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Copland's Hope for American Music

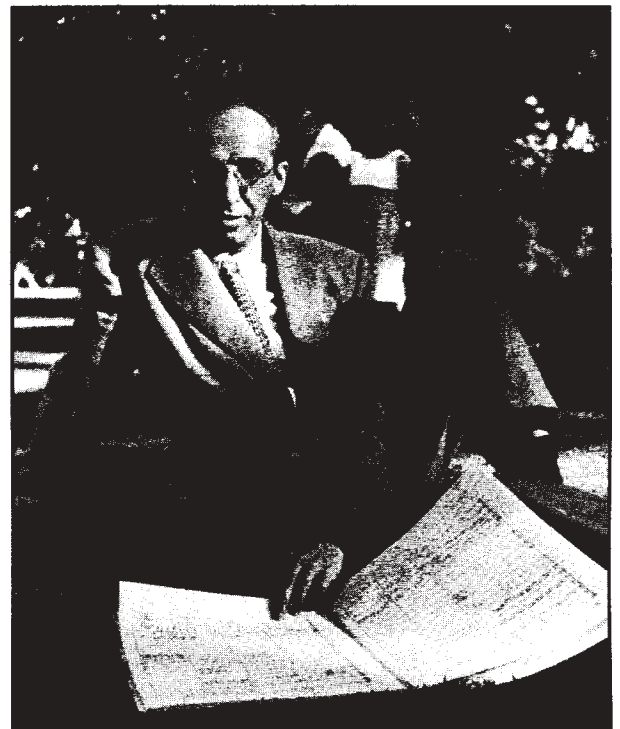
by
Howard Pollack

Copland was a dedicated and committed advocate for, in his words, "serious" American music. By "serious" he meant music that aspired to depth, some formal complexity, individuality, and high standards of craftsmanship. Copland did not presume that such music needed to fall within the tradition of European classical music, but he accepted the relevance of that tradition to the kind of music he had in mind.

Copland distinguished America's "serious" music from its "folk" and "popular" music. He had nothing against these more vernacular expressions—on the contrary, he admired their vigor, unpretentiousness, and worldwide appeal. To take one example, while travelling through South America in 1947, he visited Brazil's northern coast specifically to hear a more authentic folk music than that typically encountered in the clubs of Rio, and returned home with twenty recordings of samba. His own work, of course, made contact with a wide variety of folk and popular musics, mostly, though not exclusively, from the western hemisphere.

For Copland, however, the primary interest of American folk and popular music was as a stimulus for himself and other serious composers. Even when he thought that, say, the serious music of a certain Latin American country lacked the kind of vitality found in its more popular music, he remained fundamentally concerned about the growth and development of serious music in that particular country. And in contrast to such colleagues as Charles Ives, John Alden Carpenter, George Gershwin, and Leonard Bernstein, all of whom shared his high regard for popular music, Copland consistently pointed out what he deemed such music's shortcomings and limitations. "You can only hear popular songs so many times before you want to hear another popular song," he would say.¹ He surely liked many folk and popular tunes more than an incompetent piece of serious music, but he considered these repertoires as essentially different, a distinction posited in his references to Stephen Foster and Irving Berlin as "songwriters" as opposed to "composers."

Copland made a special exception for jazz, which, at its best, exhibited many of the qualities he associated with serious music. But jazz also, in his estimation, had certain limitations that distinguished it from serious music; the latter, he claimed, had greater potential and bigger ambitions. Even as he praised the work of Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Lennie Tristano, he wrote: "Jazz does not do what serious music does either in its range of emotional expressivity nor in its depth of feeling, nor in its universality of language. It does have universality of appeal, which is not the same thing."² From his perspective, jazz, like folk and popular music, ultimately represented a crucial resource for serious music, and he accordingly counseled



*Aaron Copland, 1947
Photo by Erika Stone*

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Copland's Hope (continued)

aspiring composers to study it for lessons in spontaneity and invention, rhythmic verve and instrumental ingenuity.

Such hierarchical distinctions run counter to recent trends which tend to equate "low" and "high" art, a line of thinking that actually would not have been all that new to Copland. Even when just beginning his career, in the 1920s, he was aware that certain listeners both at home and abroad, including some eminent intellectuals, thought jazz America's "classical" music and the songs of Berlin and Kern its "art" songs. In the 1930s and 1940s, as he also well knew, polemicists of various political persuasions denounced "modern" concert music as "bourgeois" and "decadent." And in the 1960s, some of his friends touted the recordings of Simon & Garfunkel as the important music of the age.

Copland took such attitudes seriously enough to occasionally offer a rejoinder; for instance, he stated that America also had its serious composers—and good ones, too. Moreover, in his own work, he allowed for such viewpoints to the point that his artistic development could even be seen as partly shaped by just such opinions. But the belittling and condescension that frequently greeted American serious music over the years left him unfazed. He never despaired, and he never lost hope.

Rather, he reserved his energies for full support of his ideals. Upon returning to the States from Paris in 1924, he began writing extensively on a wide array of American composers, periodically composing sharp, insightful articles that surveyed many of the most accomplished contemporaries in his field. In time, he lectured and wrote about earlier generations of American composers as well.

Such discussions, far from indulging in any chauvinistic ballyhoo, tended to be severe. Even when writing about those American composers he most admired—Ives, Ruggles, Sessions, Harris, Thomson, Chávez, Piston, Blitzstein, and Schuman, to name a few—he could be and often was rather critical of certain aspects of their work. The point of such exactitude was not just to offer a balanced appraisal for his colleagues themselves, but to help educate the public, for the enterprise Copland had in mind required a self-aware community of composers and a sympathetic but demanding and sophisticated body of listeners.

At the same time, such high-mindedness never dampened his far-ranging support for America's serious composers as a whole. Roger Sessions even scolded him for wasting his time aiding so many mediocrities. Another colleague, George Antheil, opined that such efforts marked Copland himself as a minor talent. But Copland felt that a thriving and active school provided not only excitement and stimulation, but the necessary foundation for the emergence of still greater music to come.

To this end, Copland engaged in a broad range of activities. He organized concerts of American music (notably, the Copland-Sessions concerts of 1928-1931, and the two Yaddo Festivals of 1932 and 1933); oversaw the publication of new American scores for the Cos Cob and Arrow Presses; helped found the American Composers' Alliance in order to obtain economic justice for composers and the American Music Center to help facilitate their careers; assisted aspiring composers in obtaining sponsors, patrons, and fellowships; advised performing musicians about American music; conducted scores of American works with professional and student orchestras around the world; and left the bulk of his multi-million-dollar estate to a fund devoted to the propagation of serious American music.

While these efforts were widely, if insufficiently, appreciated, Copland's candid statements about a variety of matters could engender conflict and opposition. His belief that American composers needed to strike out on their own, for instance, made him particularly wary of any undue dependence on Europe's great tradition. Not surprisingly, American composers who worked in an international style of one sort or another—not to mention European composers themselves—generally viewed this stance as provincial.

Copland, who criticized the "provincial imagination" of Smetana, Sibelius, and others, recognized such pitfalls himself. But he believed that nationalism provided at least one road toward artistic independence, especially in a country like the United States that lacked a well-established music tradition of its own. Thus, his admiration for American and Latin American composers similarly engaged in creating a distinctively American music, such as Ives, Harris, Chávez, Thomson, and Blitzstein. For Copland, this preoccupation with national idioms and themes did not mean merely striking a colorful or unusual note, but rather embracing one's time and place, reflecting the world in which one lived, and ultimately expressing one's place in it.

Even so, Copland's tastes were far more cosmopolitan than often assumed. He appreciated and early on assimilated the work of such diverse figures as Mahler, Stravinsky, Milhaud, Bartók, and Webern. He also had high regard for Piston and the early Sessions, and had little patience with those who insisted that American music should be absolutely different from European music. In brief, Copland championed a balanced stance vis-à-vis Europe's great tradition, one that promoted individuality, but not at the expense of cutting oneself off from the world. The cultivation of a distinctive voice in the context of worldwide trends remained a lifelong aesthetic principle.

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ISAM Matters

At a luncheon for new faculty members that I attended in September, conversation soon turned to our areas of research. After I mentioned that I work in American music, one of my lunch companions exclaimed: "Oh, you mean the music of John Philip Sousa?" My colleague's innocent question demonstrates that there is still a pressing need for a research center that champions American music of all kinds.

I am delighted to become Director of ISAM, an organization I have long admired, and look forward to guiding the Institute into the next millennium. In the hands of **H. Wiley Hitchcock**, its founding director, and of **Carol J. Oja**, his successor, ISAM has carved out a significant and lasting legacy as a research center energetically promoting American music through the stimulating events it has sponsored and the many publications it has fostered. I am eager to ensure that it continues to flourish in the twenty-first century with the help of ISAM Associates **Ray Allen**, to whom the Institute is indebted for serving as Acting Director for the past two years; **Jeff Taylor**, who is familiar to *Newsletter* readers as a contributor and editor; and **Michael Salim Washington**, who will join the Conservatory faculty in January 2000.

With the bright-eyed optimism of someone only three months into the job, I would like to share with our readers a few visions we are currently developing for ISAM's future directions:

- As we leave the twentieth century, we want to maintain ISAM's historical commitment to contemporary composers and to the music of our time by sponsoring symposia, seminars, concerts, and festivals featuring recent music.

- We will continue our mission of exploring music throughout the Americas while also spotlighting the music of New York City, including new music, jazz, blues, gospel, ethnic musical traditions, folk music, pop, rock, and musical theater.

- We want to encourage contributions to the *Newsletter* and, in due course, research presented at our symposia and conferences that explore the cultural contexts and social effects of music, offer analytical perspectives, and bring new research from other disciplines to bear upon American music studies. Of particular interest is work that presents insights drawn from cultural studies, critical theory, American studies, ethnic studies, critical race theory, feminist theory, gender and sexuality studies, and postcolonial theory.

- Given the dire conditions of the job market and the attendant intense competition to publish, we would like to underscore ISAM's commitment to providing a forum for research that presents bold new perspectives, especially from the work of younger scholars and from independent scholars. In these tough times, it is critical that they receive our support and recognition—especially in the crucial early years of their careers—through publications, performance opportunities, and residencies.

We welcome your ideas for future ISAM projects and initiatives. Please email us at <isam@brooklyn.cuny.edu> or write us an old-fashioned letter.

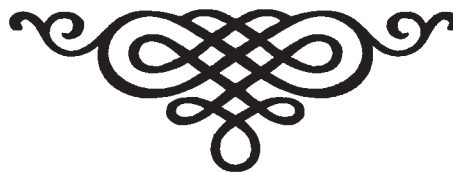
—*Ellie M. Hisama*

Remembering Friends

Just as this issue was about to go to press, we learned of the death at 42 of **K. Robert Schwarz**, who was Research Assistant at ISAM from 1988 to 1992. Rob was a beloved member of the ISAM family. With a percolating wit, generous heart, and razor-sharp intellect, he was a dear friend and much-respected colleague. To the greater musical world, Rob was best known for his active career as a music journalist, first for his articles in *Musical America* and later for those in a score of publications, including most consistently the "Arts and Leisure" section of the *New York Times*. His *Minimalists* (Phaidon, 1996) is a readable and abundantly informative survey of a group of composers whose music he felt passionate about. He repeatedly spoke out in print about gay issues and their impact on the American compositional scene, and in the last several years, he was at work on a book about the composer and novelist Paul Bowles. Through it all, he kept playing the violin. Rob earned an undergraduate degree at Queens College, where his father Boris Schwarz was an eminent member of the faculty; he also had an M.A. from Indiana University and completed course work toward a Ph.D. at the Graduate School of the City University of New York. We will miss him acutely—both in print and in person—and we send condolences to his mother Patricia. Contributions in his memory may be made to the K. Robert Schwarz Archive of Music, in care of the Queens College Foundation, Queens College—CUNY, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, NY 11367-1597.

We also note with sadness the death of **Carolyn Lott**, wife of **R. Allen Lott**, another former ISAM Research Assistant. Carolyn entered Allen's life after he had left New York and returned to his native Texas. She was a harpist. Our love and deep condolences go to Allen and their son Andy.

—*Carol J. Oja*



Just in time for the twenty-first century, we have mounted a website <<http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam/isam.html>>, which will spread the word about ISAM's projects to new folks, keep our readers informed of upcoming events, and eventually provide an electronic forum for publishing current research that may not be practical to include in the *Newsletter*. Starting with this issue, the *Newsletter* can be accessed through our website.

ISAM welcomes **J. Graeme Fullerton** as Managing Editor. A Ph.D. candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center, he holds degrees from the University of British Columbia and the Royal Conservatory of Toronto and is writing his dissertation on the grotesque in twentieth-century opera.

Rethinking Race in Nineteenth-Century Minstrelsy

A recent spate of scholarship in American minstrelsy argues that for too long the shame of white racism has impeded research in blackface. While early work in minstrelsy concentrated solely on race and racial stereotypes, several current scholars have sought to nuance this situation by suggesting that minstrelsy not only signified an entrenched marker of African American derision and difference, but also held multiple and complex meanings for nineteenth-century American audiences. Two books arguing for a more flexible interpretation of minstrelsy are Dale Cockrell's *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (Cambridge University Press, 1997; \$19.95) and William J. Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1999; \$24.95). Both attempt to revise minstrelsy's history by de-centering race and challenging readers to reconsider contemporary assumptions about race and minstrelsy in nineteenth-century American life.

Cockrell's *Demons of Disorder* examines how music transformed a blackface tradition in American folk and theater history from the Jacksonian era through the first "concert" conceived by the Virginia Minstrels in 1843. Cockrell differentiates between blackface minstrelsy in "legitimate" stage theater and a more nebulous tradition used on the streets in "folk theatricals"—primarily European folk rituals like callithumpian performances, Carnival, mumming plays and morris dancing. Studying the "music made by common Jacksonians," Cockrell contends that "music's antonym—noise—[was] a legitimate form of cultural expression." Once a racially ambiguous and raucous ritual of noise-making, minstrelsy became, by 1843, an established musical genre that pitted lower class "common white people" against elite white males who patronized the urban theaters. The meanings inherent in blackface minstrelsy thus reflected not only an historical change but also the contingent influence of class and race.

Because nineteenth-century working class audiences left behind little information concerning how they felt about minstrelsy, Cockrell had to piece together court reports, symbolic artifacts, and anecdotal evidence buttressed by minstrel texts to tease out an insightful view of minstrelsy's Jacksonian folk contexts. The focal personae of Jim Crow, Zip Coon, and Old Dan Tucker resonate as symbolic and contested figures whose meanings are predicated upon the viewer's proximity to folk theatrics. Cockrell traces the mythical "Jump Jim Crow" figure not to the stereotypical plantation "darker" but to highly politicized social events that foregrounded class conflict within earlier folk traditions of noise-making. Zip Coon, his signature melody and his impersonator, George Washington Dixon, all come to represent not a mockery of the northern black dandy but a parody of elitist middle class pretense. By 1843, when the Virginia Minstrels presented Dan Emmett's "Old Dan Tucker" in what is typically billed as the first minstrel show, blackface minstrelsy had become more about impersonating racial stereotypes for profit and less about common white American identity.

Mahar's *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask* presents blackface minstrelsy as multifocal and central to the formation of American popular culture. For Mahar, blackface minstrelsy becomes a means of social critique expressed through humor, rather than masquerades

and senseless depictions of racial stereotypes. Hidden behind blackened faces, the minstrels used their concealment as an opportunity to speak freely and poke fun at issues of class, European cultural elitism, and gender, in addition to race. As a flexible and derivative performance practice that parodied the likes of foreign opera, political speeches, and artistic virtuosity, blackface minstrelsy is best conceived of as a pastiche of burlesqued genres suited to fit the changing needs of its diverse nineteenth-century audience.

Mahar divides the history of minstrelsy into three progressive phases, each supported with evidence gleaned from playbills which are, helpfully, appended. The first phase, 1843-1848, is characterized as amorphous, consisting primarily of parodic popular song and aria renditions. The second phase, 1849-1854, explains how blackface minstrel shows incorporated longer burlesques of Italian and French opera, Ethiopian sketches, and afterpieces. The third phase, 1855-1860, reveals a bifurcation in the conception of the minstrel show, as managers sought either to provide a nostalgic (though not necessarily old) depiction of minstrelsy or to compile a series of variety skits similar to vaudeville. Moreover, Mahar examines the implications of minstrelsy as a male-dominated construct that constricted women's rights while it simultaneously reified masculinity through its songs and images.

Most impressive is Mahar's use of primary evidence; his arguments are well supported by a thoughtful examination of minstrel playbills, songs, and song texts. Copious musical examples are integrated throughout. Mahar's appendices include minstrel companies and their personnel (retrieved from playbills and newspaper advertisements), concluding numbers from selected minstrel shows, and a listing of the frequency of song texts published in antebellum songsters.

Cockrell and Mahar aptly rail against scholarship that projects minstrelsy solely as a pillar of race, pushing us to temper our late twentieth-century sensibilities and broadening our horizons in the process. However, *Demons of Disorder* and *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask* also foreshadow a disquieting trend in the field that seeks to displace racial context in the service of creating a less threatening, less ostensibly racist account of blackface. Minstrelsy is, in effect, made safe by expunging from it the painful details of racism. Cockrell's hope is to "undercut the tired old story that blackface minstrelsy is about unrelenting hatred of blacks by working-class, urban white males..." The story may be old, but tired? Mahar, while initially acknowledging the importance of race, proceeds to undermine his own assertion by locating minstrelsy's significance elsewhere in burlesque, English theater, class, sex, Eurocentric critique, and gender issues.

Cockrell and Mahar's call for a broader interpretation of minstrelsy is not without merit. Privileging race should not impede us from exploring other crucial narratives and social critiques. Yet their approach must not obscure the reality that race and racism, evinced by the minstrel's gesture of blacking up and his subsequent parodic performance of blackness, are the central and undeniable components of minstrelsy.

—Maya Gibson

University of Wisconsin at Madison

spectral frequencies

But I knew she was coming. I could hear her echoes peeling back off the moments, the way Aunt Raylene said she could always hear a spell coming on. Katy's persistent. Some of my ghosts are so faded; they only come when I reach for them. This one reaches for me.

—Dorothy Allison

Dorothy Allison's story "Demon Lover" is an homage to the genre of lesbian ghost stories. It features Katy, a sexy demon lover who has died of a drug overdose and visits her ex-lover (Allison herself) as an apparition. Katy's "pale skin gleams in the moonlight, reflecting every beam like a mirror of smoked glass while her teeth and nails shine phosphorescent." She reaches for Allison, putting her in touch with her painful and glorious past and her desires, pleasures, and fears. Katy's spectral visits inspire me to listen to Pauline Oliveros's electronic music in new ways.

Composed in 1966 as a real-time improvisation in the University of Toronto electronic music studio, *I of IV* (CBS Odyssey 32 16 0160) is one of Oliveros's best known tape pieces. While listening to this piece, I am struck by the extraordinary range of timbres, rhythms, spatial effects, and intensely luxurious sound shapes created by Oliveros's use of tape delay. As a lesbian listener deeply concerned with the ways music sounds out connections to particular social and erotic contexts, this piece prompts me to consider Oliveros's musical ideas alongside the larger patterns of lesbian culture in North America.

I of IV features an eight-second delay which, with shorter cross-coupled delays, forms large-scale echo effects as well as subtle changes in timbre and dynamics. Oliveros's use of tape delay is the primary means by which musical gestures and structures are created. The piece also makes use of combination tones—tones produced by the sums and differences between frequencies. When produced on instruments, combination tones are typically very faint, but when produced electronically, they can be amplified, as Oliveros does in *I of IV*. The timbral effects of these combination tones include overtones, inharmonic partials, and "noise." At times, the distinction between pitch and timbre is blurred.

To listen to *I of IV* is to experience a remarkable sonic landscape. The piece begins with a nasal, drill-like drone on C#4 with occasional metallic scrapes above and below this drone (pitch names are approximations only and follow international acoustic practice). The reverberation and combination tones create a rotating effect, as if the sounds were turning in space or carving a figure

eight. At 1'20" a distinct trombone-like tone enters on C#5; the sound stretches and bends slightly above and below this pitch to produce a smaller-scale, more focused sense of rotation while other accompanying sounds expand in volume. A high-pitched whistle tone enters at 3'00" and sweeps around the treble range while the lower register (from the beginning of the piece) fades out. The sweeps repeat (tape delay), and reverberation is especially apparent here, creating a cave-like soundscape. A descending minor third, C#5 to A#4, stands out of the texture, echoes, and re-emerges an octave lower, establishing a connection between the upper and lower registers.

At 8'00", a gradual decrescendo leads to a low percussive sound like needle clicks on a phonograph. As they echo, the timbre of the clicks grows fatter. Higher tones play short pointillistic rhythms, a sonic interchange that implies ricochet. A pair of contrasting spaces then emerges—the lower register evokes a large, open space, while the upper register suggests a smaller, more intimate space. The next two and a half minutes feature a thick collection of pulsating sounds comprised of clusters of tones to which it is nearly impossible to ascribe pitches. The timbres are metallic, and higher pitched overtones, like whistles, are also apparent. But any distinction between pitch and timbre is completely blurred. The aural effect is both lush and unsettling.

At 12'30" a grand, sweeping melody takes charge. The timbre is a cross between a trombone and a fire engine siren, and recalls the earlier moment at 1'20". The sonic shift is both abrupt and climactic. Extremely wide glissandos soar through high and low registers, reaching around and rolling over themselves. The melody dwells on a single tone and then swoops away. The canon-like repetition of the tape delay is so pronounced that this melody seems to carve itself into space. Like a sonic sculpture, these sounds are shapely and muscular. As one of the longest sections of the piece—approximately four minutes—a luxuriousness emanates from the multiple repetitions and decays.

A low undulating hum extends through the piece, and is especially audible towards the end. At 16'00", after the siren melody has evaporated, some very high-pitched twitters dart around above the purring hum. These "sound sprays" are rhythmically unpredictable, and they seem to move from one location to another like shooting stars, or perhaps fireworks. The piece ends with a return to the undulating rumble and a flourish of xylophone-like sounds, C#5 to B5.



Pauline Oliveros
Photo by Gisela Gamper

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New Music Notes by Carol J. Oja

Not so long ago, it was downright frustrating to locate sound or print sources related to West Coast experimenters. But those days are quickly being eclipsed by a fairly stunning ease of access. At least that is the case for Lou Harrison and Harry Partch, two of the region's more intriguingly idiosyncratic figures, who over the past few years have inspired a cascade of publications and CDs.

Lou Harrison: Composing a World, by Leta E. Miller and Fredric Lieberman (Oxford University Press, 1998; \$35), heads the list, with a warm, engagingly shaped portrait of the composer from Portland. The first third of the book takes a traditional approach by scanning Harrison's life as revealed in his published writings, personal correspondence, and interviews with friends and colleagues. After childhood and early adult years in Oregon and California, Harrison moved in 1943 to New York, where he soon was writing criticism for the *New York Herald Tribune*. By 1951, finding himself at odds with the stresses of city life, he took a faculty position at Black Mountain College in North Carolina; two years later he moved back to California, where he has been based ever since. The bulk of the book, however, abandons a chronological narrative in favor of exploring specific aspects of the composer's life and work. Harrison's collaboration with dancers is discussed, as are his passion for tuning and temperament, his longtime involvement with instrument building (especially in collaboration with his partner William Colvig), his intense study of various Asian traditions, and his devotion to the gamelan, which has resulted in building several ensembles of his own. There are also chapters about his compositional process, his stint as a music critic, and his personal politics and sexuality.

One theme that pops up repeatedly is how a composer known for such tuneful music managed to find a place for himself in Cold War America. Today, as Harrison's music gains ever-wider exposure and is increasingly hailed as a forerunner to minimalist and multiculturalist tendencies of the late twentieth century, it is easy to forget that his work was not always accepted so heartily. "It was like a breath of fresh air, particularly in an atmosphere heavily loaded with serialism," mused composer Robert Hughes in describing Harrison's works from the late 1950s in an interview with Miller and Lieberman. "When you flipped from Hugo Weisgall to Lou Harrison," he continued, "there was a culture shock that was absolutely marvelous. It was something new." Harrison had his own bout with serialism, which largely ended in 1953 when he moved back to California; yet he has returned to the method occasionally, and an intellectual rigor has continued to characterize his music. Alongside these aesthetic issues, Harrison also became an activist for political and humanitarian causes, whether anti-nuclear, pro-environmental, or defending the rights of animals. His commitment to pacifism shines through in works such as *Pacifika Rondo*, which celebrates the diverse cultures of the Pacific Rim and culminates with a movement titled "A Hatred of the Filthy Bomb" (written with serial techniques). As Miller and Lieberman report, Harrison uses the designations "B.B." ("before bomb") and "A.B." ("after bomb") for the chronology of his life. Yet for Harrison, social or political protests are often gently articulated. An abiding optimist, he "believe[s] that the world's seemingly intractable problems are solv-

able," as Miller and Lieberman put it. Often his art becomes a polemical force by simply setting a beatific example. "We should bring forward the good things of our separate musical cultures," stated Harrison at a Tokyo conference in 1961, "for the delight and help of humanity, to celebrate that man really can ennoble life, can enjoy, and value life. If the world wounds you, then strike back at the world. Don't strike at your art, embrace that as a treasure."

Like Virgil Thomson, his friend and mentor at the *Herald Tribune*, Harrison is a thoroughly quotable composer with an abundant gift for language. Miller and Lieberman devote a chapter to his writing for the *Herald Tribune*, which opens access to a legendary but little-explored part of his career, and they provide an appendix listing his reviews for the paper. Anyone seeking a tonic in a chaotic world should return to *Lou Harrison's Music Primer* (C. F. Peters, 1971), where the composer delivers memorable maxims ("Cherish, conserve, consider, create") together with information about his compositional procedures.

Besides illuminating the many byways of Harrison's experience, Miller and Lieberman manage one of the greatest feats of all—that is, to achieve a tone that consistently conveys the composer's affirmative outlook on life. Their book concludes with a list of Harrison's works and—most appealingly—a CD of previously unissued or out-of-print performances of his music. Highlights include Harrison's own performance of *Cinna (Suite for Tack Piano)*, which includes a discussion by him of the tuning system on which the work is based; his performance on the Korean *p'iri* in *Hyi Mun*, a transcription of a fifteenth-century Korean work; another on the *cheng* in *The Garden at One and a Quarter Moons*; a robust reading of "A Hatred of the Filthy Bomb," conducted by his student Robert Hughes; and an excerpt from his *Three Songs*, as performed by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, with which Harrison has had a strong working relationship.

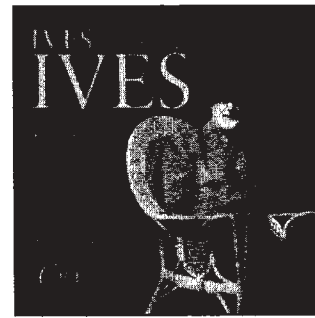
Another recent publication is Lou Harrison's *Selected Keyboard and Chamber Music (1937-1994)*, edited by Leta E. Miller (A-R Editions, 1998; \$95), which appears as Volume 8 of the American Musicological Society's "Music of the United States of America." Included are edited scores for seven Harrison works representing different points in his career: *France 1917-Spain 1937* (for percussion and string quartet), *Tributes to Charon* (percussion trio), *Praises for Michael the Archangel* (organ solo), *Vestiunt Silve* (soprano, flute/piccolo, two violas, harp), *Incidental Music for Corneille's 'Cinna' (Suite for Tack Piano)*, *Varied Trio* (violin, piano, percussion), and *Grand Duo* (violin and piano). Miller's extensive introduction discusses the works in detail, expanding on coverage in her book. Among recent Harrison recordings, take special note of a Koch release (3-7465-2 H1) that includes a group of his piano and chamber works, including his *Suite for Violin with String Orchestra* (an arrangement of his *Suite for Violin and American Gamelan*), *Suite for Cello and Piano* (1995), and *Suite for Cello and Harp* (1949). Michael Boriskin performs two groups of early Harrison piano works—what Boriskin calls the "Equal Tempered Harrison." Especially beguiling among them are the lithe and lilting *Three Waltzes* (1944-51).

Meanwhile, a Harry Partch growth industry has suddenly sprung up, making a profuse array of his writings and music readily available. One of the most beautiful books on music to be published in recent years is *Enclosure 3: Harry Partch* by Philip Blackburn (American Composers Forum, 1997; \$75). A 500-page "scrapbook" of photos and facsimiles (letters, programs, clippings), gorgeously printed on glossy paper, it provides primary source material for researchers and pleasurable reading for just about anyone else. It looks hip enough to draw in a twenty-year-old just as quickly as a more grizzled Partch fan. According to a note in the back of the volume, Blackburn took over the project from his composition teacher Kenneth Gaburo. He has not just published a single book but launched an ambitious series, every component of which is as visually striking as the last.

Enclosures 1 and 4 are both videotapes with archival Partch footage. Included in *Enclosure 1* are four films by Madeline Tourtelot, who collaborated with Partch on a series of projects: *Rotate the Body in All Its Parts* (1961, a performance by gymnasts at the University of Illinois to Partch's *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*); *Music Studio—Harry Partch* (1958, an absorbing first-hand view of Partch's Chicago residence, together with demonstrations by him of many of his instruments); *U. S. Highball* (1958/1968, a film realization of Partch's story of riding the rails); and *Windsong* (1958, a dramatization of the legend of Daphne and Apollo, with Partch's music as soundtrack). *Enclosure 4* opens with Tourtelot's 1971 film of *Delusion of the Fury*, with Danlee Mitchell as music director; although of considerable historic interest, it is lugubrious to the contemporary eye. The film also includes an engaging television documentary about Partch, released in San Diego in 1968. In it, Partch is interviewed amidst his instruments, which are spread out on a lawn at the University of California at San Diego; performances are also featured of *Daphne of the Dunes* and two duets from *And on the Seventh Day Petals Fell in Petaluma*.

Enclosures 2, 5 and 6 are all CDs, which essentially supplement four Partch reissues released by CRI in 1997. Since two of these are multiple-disc sets, adding up to eight discs among the three releases, the contents are too considerable to detail here. Archival recordings made by Partch are included, as are more recent performances of some of his works. *Enclosure 2: Historic Speech-Music Recordings from the Harry Partch Archives* includes such rarities as "A Wagnerian Wrestling Match," delivered by Partch on KPFA-Berkeley in 1954, and a performance of *O Frabjous Day!* as recorded the same year by Danlee Mitchell "on a Silver-tone toy tape recorder from Sears Roebuck." *Enclosure 5: Harry Partch* yields a 1971 performance of *Ulysses Departs from the Edge of the World*, as well as a 1980 performance of *Bewitched*; both involve the Partch disciple Danlee Mitchell. This CD set adds even more curiosities, especially a performance of Johann Krieger's "Menuet" from *Partita in G*, as interpreted on Harmonic Canon and Kithara by Partch and Ben Johnston in 1950. *Enclosure 6*, the latest release, features *Delusion of the Fury* as recorded at UCLA in 1969; this production, too, was directed by Mitchell and supervised by Partch. For a complete inventory of the marvelously varied materials on these CDs, log onto <www.composersforum.org>

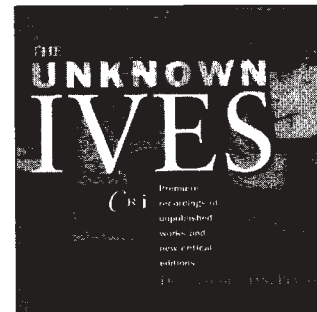
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Demythologizing the Blues

The following is a condensed version of the Phillips Barry Lecture delivered by David Evans at the Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society in Memphis, TN, 22 October 1999.

Blues music has enjoyed a tremendous resurgence in popularity over the past decade. Once the sole domain of its southern African American creators, blues has crossed racial, regional, and international boundaries so successfully that today it stands as a major genre of world popular music alongside jazz, rock, rap, country, and gospel. This recent expanded interest in blues can be traced back to the folk revival of the 1960s when an appreciation for blues was nurtured in American and European intellectual circles. This initial blues revival in turn was made possible by the early efforts of the commercial recording industry and by the pioneering collecting projects of folk song scholars like John and Alan Lomax, Howard Odum, Harry Oster, Zora Neale Hurston, and John W. Work.

All this interest on the part of scholars, popular writers, collectors, and blues fans has fostered a number of blues “myths” among the general public and occasionally within academic discourse. Like many popular myths and stereotypes, these blues myths are based on some degree of fact, truth, or observable reality. Under close scrutiny, however, they fall short as general explanations or interpretations of the blues. They function as easy and reassuring explanations of the blues for those who are newcomers to the genre, for those who have an ideological ax to grind and want to use blues as a weapon in their battle plan, and for those who are uncomfortable with some aspect of the blues or its purveyors.

Blues myths can be divided into two broad categories: myths of origin and evolution, and myths of ideology and meaning. Myths of origin try to place the beginnings of the blues in some earlier time, place, or social situation. One such myth that used to be widely held, especially in the early days of research into jazz history, was that blues arose in the era of slavery. This notion seems to be based almost entirely on the seemingly logical assumption that the slaves must have had the blues. But this view confuses blues as a melancholy feeling with blues as a genre of musical expression, a genre that includes a range of feelings from sadness to happiness, from pessimism to optimism. The historical record reveals that the earliest actual evidence for a musical genre recognizable as the blues comes from a period around the beginning of the twentieth century. If the blues genre had originated in the slavery period, surely we would have some descriptions of it from that period, as we do for other genres of music, or if it had been a secret underground music of the slaves, it surely would have emerged into plain sight immediately after Emancipation, as indeed the spirituals did.

Not content with a “slave origins” theory, some writers have sought to trace the blues to Africa. While there are indeed many African musical traits in the blues, as described in Gerhard Kubik’s *Africa and the Blues* (1999), there is no evidence in Africa of a fully developed, blues-like genre that contains personal expression of feeling and a form close to twelve bars and three lines in an AAB arrangement. Paul Oliver, in his influential *Savannah Syncopators*

(1970), identifies the Savannah region of West Africa as an important source for stylistic elements of the blues, noting that a significant percentage of the United States slave population was taken from this area that includes Mauretania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinée, Mali, and northern parts of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria. Oliver also documents the existence of an occupational caste of entertainers known as griots who demonstrate many characteristics similar to those commonly associated with blues performers—a preference for stringed instruments, a repertoire including songs of praise, derision, and social commentary, an itinerant lifestyle, and a rather marginal social status with an aura of disrepute. Oliver is certainly onto something here, but his findings have unfortunately been overly simplified and distorted by others to the point of absurdity, so that we now hear of “blues griots.” This myth suggests that the blues performer is a direct cultural descendent of the African griot, his six-string guitar and stage outfit being a replacement for the twenty-one-string kora and flowing robes of a Mandinka bard. But blues artists do not constitute a caste, and few, until recently, learned their craft directly from a parent or even a member of their parent’s generation. The creators of the first blues would, by the turn of the twentieth century, have had no first-hand knowledge of Africa, and were hardly in a position to perpetuate an African caste in America where they were under constant assault from Jim Crow laws and night riders. Moreover, griot repertoires contain many historical epics set in a past heroic age, while blues are almost always set in the present or recent past. Blues music and blues singers, while embodying many African characteristics, must be viewed first in their immediate American musical and social setting.

Another African blues myth holds that the devil who sometimes appears in blues lyrics or in legends about blues singers selling their souls to Satan at the crossroads is not really the devil of Christianity (viewed as the white man’s religion) but is actually a disguised form of an African trickster deity such as the Dahomean Legba or the Yoruba Eshu. The blues artist now becomes a reinterpreted initiate or even a priest in a cult of such a trickster deity. This view has been advocated by Julio Finn in *The Bluesman* (1986) and Jon Michael Spencer in *Blues and Evil* (1993), and to a lesser degree by Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., in *The Power of Black Music* (1995). Like the griot myth, this crossroads myth connects the blues to a fully functioning historical African society while adorning the blues artist with a priestly robe. There are, however, several serious problems with this crossroads myth. The devil imagery found in the blues is thoroughly familiar from western folklore, and nowhere do blues singers ever mention Legba or any other African deity in their songs or other lore. The actual African music connected with cults of Legba and similar trickster deities sounds nothing like the blues, but rather features polyrhythmic percussion and choral call-and-response singing.

Moving from myths of blues origin to those of blues evolution we encounter a school of thought holding that some sort of pure “folk” or “country” blues became corrupted by popular, commercial, and urban influences. The first to express this view were folklorists in the 1920s, such as Howard Odum, Guy Johnson, and Newman White, who had done most of their blues collecting before

the advent of commercial blues recording. They warned that the imitation of inferior commercial recordings by folk blues singers would lead to the rapid demise of the blues genre. These predictions proved false, but the myth of corruption persisted with writers like Rudi Blesh and Samuel Charters. The latter, in his influential book *The Country Blues* (1959), consistently found urban Chicago blues of the 1930s and early 1940s, as well as most modern electric blues, to be "cheap" and "derivative" in comparison to authentic rural blues. In addition, these scholars were bothered by the explicit sexual content found in many commercial blues recordings. But close comparison of field and commercial recordings reveals that like artistic merit, explicit sexual references are found across the folk/popular spectrum.

Another emerging myth of blues history is a Delta to Chicago to London narrative. This myth holds that the blues was born in the plantations of the Mississippi Delta, migrated to Chicago where it became electrified in the 1940s and 1950s, and eventually immigrated to London where it shaped the bluesy rock sound of groups like the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds. This story of blues evolution, which posits a direct line of development from Delta pioneer Charley Patton to Son House to Robert Johnson to Muddy Waters to Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton, is most clearly expressed in Robert Palmer's *Deep Blues* (1981). Although the Delta and Chicago were enormously important blues centers and this line of historical development is indeed one of the big stories of the blues, it is not the only way the story can and should be told. For example, the Delta to Chicago myth ignores the contributions of W. C. Handy and other composers to the mass popularity of the blues early in the twentieth century. It further disregards the early activities of great women vaudeville blues singers like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Mamie Smith. And it discounts other significant centers such as Texas and Memphis where artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson, T-Bone Walker, and B. B. King contributed substantially to the stylistic development of the blues.

Ideological myths of the blues generally result from a search for meaning in the blues and are based on study of the lyrics of blues songs or the lives of blues singers. Like myths of origin and evolution, these ideological myths often have a degree of truth to them but suffer from over-generalization and the selective use of evidence to fit a preconceived theory. Proponents of such myths might take heed of the insightful observations made by Sterling Brown in his 1930 study of blues poetics: "Stoicism is here as well as self-pity, for instance; rich humor as well as melancholy. There are so many blues that any preconception might be proved about Negro folk life, as well as its opposite."

One of the earliest ideological myths was that of blues as social protest. Although blues, as a highly personal form of expression, would seem to be an ideal vehicle for expressing protest, this myth quickly founders from the relative dearth of blues material expressing overt protest. Personal dissatisfaction with all sorts of situations can be found in abundance, but blues rarely serves as an expression of collective solidarity or aims at changing the system. During the years that the blues appealed most strongly to black Americans, many of the institutions that would have been worth changing were so entrenched and immutable that blues singers preferred to sing about things over which they had some degree of personal control or alternatives for action. In a sense, the entire existence of blues constitutes a massive but subtle form of social protest, since blues challenges many of the basic tenets of American society and constantly exposes hypocrisy, but there is only a

small amount of specific protest in its lyrics. Nevertheless, the hope that blues could expand to become a significant vehicle for protest led ideologically minded fans to encourage a few bluesmen like Leadbelly and Joshua White to create and perform a good number of such songs, while other artists like J. B. Lenoir seem to have gone in this direction on their own.

Somewhat related to the protest myth is what could be called the myth of black essentialism and the blues. A number of black commentators on the blues, beginning with Amiri Baraka in his book *Blues People* (1963), have expressed the idea that blues is intimately tied up with a collective black experience and is a rich source for understanding that experience.

This idea had not escaped white researchers as well. As early as 1911 sociologist Howard Odum found blues lyrics to be a key to understanding "the southern Negroes." Paul Oliver's 1959 study of blues lyrics and black culture was appropriately titled *The Meaning of the Blues*. One could hardly argue against the idea that blues has much to teach all of us about black American life, or at least about certain segments of it. However, blues has never appealed to nor represented the opinions and experiences of all segments of black society, any more than country music or alternative rock have represented the sentiments of all segments of white American society. The black middle class has historically preferred more sophisticated types of music such as jazz and soul, while many black churchgoers have condemned blues as the "Devil's music."

Further ideological myths portray blues as mere entertainment or as chaos. The myth of blues as entertainment is expressed most notably by Stephen Calt in various album notes and his extended studies of the lives of Mississippi bluesmen Charley Patton and

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R. L. Burnside
Photo by Tom Wafford
University of Memphis Photo Services

Behind the Beat with Mark Tucker

White jazz musicians, according to **Richard M. Sudhalter**, have fared poorly at the hands of several generations of critics, historians, and scholars. Driven by ideology rather than fair-minded musical assessment, writers have “promulgated a distorted version of the facts,” presenting jazz history as “a dynasty of black masters, with whites either absent or, worse, vilified as thieves and exploiters.” To counter and revise this view, Sudhalter has produced the massive, ruefully titled *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1999; \$35). Throughout the book, Sudhalter tenaciously pursues two main objectives: to recognize the achievements of musicians whom he believes have been undervalued or ignored, and to argue the case for jazz as a “profoundly pluralist” artistic realm in which whites and blacks have worked steadily together to create a vibrant form of American music.

In the first of his goals, Sudhalter succeeds admirably. Proceeding from the first wave of New Orleans groups to the explosion of hot jazz activity in Chicago and New York in the 1920s, and carrying on through the peak years of swing in the late 1930s and 1940s, he tells the stories of prominent individuals and influential bands, weaving together biographical information with extensive discussion of stylistic features. An accomplished cornetist and veteran exponent of traditional and mainstream jazz, Sudhalter delivers insightful musical commentary, generously illustrated with transcriptions, that makes the reader eager to hear the recordings. Given the difficulty in locating some of these recordings, it’s unfortunate the book includes no guide to current CD reissues; even better would be a companion web site listing regularly updated discographical information. There is, however, a 2-CD companion set for *Lost Chords* issued by Retrieval and available for \$25 from <worldsrecords.com>.

Sudhalter’s enthusiasm for the music bursts through on every page. Unlike Gunther Schuller, whose assessments of some of the same figures in *Early Jazz* and *The Swing Era* can be qualified, at times severe, Sudhalter is more interested in singling out aspects to admire and savor, keeping negative remarks to a minimum. A representative example of his descriptive style is the following sentence: “‘China Boy’ opens on an ear-catching Teagarden cadenza, then moves swiftly through solos by Nichols (at his best, a well-turned summation of his view of Bix), Goodman (whirling and cascading, driven by Chicago boisterousness and sustained by his limitless technique), and two stomping Sullivan choruses backed ardently—if a tad raucously—by Krupa.” Though the analysis can get more technical, the tone of passionate advocacy remains a constant.

Yet this same passion proves a liability as Sudhalter strives to develop his larger theme of jazz as a model of American multiculturalism and racial cooperation. For one thing, in trumpeting the accomplishments of white artists, Sudhalter often finds it necessary to chip away at the reputation of blacks. He asserts, for example, that it is clarinetist Leon Roppolo, not Louis Armstrong or Sidney Bechet, who deserves recognition as “the first great jazz soloist to appear on records”; that Fud Livingston, “a composer of infinitely greater range and harmonic sophistication than [Jelly Roll] Morton,” had reached by 1928 a “degree of accomplishment in

scoring” unmatched by Duke Ellington and Don Redman; that Bix Beiderbecke’s art is “altogether more subtle” than that of Armstrong and Bechet, with the white cornetist’s solos displaying a complexity, heterogeneity, and “inner voice” missing from those of Armstrong, which he characterizes as “emotional monoliths.” These are not corrections of the historical record but matters of personal opinion. Though Sudhalter may believe that such statements help level the playing field, showing blacks and whites engaged side by side as creators and innovators, instead they wind up having the opposite effect, fostering a sense of lopsided competition as one group keeps scoring points at the expense of the other.

More disquieting than this partisanship is Sudhalter’s contention that jazz musicians have long inhabited some sort of idealized, color-blind realm, concerned largely with aesthetic issues and insulated from the racial divisions of American society. “Very often,” Sudhalter writes, “such unity [within the jazz community] was strong enough, elastic enough, to thrive against countervailing pressures from the society at large.” This is wishful thinking. In the pre-Civil Rights era discussed by Sudhalter, every aspect of a jazz musician’s life—from performing and recording opportunities to salaries, educational options, living conditions, social status, and the mundane details of daily experience—was affected by contingencies of race. Stark differences in how black and white musicians pursued their vocations and struggled to survive in a competitive marketplace and racist society are missing from Sudhalter’s account. In its place is a utopian vision of “cooperation, mutual admiration, [and] cross-fertilization” that Sudhalter claims has prevailed in the jazz world until only recently, when “cultural and racial politics” have introduced “fractiousness and fracture, rivalry and mutual suspicion.”

Certainly a balanced, integrated account of jazz history is long overdue. Sudhalter’s discussion of musical topics in *Lost Chords* will make it easier for someone to write it one day. Meanwhile, I’m afraid this volume will do little to help promote racial understanding or unify a fragmented jazz community. Its brash and defensive tone, far from making converts to the cause of white jazz musicians, may instead help reinforce the very color line it ostensibly wants to erase.

Musical Alliances. A more complicated reading of black and white musical relationships appears in **Jeffrey Melnick’s** *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews, and American Popular Song* (Harvard University Press, 1999; \$27.95). In this study, focusing on song, ragtime, and (to a lesser extent) jazz in the first three decades of the 1900s, Melnick considers how Jewish musicians used African American styles to articulate an “American” identity for themselves, and how this strategy helped them become dominant figures in the entertainment industry. Melnick goes far beyond earlier, simplistic accounts of white appropriation of black sources. He offers original, provocative interpretations of such figures as Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, and Al Jolson, devoting an entire chapter to James Weldon Johnson’s views of ethnicity, race, and American popular culture. There are problems in Melnick’s methodology: he fails to account for non-Jewish white songwriters and musicians whose careers and styles

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Passionate Victorian

Adrienne Fried Block's *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867-1944* (Oxford University Press, 1998; \$45) is a valuable contribution to music scholarship and an outstanding tribute to the dean of America's female composers, Amy Beach. Block's long-awaited biography—the first thorough scholarly study of Beach's career—bestows upon Beach her rightful place among the important musical figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Block's narrative can be divided into three parts. The first part chronicles Beach's upbringing and years in Boston. Particularly significant are her discussions about Beach's relationships with her mother, Clara Cheney, and her husband, Dr. Henry Beach. Block also examines Beach's development as a composer, focusing on her first large-scale works, the Mass in E^b and the "Gaelic" Symphony. The second part deals with the period after the deaths of her husband and her mother when Beach left Boston and embarked on a career as a pianist, undertaking European and American concert tours. This period ends with Beach caring for her terminally ill cousin and then for her dying aunt in New Hampshire, during which time she wrote and performed little. The third part revolves around her stay at the MacDowell Colony and in New York where she eventually settled, continuing to write and perform in limited engagements.

Block's command of the biographical material is commendable. Beach left a wealth of letters, scrapbooks, journals, diaries and other personal papers that chronicle her life. Block, however, moves beyond the readily available and digs deep into the sources, consulting public records, obscure nineteenth-century periodicals, and small archival collections. She is thus able to fill in previously unknown details about Beach's life, such as a relationship she calls one of Beach's "best-kept secrets:"

"Cryptic clues in her diaries ... consist of repeated remembrances of 'A' — of his birthday, his death, his leaving Boston, and other signal events of his life. Finally, in one entry she names him as 'Arthur' but still does not provide his last name. There is no question, however, that he was as important to her as Henry Beach had been ..." Block's mastery of Beach's repertoire—consisting of roughly 200 works—is also exceptional. Her incisive discussions of the compositions, along with the numerous musical examples reproduced in the book, familiarize the reader with the composer's music.

Unfortunately, one rarely glimpses Beach's inner life through her private thoughts. But this is not the fault of the biographer:

Beach's diaries exist only for her later years, 1926 to 1944. Consequently, how she felt about various figures in her life, most notably her husband and her mother, goes unsaid. Block is left, therefore, to speculate about Beach's feelings and motivations about significant events, such as her sudden unexplained move from San Francisco, a city she loved, to Hillsborough, New Hampshire, which isolated her from cultural life.

Two underlying themes in Block's narrative highlight the importance of Beach's life for music scholarship and women's studies. First and perhaps foremost is the issue of gender. Throughout the book, the reader is acutely aware of the problems faced by a female composer and performer. The effects of gendered attitudes on Beach's career—most notably on the performance and reception of her works—are often accentuated by the author's commentary, as when she challenges one critic's response to the Violin Sonata by asking, "Would he have said that of one of Haydn's monothematic movements?" Block's voice comes out most clearly on these issues, though it is at times too forceful. Nevertheless, she succeeds in bringing the problem of gender bias to the forefront, and the reader is led to contemplate what Beach's career might have been like in a more equitable society.

More importantly, Block's biography allows the reader to consider the extent to which Beach's life and career were continually shaped by her social role as a woman. Clearly, all of the characters in the story of Beach's life acted according to fundamental assumptions about gender that were integral to their social environment. Beach's mother raised her daughter according to Victorian standards of female behavior. Her husband expected her to fulfill the duties of faithful wife and helper in spite of his support of her musical activities. Later in life, Beach transformed herself into

"Aunt Amy," a maternal figure for younger female composers and performers. Daughter, wife and aunt were the roles that Beach took on and they significantly affected the course of her career. One sees finally that her life was a weaving together of two threads, one professional—composer and pianist—and the other social—woman.

Block also broaches critical issues in cultural history. Nurtured in the environment of late nineteenth-century Boston, Beach found her voice in the late Romantic style. But since Beach lived well into the twentieth century, Block is faced with the thorny issue of positioning the composer's works in the modern musical world. Here

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*Marcella Craft and Amy Beach in Munich
Craft Collection, Tomás Rivera Library,
University of California, Riverside*

Copland's Hope (continued)

Copland prized fine craftsmanship as another crucial prerequisite for a viable school of serious American music; indeed, he was unusually sensitive to the misplaced note or careless harmony. He often advised young composers to study with Nadia Boulanger, as he himself had done, not to become indoctrinated in some ideology or other, but as a way for American composers to master their craft. And while academicism left him cold, he had an honest respect for the well-made score. Much as the individuality of Billings, Gottschalk, MacDowell, Ives, Gershwin, Harris, and others compensated, in his opinion, for assorted technical lapses or crudities, so the finesse of such composers as Paine, Piston, Sessions, Barber, and Schuman made up for the lack of a clear and memorable stylistic profile.

Copland had other criteria for judging music. He took to task music perceived as sentimental, trite, sensational, and bombastic. This sensibility distanced him not only from much nineteenth-century music, but from a good many contemporary works for stage and screen. His own operas and film scores, in their unaffected directness, even have the quality of an attempted antidote.

At the same time, he had little sympathy for the hermetic, the inaccessible, the convoluted, and the cluttered. He complained of such overcomplexity, for instance, in certain works by Ives, Schoenberg, Sessions, Carter, Boulez, and Stockhausen. One senses, concomitantly, a strong preference—though not a doctrinaire one—for textural clarity.

In sum, Copland wanted for America a serious music that was individual, that reflected its time and place, that was well-crafted, and that was neither commercial nor hermetic. He shared many of these ideals with the numerous American writers, critics, musicians, film directors, choreographers, actors, and playwrights with whom he congregated and collaborated over the years, including one of his closest friends, the director and theater critic Harold Clurman. The rejection of the commercial and the hermetic, for instance, echoed the literary criticism of one of these associates, the literary critic Van Wyck Brooks, who wrote of a culturally immature America comprised of “millionaires” and “saints.”

Copland may well have agreed with some of these friends that such ideals were best realized, among American artists, by the poetry of Walt Whitman. How far American composers succeeded in approaching Whitman’s achievement—either in the originality of their vision, the sureness of their craft, or the depth of their humanity—Copland hesitated to say. But he felt that America was a young country, and that a profound and meaningful musical culture required time to develop. He hoped that what he and his most esteemed colleagues had accomplished might shed some light towards that goal.

—University of Houston

Notes

¹ Interview with Trish Barnes, November 1980, Copland Clipping File, New York Public Library. Cited in Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Henry Holt, 1999), 114.

² Aaron Copland, “Pleasures of Music,” unpublished 1959 lecture, Copland Collection, Library of Congress. Cited in Pollack, 118.

Behind the Beat (continued)

closely resemble those of his Jewish subjects, and at times his musical analysis can bog down under the weight of theorizing (e.g., the labored interpretation of Gershwin’s “Summertime”). But overall, Melnick demonstrates sophisticated handling of a difficult, politically charged topic. *A Right to Sing the Blues* is both an impressive contribution to the literature of Black-Jewish relations and a study that will prove richly rewarding for teachers and historians of American popular music.

Medium Cool. From 1959 to the late 1960s, the critic **Ralph J. Gleason** produced a series of half-hour programs devoted to jazz for the National Educational Television network. Calling the show *Jazz Casual*, Gleason invited well-known musicians into the studio and let them play whatever they pleased, seeking to provide home viewers with the relaxed ambience and intimate communication they might experience in a night club. Of the thirty-one “Jazz Casual” episodes originally aired, twenty-eight survive; Gleason’s son Toby has begun digitalizing and repackaging them on video, with more than a half-dozen titles issued so far (available from The Jazz Store, 800-558-9513, or <www.thejazzstore.com>; \$14.95 for single videos, \$39.95 for a three-pack).

The three “Jazz Casual” programs I’ve seen contain stretches of memorable music-making broken up by stilted verbal exchanges between the host and guests. Though Gleason aims to put the musicians at ease, chatting them up as though they had just dropped by for a visit, the strain of “acting naturally” for lights and camera shows through in segments featuring **Carmen McRae** and **Count Basie**. Perched on a stool in front of her quartet, McRae gives dramatically riveting performances of such tunes as “Round Midnight” and “Love for Sale”; seated next to Gleason in a canvas deck chair for the interview segment, she visibly tightens upon hearing his first question (“What is a jazz singer?”), and the conversation never settles into a comfortable rhythm. Similarly, Basie plays marvelously in a quartet setting, but when Gleason tries to prod him to reminisce about the “old days,” the pianist responds dutifully with a few terse sentences, then begins noodling at the keyboard, as if to say, “Cut the talk—let’s play!” The most radical and arguably successful solution to the problem of integrating performance and interview segments comes in a 1963 episode with **John Coltrane** and his quartet. Coltrane apparently told Gleason that he only wanted to play—so there’s no talk at all. The results are impassioned, extended performances of “Afro-Blue,” “Impressions,” and “Alabama” (interesting to compare this version with the one on *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*). During the performance, it becomes clear that neither the Coltrane quartet nor its music fits comfortably within the imaginary space of a “jazz casual” encounter. The contrast between the players’ intense inward focus and Gleason’s avuncular persona as the hip connoisseur—slouching in his cardigan sweater and puffing thoughtfully on his pipe—effectively explodes the artifice of the format. Freed from having to answer questions or verbalize about their art, Coltrane and his musicians devote full attention to the sounds they are producing, reducing the host’s role to that of a bystander. Gleason gets the message: after the group’s first number he leaves his place seated next to pianist McCoy Tyner and disappears from the screen.

Demythologizing the Blues (continued)

Skip James. Nobody would deny that blues entertains its audience and operates within a mass media entertainment industry, but a focus on entertainment as the primary function of the blues downplays or ignores its functions as spiritual, philosophical, political, and artistic expression, as well as the ritualistic quality of blues performance in many traditional contexts. This infatuation with blues as entertainment demeans and trivializes the music while separating it from any African American historical, social, and creative setting.

The myth of blues as chaos is a more recent product and has not yet been fully articulated, but one can detect it in some of the album notes of Robert Palmer and in the approach to production of the Fat Possum record company of Oxford, Mississippi. Focusing on the riff-driven styles of Mississippi artists such as R. L. Burnside and the late Junior Kimbrough, Palmer and Fat Possum have often emphasized sloppy production, unrehearsed jamming, and cameo appearances by famous white rock musicians screaming and playing loud guitar solos over the music of these artists in drunken orgies of sound. This approach has not surprisingly found favor among the fans of these alternative rock stars, who are now beginning to view Mississippi blues as the "roots" of their music. One can grant that the music and lives of these artists might appear chaotic in comparison to the more regulated middle-class experience that proponents of this myth are evidently fleeing, but the latter are confusing dissatisfaction, experimentation, and improvi-

sation in the blues with chaos and anarchy. The open-ended quality of this type of blues is not an indication that it was thrown together haphazardly with no formal structural qualities.

Ultimately the "chaos" myth puts the blues up for grabs, reducing it to a mere collection of found objects. It should not be surprising that the latest step in Fat Possum's production program has been to take samples from R. L. Burnside's blues and subject them to the studio remix process under the guise of making the blues relevant to the contemporary young audience. In other words, they have now supplied the structure and form that the blues apparently formerly lacked.

The preceding discussion may appear unduly pessimistic about the state of blues writing, but I do not want to leave with this impression. There is a great deal of impressive scholarship being produced in the 1990s, and certainly more thorough writing about blues with greater subtlety and analytical depth will help combat the uncritical acceptance of the myths outlined above. As scholars of American music we are particularly well positioned to join in this effort to demythologize the blues—first, by encouraging quality research and writing on the subject, and second, by correcting our students' misconceptions about this venerable tradition.

—David Evans
Memphis State University

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ILLINOIS

spectral frequencies (continued)

In her discussion of *II of IV*, the second in Oliveros's series of tape pieces, composer Linda Dusman turns to Terry Castle's notion of the apparitional lesbian as a way of locating the presence of the composer of acousmatic music during her absence as embodied performer.² The compositional and sonic similarities between *I of IV* and *II of IV* persuade me to consider Castle's ideas more closely. Castle traces the vast and complex images of sexual love between women in literature since the eighteenth century to argue that however prohibited or occluded, lesbianism has functioned as a powerful motif in Western culture. The lesbian as ghost, specter, phantom, apparition persists in writing by both men and women, lesbians and non-lesbians. Although the idea of the lesbian as ghost—without flesh and blood—is homophobic, “[o]ver the past three hundred years,” Castle suggests, “the metaphor has functioned as the necessary psychological means for objectifying—and ultimately embracing—that which otherwise could not be acknowledged.” Furthermore, the apparitional lesbian, the figure of homoerotic possibility, is often “‘brought back to life’—imbued with breadth, heft, and charisma—in the later twentieth-century lesbian imagination.”³

Perhaps lesbians working in the creative arts were awakened by sonic apparitions as well. Before she began composing with electronic media, Oliveros was haunted by sonic images that she found difficult to sketch within the conventional system of Western notation: “I was hearing sound qualities which only much later became accessible to me through electronic means.”⁴ In an interview with William Duckworth in 1995, Oliveros remembers at age sixteen hearing complicated sounds that were part symphonic, part abstract: “[S]ome of it was sensation that I needed to realize as sound, but I didn't know how to do it.”

DUCKWORTH: Did these early sounds intrude on whatever you were doing at the moment, or did you have to be in a certain frame of mind before they would come to you?

OLIVEROS: I was always listening. The first time I heard them, it was like a hypnogogic state except that instead of having vivid visual images, I had vivid sound images. But there it was.

DUCKWORTH: Did it seem like an unusual experience to be having?

OLIVEROS: It seemed euphoric. It was very ecstatic. The only thing that could match it was when I heard my first composition played in class at the university [in Houston]. It was a similar experience. “Wow! I don't want to do anything else but make this music.” That's where the strength to stay with it comes from—from that pleasure, ecstasy, and euphoria.⁵

About *I of IV*, she says, “In this work I proceeded to elaborate a strong mental sonic image.”⁶ For Oliveros, making electronic music, especially *I of IV*, was to realize vividly her sonic apparitions and bring them to life. In particular, the combination tones—normally beyond the range of audibility—are amplified, and appear as new timbral ideas. So startling were these “sounds from a nether realm”⁷ that Oliveros's work in Toronto was sabotaged.⁸ “In one electronic studio I was accused of black art, and the director disconnected line amplifiers to discourage my practices, declaring that signal generators are of no use above or below the audio range because you can't hear them.”⁹

Of course, Oliveros found plenty of use for sub- and super-audio generators in *I of IV*, especially in the climactic “siren melody,” which she gleefully describes to Barry Schrader:

At one point in the piece there's a rather climactic scream-like melody that sweeps through most of the audible range. When that thing started coming out, I didn't expect it; it was incredible and very delightful. I was laughing and was amazed at that particular moment, and I still enjoy that part of the piece. I would hope other people might experience something like that when they listen to I of IV.¹⁰

Oliveros's laughter embodies the pleasure, ecstasy, and euphoria she experienced, as if she were finally greeted by fully fleshed sounds that were ghosts before. For me, in Oliveros's music the erotic is never very far away. To return to Allison's “Demon Lover,” I hear *I of IV* as Katy's sonic counterpart, an undeniable force both apparitional and real. Katy's powerful ability to thrill parallels the effect composing/performing *I of IV* had on Oliveros. Listening to the piece in this way teaches me important lessons about the richness of lesbian life in the twentieth century, a complex cultural presence often misunderstood, unseen, unheard. And just as scholars of lesbian history and literature have had to read between the lines, those of us working in music must listen beyond the sounds to the spectral frequencies and decipher from musical texts their messages of lesbian eroticism.

—Martha Mockus
San Francisco

Editors' Note: This article is a revised excerpt from Mockus's doctoral dissertation, Sounding Out: Lesbian Feminism and the Music of Pauline Oliveros (University of Minnesota, 1999), which won the 1999 Philip Brett Award from the American Musicological Society.

Notes

¹ Dorothy Allison, “Demon Lover,” *Trash* (Firebrand, 1988).

² Linda Dusman, “No Bodies There: Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Performance,” in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond (University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

³ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 60, 55.

⁴ Jane Weiner LePage, “Pauline Oliveros,” *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century* (Scarecrow Press, 1980), 167.

⁵ William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (Schirmer, 1995), 163-64.

⁶ Oliveros, “Career Narrative,” [1973] File W11, Oliveros Archive, U.C. San Diego, 3.

⁷ In “Some Sound Observations,” *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-1980* (Smith Publications, 1984), Oliveros writes: “When I was thirty-two [in 1964] I began to set signal generators beyond the range of hearing and to make electronic music from amplified combination tones. I felt like a witch capturing sounds from a nether realm” (26).

⁸ Katherine Setar confirms that the studio referred to is the one at the University of Toronto; see Setar, *An Evolution in Listening: An Analytical and Critical Study of Structural, Acoustic, and Phenomenal Aspects of Selected Works by Pauline Oliveros* (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1997), 219-20.

⁹ Oliveros, “Some Sound Observations,” 27.

¹⁰ Barry Schrader, “Interview with Pauline Oliveros: *I of IV*,” *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music* (Prentice Hall, 1982), 186.

Passionate Victorian (continued)

Block chooses to present Beach as an experimenter, attempting to dispel the general perception of her as an old-fashioned composer and to give her work relevance in the new century.

This approach is most apparent in the chapter "Beach the Modernist?," which begins, "Beach a modernist? How can that be? No discussion of her as a composer has ever judged her anything but a Victorian, a late Romantic composer and, during her later years, an anachronism in a new age. What has been almost universally ignored has been the adventurousness of some of Beach's music written during her last decades ..." Although her argument is intriguing, it is not entirely convincing. Beach's attempts to integrate some contemporary techniques late in her career seem too little, too late. As Block herself points out, "her first modernizing experiments followed well behind those of European colleagues." Furthermore, Beach publicly rebuked the modern movement, making it difficult to imagine that she would have wanted to be considered a modernist composer.

While the reader can appreciate the changes in Beach's style, Block essentially demonstrates that even her musical experiments were conservative and that her writing remained fairly conventional throughout her career. In the end, Block's attempt to place the composer in the context of modernism is a historiographical problem for the biographer: perhaps it was easier to try to fit a square Beach into a round modernist hole than to reformulate cultural history and to recognize that Beach's world—her music, her style and her artistic circle—formed a counterpoint to the more avant-garde world of the 1920s and 1930s.

Ultimately, the story of Beach's life—as well as her subsequent obscurity and the recent revival of her music—is most informed by gender issues and the changing cultural landscape. Block's biography opens up the possibilities for inquiry into both issues, forcing us to re-evaluate Beach's career and her music on terms that recognize the complexity of her life and of the times in which she lived.

—Laurie Blunsom
Northeastern University

New Music Notes (continued)

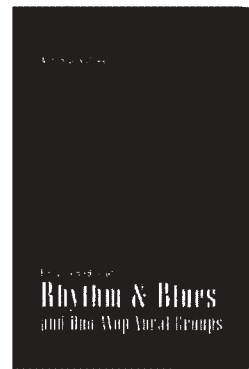
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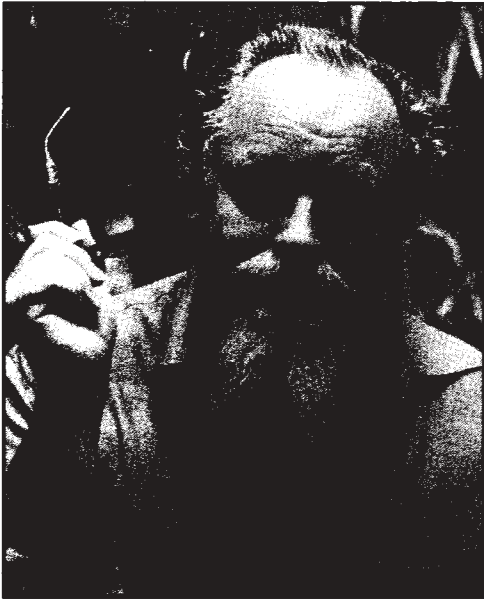


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