8108-3102-3 \$39.50

American Composers

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Maine's Sacred Tunebooks, 1800-1830

Composers of North America No. 18

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"EL ALMA DEL PUEBLO" by Juan Flores

*Following are excerpts from a keynote address given by Juan Flores at I.S.A.M.'s April 1995 conference, **Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Music and Identity in New York**. Flores is director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College and author of *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Arte Público Press, 1993).*

My Music is My Flag, the title of a book about Puerto Rican music by Ruth Glasser (University of California Press, 1995), could well set the tone and theme for any consideration of Caribbean music in New York City. The repeated "my" emphasizes ownership, belonging, personal identity. The equation of music and flag signals the role of music in "my" life as an emblem, a symbol, a marker of collective identification. Rather than a single object, though, music is emblematic as a space or field for the affirmation of continuities and the expression of change. In the case of Caribbean music in New York City, music serves as a cogent demonstration of how national identities are grounded in, and yet not bound by, time and territory. That is, musical traditions rooted in our home country may either be maintained or moved in new directions when practiced and enjoyed in another place.

Las raíces las cargo conmigo siempre, me sirven de almoliada. "I carry my roots with me all the time, rolled up, I use them as my pillow." That's a quote from Chicano poet Francisco Alarcón that captures well the feeling of Caribbean New Yorkers that we have *eminently* portable roots—identities that travel with us through the incessant migrations that have characterized our history. This is not because of anything inherent in us, but because of the ceaseless play of imperial power, since Caribbean resources, and most especially Caribbean peoples, have often been at the disposal of global economic and strategic interests. As a result, our national cultures and traditions have formed from a mix of metropolitan and colonial dimensions, and of interactions between diverse Caribbean expressive experiences.

Here again the music serves as an excellent guide, for no musical style identified with a given Caribbean nation is pure or free from traces of other Caribbean styles. Merengue, son, calypso, beguine, bomba, mambo, compas, reggae—all illustrate a history of lending and borrowing, expressive of the continual contact among the peoples from these islands supposedly so isolated from one another by colonial boundaries and regimes of power. To take the instance most familiar to me, all stylistic traditions that make up the national music of Puerto Rico—danza, bomba, seis, plena—turn out, upon closer examination, to owe many characteristics to the influence of musical practices from neighboring islands. And often, as is most clear in bomba and plena, this influence resulted from the arrival of French- or English-speaking Caribbean peoples in Puerto Rico.

This hybrid quality of Caribbean musics is what makes them so

appropriate for the social reality we experience in new communities such as Brooklyn, which has become a virtual "capital of the Caribbean." Here, even more than in our native archipelago, people from different islands live side by side, with converging social and political agendas. Now more than ever, as our numbers swell with every passing day, our contributions to North American culture are growing remarkably. Here in New York City the interaction of Caribbean and African-American musics has been powerful—consider Jerry and Andy Gonzalez playing alongside Dizzy Gillespie, or Lord Kitchener cutting his traditional calypsos with soul and funk rhythms. This fusion has gone on to affect popular musics around the world.

The study and appreciation of Caribbean music challenges us to recognize the limitless range of possible combinations, mixtures, fusions, and crossovers of cultural languages. Our markers of identity have no fixed boundaries; no influence is disallowed or taboo, no ingredient sacred or indispensable. Yet another equally powerful challenge comes with recognizing that, with this remarkable relativism and fluidity, all things are not equal. Though the ship, or rather the raft, of Caribbean music is afloat, free in the open sea of migratory movement, it still has moorings and foundations. Acknowledging a history of relentless syncretism should not blind us to the basic role of African musical culture, both in our varied home settings and in the interaction of Caribbean music with musical styles in the U.S. It is not by chance that our strongest ties have been with African-American culture. Both social proximity and congruent cultural history bind us with the African-American people, and common descent from African ancestors further solidifies those ties. These are organic and reciprocal links leading to the formation of new traditions.

This African legacy is historically, practically, ironically, and playfully conditioned by the reality of the here and now. In the words of Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera, writing to a Cuban friend:

*slowly descending, as if from the clouds above,
thinking of africa, i find myself enthralled!
rhythmic africanism swell and dwell inside
the fingers of my cuban mambo eyes.*

*the africa rhythms i hear are native, native
from my cuban land, it is as if my guaguancó
was shipped to africa, when it was the other
way around, but nevertheless all my colors are the same.*

I would like to conclude with some specific thoughts about Puerto Rican music. We can talk of Caribbean music in general terms but always need to bring it back to particular national experiences. I start off with a motto: "*La música es el alma del pueblo*" ("music is the soul of the people"). Those are the words of Manuel Jiménez ("Canario"), the immensely popular performer of plena who was one of the first Puerto Rican musicians

to record in New York in the 1970s. And from Latin Empire, a group of Puerto Rican rappers in New York: "Now we are here to let you know the Puerto Ricans has landed, live on the scene, if you know what I mean, as we get busy with our Spanglish routine."

Music is at the heart of Puerto Rican culture. Our songs and rhythms are present in all aspects of our lives, giving solace when the going gets rough, affirming our experience and identity when it's being denied or demeaned, accompanying us wherever we move, helping give voice to our resistance. There's not a political campaign or a public social event of any kind that does not resonate with our plenas, aguinaldos or salsa sounds. In fact, our culture as Latinos cannot really be appreciated without a deep sense of our music. The social position of Puerto Rico and of Puerto Ricans in U.S. society, the role of the recording industry and broadcasting, the relations between Latinos and African Americans, the struggle of Puerto Rican women, our drive toward self-affirmation—all such wide-ranging social and cultural considerations have a decisive bearing on the music. The people then are the soul of the music. In all its many forms, our popular music remains strongly grounded in tradition and can be traced through the centuries to our historical experiences as peasants and slaves, artists and urban workers.

Yet our music also shows how traditions are made and constantly remade as they enter into contact with musical styles and practices of other peoples, especially those with common cultural roots. As Caribbean-based musical styles continue to grow and change, they promise to play an ever more important role around the world.



Latin jazz artist Manny Oquendo (center front)
with his ensemble, Libre,
featuring bassist Andy Gonzalez (right center).
Photo by John Abbott.

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UNIVERSITY CULTURE: TWO VIEWS

Two 1995 books by distinguished recent emeriti have as their subject the musical culture of the North American university. They differ in many respects; one is a history of music at a single institution, with the author's highly personal reminiscences; the other is a considered account of music at a group of institutions. But the chief thrust of both is the same: music departments and conservatories are populated by human beings, with all their weaknesses, follies, conflicts, and occasional glories. Hey—music faculty aren't hired for their reasonableness or rationality, are they? *Music at Toronto: A Personal Account* (Institute for Canadian Music, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, 1995; \$15), by the remarkable composer, teacher, and writer John Beckwith, is a brief history of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, formally founded in 1918, and Beckwith's base as student and teacher from 1945 on. The Faculty was long a stronghold of conservatism and musical Anglophilia, but by around 1950 Americanization was rearing its Canadaphagous head. The early decades were dominated by some strong-willed, autocratic personalities, and strife was not altogether lacking in the later years. Yet, somehow, out of all this developed the leading institution for music study in anglophone Canada. Beckwith's book, a quick read, is entertaining, instructive, and written with a good dose of affectionate humor.

In *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music* (University of Illinois Press, 1995; \$35, paper \$12.95), longtime Illinois Bruno Nettl takes on the guise of an extraterrestrial anthropologist reporting on a field trip to the Midwest. Though much of his book is devoted to an objective description of the Music Building culture, Nettl tries "to relate cultural structures to musical structures and, in turn, to structures of musical society" (p. 9). He succeeds rather well, though there is a rigidly rational, compartmentalizing part of me that keeps flashing a *can't be done* message. How universal the essential features of the School of Music culture are! Nettl makes no mention at all of the particular subtribe to which I have belonged for over forty years, but I find myself imagining on almost every page that that's what he's writing about. Nettl errs only in viewing composition faculties as "promulgators of change" and innovation. *Au contraire*. They favor technique, tried and true (read: abandoned a generation or two ago by the innovators). There are exceptions, of course, and some students rebel against the academy or break away after acquiring their Ph.D. If I find any fault, it is that the book has so little one can object to. My heroes are Richard Taruskin and the Joseph Kerman of *Contemplating Music*; both would regard themselves as failures if each page of their writing didn't present at least one outrageous assertion. Though he claims that is not his purpose, Nettl is often implicitly and sometimes explicitly critical of the ways in which the Music Building culture falls short of the ideals of human relations and logical thinking. If his book leads to just a few tiny reforms, it will have done a real service.

—Frederick Crane
University of Iowa

IN THE GROOVES

Musical participation and musical mediation are the twin themes of *Music Grooves* (University of Chicago Press, 1994; \$47.95, paper \$18.95) by ethnomusicologists Steven Feld and Charles Keil. The collection consists of ten essays, slightly revised from earlier publications, and three "dialogue" sections of informal conversation between the authors.

The first section, "Participation in Grooves," begins with a remake of "Motion and Feeling Through Music," Keil's classic 1966 essay in which he first proposed that music be approached as a creative activity rather than a static object. Drawing examples from modern jazz, he argues convincingly that music's deepest meaning is generated not simply from a syntax of sound intervals but through "engendered feeling," an elusive quality of spontaneity that emerges during performance. Feld's essay on music and communication picks up on this theme, examining the process by which listeners decode musical texts based on complex personal, social, and cultural factors.

The second section, "Mediation of Grooves," explores the mechanical reproduction and commodification of music. Tracing parallel developments in African-American blues and Polish-American polka, Keil contrasts the pristine, Apollonian nature of recordings with the collective intoxication of Dionysian live performances. He further considers the interaction of mediated and live sounds in African-American rap and Japanese *karaoke* music. Feld delves deeper into the process of schizophrenia (the splitting of sounds from their original sources), exploring the commodification of third world music as world beat, and asking difficult questions about ownership, economics, and power. He emerges as a media optimist, pointing out the advantages of global exposure for third world sounds, while Keil remains more skeptical, questioning the human benefits of sound recording and the reduction of art to commodity.

Music Grooves is not an easy read. The essays are dense, presuming a strong familiarity with poststructural criticism, and the dialogues sometimes ramble off on esoteric tangents. But there is much to learn from the authors' intense theorizing and informal musings. Keil and Feld advocate a musicology that moves beyond the analysis of sound structure to consider process, performance, and interpretation of meaning within diverse cultural settings. The value of this approach for analysis of emergent, improvised expressions, particularly those musics centered in African and Asian practices, is obvious. Application to traditions dependent upon written composition, such as European art music, will prove more challenging. Yet in this media-driven world where distinctions between high and low are becoming increasingly blurred and the influences of non-Western traditions on art music continue to spread, scholars of American music are well advised to consider seriously the experiential dimensions of musical participation and musical mediation.

—Ray Allen

SOUND-BITES AND A SPECTACULAR

Unlikely bedfellows? Perhaps so. William Duckworth's *Talking Music* (Schirmer Books, 1995; \$30) and S. Frederick Starr's *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (Oxford University Press, 1995; \$35) are on opposite sides of the coin of musical biography. But that's why I comment on them together. Duckworth—best known as a composer (whose work I enjoy a lot: see elsewhere in this *Newsletter* issue)—offers here 490 pages of oral history in the raw: interviews with seventeen composers blurbled as "Five Generations of American Experimentalist[s]." Starr—best known as former president of Oberlin College, now director of The Aspen Institute—gives 560 pages of traditional heavy-duty critical biography of a composer-pianist.

Both approaches are of course valid. And each author takes his approach seriously and pursues it with conscientious effort and attractive results. Duckworth conducts conversations with trail-blazing (or just plain singular) composers: Cage, Nancarrow, Babbitt, Harrison ("Experimentalists"); Johnston, Oliveros, Wolff ("The Avant-Garde"); Young and Zazeela, Riley, Reich, Glass ("Minimalists"); Meredith Monk and Laurie Anderson ("Performance Artists"); and "Blue Gene" Tyranny, Glenn Branca, and John Zorn ("Post-Moderns"). He has done his homework well, preparing carefully for the interviews and being well-armed with experience of the interviewees' works. And Starr, a remarkably prolific author on top of administrative jobs and moonlighting as a jazz clarinetist, brings to his book on Gottschalk a natural-born biographer's enthusiasm for the most minute details of his subject's life, an archivist's curiosity for the most out-of-the-way sources, and a musicologist's dutiful documentation of everything, including what others have said about the subject.

Ultimately, though, I found both books tedious, Starr's less so than Duckworth's. Oral history has its uses, but more as a *step toward* history than history itself. To paraphrase Leo Treitler, "What Kind of Story Is [Oral] History?" Not much of one—rather raw material on which to base a story or a satisfying, unified book. Flitting from one thought or recollection or personal perception to another, as Duckworth's composers tend to do, provides only sound-bites, leaving us hungry for more generous, substantial victuals, not to mention rumination (I mean interpretation). And slogging along with Gottschalk—our first international "musical matinee idol"—through day after day of concertizing, miles and miles of touring, in country after country, is exhausting. Without question, though, Starr has written the first definitive life-and-works study of Gottschalk—Bob Offergeld having died before he could finish his—and moreover lives up to his subtitle's claim: we really do learn about Gottschalk's "times"—the social, political, and cultural ambiances in which he glittered—as well as his "life." In this ancient biographical sense, Starr has done a spectacular job.

—H. W. H.

AMERICAN-MUSIC COLLECTIONS

Oral History American Music Project. Vivian Perlis, Director, has received a grant from The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation for a two-year period to support the updating of interviews with major composers and to continue the Young Composers' Series. OHAM, which is affiliated with the Yale School of Music and Library, is the only ongoing project in the field of music dedicated to the collection and preservation of oral and video memoirs. Founded in 1971, the archive is an extensive repository of unique source materials in twentieth-century American music. Highlights of the collection include oral histories on Eubie Blake, John Cage, Aaron Copland, Duke Ellington, and Charles Ives, as well as interviews with 245 other major figures. For more information call 203-432-1988.

Rock in a Museum!?! While musicologists furiously debate whether the concert stage has become an antiquated archive, the pop-music world has gone ahead and made a museum of its own. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has been inducting members since 1985, and the actual hall, as well as the museum associated with it, officially opened in Cleveland, Ohio this past September.

Inherent in the Hall of Fame and Museum are the complexities of any institution that attempts to record history. Many exhibits, as well as the educational program, open up issues, from the viability of "Music in a Museum" to race, gender, and censorship. The initial displays cover a range of approaches to rock history. In addition to representing individual artists, such as John Lennon, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin, some center around notable times and places that became a locus for strong musical and cultural currents, such as Memphis in the 1950s, New York and London in the 1970s (with the punk connection), or New York in the 1980s (rap). There are thematic exhibits, such as "Making a Hit." Others cover the roots of rock music, including gospel, country, blues, and rhythm-and-blues. The memorabilia range from the set for U2's "Achtung Baby" tour to Jimi Hendrix's handwritten lyrics for "Purple Haze."

The museum has also begun establishing its own library and archive (including memorabilia, documents, photographs, and audio and video resources) and will continue to develop these collections for the use of scholars and journalists. Ultimately, it will function not only as an archive but as a coordinator as well—a center for information either on its own holdings or on materials in collections across the country. Robert Santelli, formerly of Monmouth College and Rutgers University, serves as director of the museum's educational programs.

Since the first Hall of Fame induction ceremony, rock aficionados from musicology graduate assistants to Courtney Love have wondered what the museum could possibly mean. Like rock itself, the answer to that question will remain in flux for some time to come. Meanwhile, for information, call 216-781-7625.

—Susan Richardson

Hits of an Earlier Era. The Foster Hall Collection, a library, archive, and museum at the Stephen Foster Memorial of the University of Pittsburgh, is the oldest academic center for American-music research and performance. Assembled by Indianapolis industrialist and bibliophile Josiah Kirby Lilly between 1931 and 1937, the holdings now exceed 30,000 items.

The heart of the collection is the Foster material: letters, an account book, music manuscripts, a sketch book, at least one copy of every first edition of his music, and some 7,000 other scores. The accumulation of every known bibliographically distinct copy of all Foster songs makes the holdings especially valuable for studying nineteenth-century music publishing. Because the thousands of songbooks, journals, and monographs extend far beyond Fosteriana, they are a rich resource for American-music studies in general. The printed materials are catalogued and searchable on OCLC; a typed guide provides access to the remainder of the holdings.

Foster (1826-1864) was America's first professional songwriter, and his tunes are still among the best-known products of American culture around the world. Although Foster tried to reform minstrelsy and supplant its "trashy and really offensive" songs, his own works were used to caricature African Americans and have been shunned as symbols of an enslaving Euro-American political and cultural establishment. Part of the collection's task is to document and interpret such reception history and at the same time to plumb the politically skewed interpretations first promulgated by Foster's family. Recent research has overturned the common perception, heavily influenced by romantic literature and popular media, that Foster was essentially untutored as a musician, that he managed his finances poorly, or that the lyrics, which he wrote himself, yearned for a simpler era represented by the Old South.

From time to time the Foster Hall Collection publishes books, pamphlets, and recordings, and it hosts an annual concert series of American music by The Dear Friends, an ensemble in residence. It also collaborates nationally on special projects, recent examples being the critical edition of Foster's complete works prepared for the Smithsonian Institution Press (1990) and Thomas Hampson's recording of Foster songs with Jay Ungar and Molly Mason (Angel, 1993). Within the past two years, it has served as a resource for the 16-volume series *Nineteenth-Century American Musical Theater* (Garland, 1994), the North American volume of the *Encyclopedia of World Music*, a critical biography of Foster, and several plays, films, and recordings. For information call 412-624-4100.

—Deane L. Root, Curator

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BEHIND THE BEAT (continued)

the enchanting performances—with Bird's alto saxophone gracefully soaring over the strings' lush backgrounds—belong in every jazz lover's collection. . . . New from Bluebird is *Dizzy Gillespie: The Complete RCA Victor Recordings* (666528-2), focusing on the trumpeter's sessions with his big band in the late 1940s (including the celebrated sides made with conga player Chano Pozo). Another Bluebird reissue, *Sonny Rollins & Co. 1964* (66530-2), invites reappraisal of an intriguing chapter in the saxophonist's recorded legacy, offering a number of alternate takes (until now available only on imports) and incisive critical commentary by annotator Bob Blumenthal. Of special note is Rollins's solo on the Charlie Parker standard *Now's the Time*, a voyage of discovery in which the saxophonist explores the deep, uncharted waters of his musical imagination.



Mike Mainieri. Photo courtesy of NYC Records.

American Diary. When did you last hear a jazz group tackle Aaron Copland's Piano Sonata, stretch out on Frank Zappa's *King Kong*, or reconstruct Charles Ives's "Universe" Symphony? These are a few of the unusual offerings on vibist and record producer Mike Mainieri's *An American Diary* (6015-2), issued by his own company, NYC Records. Joining Mainieri for this venture are saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Eddie Gomez, and drummer Peter Erskine. In keeping with the unconventional repertory on this disc—other featured composers include Samuel Barber, Roger Sessions, and William Grant Still—the group's performances blow fresh and free, at times evoking early Weather Report with their wide-open textures and liquid sonorities (hear the combination of alto clarinet and marimba on their version of Sessions's First Piano Sonata). Since concert composers have borrowed so liberally from jazz over the years, it seems only fair for Mainieri to return the favor, exposing the interwoven roots and hybrid vines of American musical traditions.

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INTERPRETING BLACK MUSIC

By almost any measure, Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.'s *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1995; \$30) is an important contribution to scholarship on African-American music. Floyd sets out to demonstrate the value of literary theory in interrogating certain received ideas about African-American musical expression. He puts into service Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of critical "signifying" in examining both the discourse on African-American musical "texts" and the rhetorical strategies by which musical genres are read by African-American performers. In addition, Floyd's study gains much of its grit from Sterling Stuckey's intriguing conceptualization of the ring shout as a transformation of African ritual practices. According to Stuckey, the ring shout provides a key to understanding the development of black culture and identity in the United States by reminding African people of common elements in their cultural heritage.

By combining these two approaches, Floyd demonstrates the inadequacies of generally accepted musical categories for defining, explaining, and accounting for the whole of African-American music-making as artistic and cultural practice. As he puts it, "this book is meant as a vehicle of rapprochement between vernacular and classical, formal and folk, academic and popular ways of knowing, attending to, and criticizing music."

Floyd does not deny the appeal of certain genres and forms or their identification with specific audiences. Instead, he shows that a variety of cultural, social, and political forces have influenced the emergence of these genres and can account for the interrelationships between them. In this regard, his chapter on music-making during the Harlem Renaissance is exemplary. Here he explores the cultural influence of Pan-Africanist thought on the intellectuals and artists who turned to black vernacular culture in their efforts to develop a distinctive African-American art. By examining the ways in which a concern with the vernacular was reflected in diverse forms of African-American musical expression, from classical compositions to gospel music and the blues, Floyd offers fresh readings of creative cultural production in its broadest reaches during the period. He also illustrates how parallel concerns with the vernacular basis of black culture influenced the flurry of musical activity and innovations in 1940s Chicago.

Floyd makes known early on that he is not simply interested in identifying traits characteristic of African musical traditions

and then pointing out the African-American forms and genres derived from them. More profoundly, he is interested in the diverse ways in which these traits define, and give meaning to, the musical traditions of African people in the United States. The study emerges as an exploration of how "black music making is the translation of the memory into sound and the sound into memory." According to Floyd, the continuity of African musical practices in African-American performance has helped to preserve this "cultural memory."

Floyd deploys his sophisticated theoretical framework in fruitful ways throughout this study, yet his most important contribution is his careful attention to historical details and the insights gained from viewing musical traditions and innovations within a historical context. His approach, however, can sometimes appear contrived and forced. Far too often he reminds the reader that Esu Elegabra, the archetypal African trickster of the crossroads, is the spiritual inspiration for certain musical practices and that the "ring" is his central trope for understanding the key musical innovations at the tradition's core.

The range of this book, which brings the reader from the African past to the musical developments of the post-World War II period, is impressive. In the later era, Floyd's discussion of the rise of rhythm-and-blues and its profound influence on rock is especially informative. The treatment of later developments in African-American musical forms and their derivatives

is also remarkable for its analysis of a popular cultural industry that increasingly influenced both performance and musical taste. While the discussions of record labels and their interactions with artists could easily become tedious in a less well-focused study, Floyd maintains a nice balance by always keeping music in sight. Although he often seems more interested in jazz than in other genres, Floyd makes jazz innovations a key to understanding the emergence and flowering of African-American traditions as a whole. That is, he demonstrates rather convincingly that jazz's "signifying" on other musical genres constitutes one way of understanding the development of black popular music in the twentieth century.

Floyd makes deft use of the tools of critical theory, yet his lucid writing style avoids the dense jargon often associated with this approach. As a result, *The Power of Black Music* is an exceptionally erudite and thoroughly readable work.

—John W. Roberts
University of Pennsylvania



New Orleans slaves dancing the Bamboula, an African-derived ring dance, circa 1818. From an engraving by Edward W. Kemble.

REVISING THEATRICAL HISTORY

The dust-jacket copy for Lee Davis's *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern, The Men Who Made Musical Comedy* (James H. Heineman, Inc., 1993; \$29.95) claims:

For the past fifty years, popular theatre history has contended that the American Musical Theatre began on the night of March 31, 1943, when "Oklahoma!" opened at the St. James Theatre. It didn't.

Actually, it's unlikely anyone with real knowledge of the subject would suggest that. 1931 saw the Gershwin brothers' *Of Thee I Sing*, *Porgy and Bess* was produced four years later, and most importantly, *Show Boat* (the piece that has truly been considered as marking the beginnings of American musical theater) opened long before any of the above, in 1927. This may seem rather trivial, but the copy reveals Davis's revisionist agenda.

The facts, as Davis sees them, are as follows: the first attempts at verisimilitude in American musical theater (as opposed to the smorgasbord extravaganzas of, say, Florenz Ziegfeld) originated with the partnership of Guy Bolton, P.G. Wodehouse, and Jerome Kern from approximately 1915 through 1918. The author makes it clear that "the tightly expressed idea . . . where book and music and lyrics are equal and interdependent, was born in the mind of Jerome Kern."

There is little reason to doubt this. However, it is also clear that the musicals Davis documents in these 420 pages lacked the weight and importance of *Show Boat* or *Oklahoma!*. With titles such as *Zip Goes A Million*, *Miss Springtime*, *Oh, Boy!* and *Very Good Eddie*, it's painfully evident that none of these plays—most of them consisting of simplistic boy-meets-girl plots—really deserves the kind of attention and painstaking research that this author has given them. Davis, like many chroniclers of American musical theater history, is first a fan and second a scholar. One can't help but admire the sheer amount of time and energy he has spent doing interviews and shuffling through personal papers and documents, recording the movements of his three protagonists through almost a century. Still, the hero-

worship quality of the writing makes one pause, particularly since Davis's three main characters don't quite deserve it.

Guy Bolton is probably the least known of the trio. Even at his height he was mostly a hired gun, writing cloyingly comic libretti and dialogue for musicals, reviews, and sketches. His attempts at serious drama (most notably with *Anastasia*) largely failed, in spite of his claim that "a drama is easier to write than a musical comedy." Jerome Kern, widely known in entertainment circles as the meanest man in show business, is portrayed in as flattering a light as possible. But in Davis's discussion of his domestic life, the truth can't help but come through. For example, when asked by his daughter if he thought she would make it as an actress, Kern warmly gave the following fatherly advice: "You're intelligent, and so you'll give an intelligent performance. You'll be acceptable. But you'll never be great."

P. G. Wodehouse suffers the most from Davis's adulation. Wodehouse, best known for his Jeeves novels, is portrayed as a stereotypically absent-minded Edwardian, a rather boring, domesticated man with little more on his mind than the latest catchy lyric and his prize pekinese. The truth—not to mention the man—is more complicated. In 1940, while imprisoned in a German internment camp, Wodehouse made a series of propaganda broadcasts for British consumption. Not surprisingly, these tongue-in-cheek broadcasts, in which the writer blithely questioned whether or not England would win the war and described internment "as an agreeable experience" that "keeps you out of the saloons and gives you time to catch up on your reading" caused controversy back in England, leading eventually to his exile in the United States. Davis suggests that Wodehouse agreed to these broadcasts because of "his naivete and belief in the inherent good and simplicity of human beings." Apparently, Davis can't believe that the man who created as lovable a character as Jeeves could be capable of collusion with the Nazis. However, it is exactly the exploration of these contradictions that Davis avoids for fear of tarnishing his heroes' images.

The reason we look to *Show Boat*, *Of Thee I Sing*, or *Oklahoma!* as cornerstones of a genre is because they succeed on most, if not all levels. It's difficult to believe that anyone would say the same about *Very Good Eddie*. What is interesting—and what Davis for all his research never picks up on—is that the important works mentioned above sprang up from a completely commercial marketplace (that is, Broadway at the turn of the century through the 1920s), and, simultaneously, that three of its initial architects were self-serving mercenaries, willing to sell out their friends, lovers, business associates, countries, and, at times, each other for the pursuit of personal and monetary gain. An exploration of that particular phenomenon may have made for an interesting discussion on the nature of American popular art. Unfortunately, *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern* is not the place for that discussion.

I.S.A.M. Newsletter, Vol. XXV, No. 1 / ISSN: 0145-8396

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The I.S.A.M. Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring. Copyright © 1995 by the Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY 11210.

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