

Institute for Studies In American Music

Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume XXX, No. 2

Spring 2001

Ruth Crawford Seeger's Different Tunes

by Judith Tick

*My mother was exotic, she was like
a gypsy queen;
I'd pretend she wasn't mine when
I was fifteen;
Her voice was loud, she wore men's
shoes, she braided up her hair;
Men would stop and stare.
Her clothes were few and seldom
new, she was always out of style;
She was always nagging me,
she would treat me like a child;
Sometimes I wished I had a mother
like the rest -
Sometimes she was so lovely that it
took away my breath.*

—Peggy Seeger,
“Different Tunes”¹



Ruth, Michael, Charles, and Peggy Seeger, ca. 1937
Photo courtesy of Michael Seeger

Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901-1953) left
an important legacy in American

music as a modernist composer and as a leader in the American folk song revival movement, which she helped to initiate in the 1930s and 1940s. We who write about female composers and women's history in Western classical music are keenly aware that our historical subjects are different, so casually have most of them been discarded as “out of style” in the sense that they have typically been neglected in mainstream historical narratives. Thus, for our subjects and perhaps equally for ourselves, the question is: how do we weave our different tunes into the counterpoint of Western music history?

Several interrelated factors account for Crawford's recent rebirth within American music history. First is the emergence of a school of American serial composers in the 1950s and 1960s. When a few American composer/theorists turned their attention to earlier manifestations of serial interest in the 1920s, they encountered Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*. One transformative moment occurred in 1960. In his pioneering article about the origins of American atonal and serial practices, George Perle wrote a crucial assessment of Crawford's contributions:

The *String Quartet 1931* of Ruth Crawford is an original and inventive work whose numerous “experimental” features in no way detract from its spontaneity, freshness, and general musicality...In some respects serial procedures are suggested.²

Perle had never forgotten a performance of the *String Quartet 1931* that he had heard at a concert at Columbia University in New York on 15 March 1949.³ He later recalled how he “knew nothing about Ruth Crawford Seeger,” first encountering her name only on an edition of music by her pupil Vivian Fine. “It mentioned that she had studied with Ruth Crawford Seeger. That was the first time I heard of her. Remember in those days if you ran into somebody who heard of Alban Berg, you got excited. People have no idea of the isolation of composers.”⁴ Ten years later, Perle oversaw a performance of the *String Quartet 1931* in Davis, California, communicating his enthusiasm for this work directly to Crawford's husband, Charles Seeger. “I am

Inside This Issue

Remembering
Mark Tucker 4

In a Mist: Thoughts
on Ken Burns's *Jazz*
by Robin Kelley ... 8

Making Music Modern
Review by
David Nicholls ... 11

Different Tunes (continued)

delighted to learn that Miss Crawford's Quartet will be recorded. Apparently there are other people who share my interest in this work!"⁵

In fact, many other people would share Perle's excitement. Reviews of the first complete recording of Ruth Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* on the Columbia Masterworks label appeared the following year. In 1961 the composer-critic Eric Salzman headed an enthusiastic review of the Amati Quartet's recording with the title, "Distaff Disk. Ruth Seeger's Work Ahead of Its Era."⁶ In 1973 a new recording of the *String Quartet 1931*, performed by the Composers Quartet, was released on the Nonesuch label, along with quartets by George Perle and Milton Babbitt. Teresa Sterne, Director of Nonesuch from 1965 through 1980, recalled how the recording came about:

The Ruth Crawford quartet certainly wasn't what we started out with as a concept for the record. The recording started off with the Milton Babbitt String Quartet no. 2. (The Composers Quartet were the only ones who could play it at the time.) The Ruth Crawford quartet was an afterthought. They were going to do the Babbitt and it was Josh Rifkin who suggested the Perle. We needed more music, and I just said "Ruth Crawford" to Anahid Ajemian, and she said, "What a marvelous idea. It's a great idea. We've played it." We used that just as a filler, and it turned out that it became the spark that brought attention to the other works.⁷

The record elicited rave reviews from eminent New York critics, who deliberately widened the frame of reference for the piece by linking it to the most contemporary trends—for example, Andrew Porter, writing in *The New Yorker*, made Crawford's precedence explicit:

Influences are harder to discern than pointers to the future. Some of Elliott Carter's rhythmic procedures are foreshadowed in the first movement, and while the softly shifting cluster-chords of the slow movement may owe something to Berg's *Lyric Suite*, closer parallels can be found in Ligeti and Lutoslawski compositions of recent years.⁸

John Rockwell noted in *High Fidelity*:

The quartet lasts about ten minutes and is in all ways a masterpiece. To our ears what might seem most immediately striking is the uncanny anticipation of later developments, particularly in Carter's independent part-writing and

metrical explorations. But strictly on its own terms the quartet makes extraordinary expressive sense.⁹

Had Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* not been reissued in the early 1970s, the continuity between her work and contemporary post-serial trends might not have been noticed. This second recording was produced because of the cultural activity associated with the Bicentennial of the American Revolution (1976) and a renaissance of national interest in the history of American classical music. Thus an early retrospective concert entirely devoted to Crawford's work by the Performers' Committee for Twentieth-Century Music in 1975 elicited this reviewer's comment: "Here is a composer we will be hearing much of during the bicentenary celebrations, but who should survive in the repertory long after that."¹⁰

In the early 1970s, Matilda Gaume chose Ruth Crawford as the subject for her doctoral dissertation—the first full-length study of Crawford's work.¹¹ Renewed attention paid to Charles Ives in this decade spilled over onto subsequent generations of "experimental" composers, including Crawford. Under the guidance of H. Wiley Hitchcock, who along with the historian Vivian Perlis contributed so much to the Charles Ives revival in the 1970s, music historian Rita Mead began her research on Henry Cowell. Because Cowell advocated for and published Crawford's music during her lifetime, Mead provided details about Crawford's career.¹²

Another factor influencing the reception of Crawford's music had to do with the cultural feminist movement. Crawford's stature and symbolic resonance within the emerging women's history movement intensified from the 1970s onward. While her first biographer Matilda Gaume does not consider herself a "feminist" scholar, in Gaume's invaluable set of interviews with Crawford's family and friends in the late 1960s, she asked many questions about Crawford's life as a woman as well as an artist, as did Mead.¹³ To Mead we owe the first recounting of Charles Ives's resistance to Cowell's proposal that he underwrite the recording of the slow movement from Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* because it had been written by a woman.¹⁴

For Teresa Sterne, who did not welcome what she calls the "ghetto-izing of all women," producing the Nonesuch recording of the *String Quartet 1931* was, as she recalled in 1999:

the beginning of my immersion [in Crawford's music]. She and her story and her music became a fixed star in my mind. If she hadn't been a woman, that genius and that spark would have been not only encouraged, but would have been welcomed and would have been promoted.¹⁵

The *String Quartet 1931* continued to enhance Crawford's reputation. In 1975 a performance of the orchestral arrangement of the Andante movement from the quartet occurred at a highly publicized concert by the New York Philharmonic. Devoted to female composers, the concert was sponsored by a feminist publishing collective for *Ms.* magazine, and the orchestra was conducted by Sarah Caldwell. In 1980 Jeannie Pool organized a one-day Conference/Workshop on Twentieth Century String Quartets by Women Composers. It was dedicated to Crawford's memory, and her pic-

Continued on page 12

ISAM Newsletter Vol. XXX, No. 2 / ISSN: 0145-8396

Editors..... Ellie M. Hisama and Ray Allen

Managing Editor J. Graeme Fullerton

Contributing Editors H. Wiley Hitchcock
Carol J. Oja
Jeff Taylor

Computer Consultant David Latulippe

Production Assistant Kathleen Mason Krotman

The ISAM Newsletter is published in the Fall and Spring. Copyright 2001 by the Institute for Studies in American Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 2900 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11210.

Tel: 718-951-5655 Fax: 718-951-4858

Email: <isam@brooklyn.cuny.edu>

Website: <<http://dephome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>>

Robert Starer

Robert Starer, composer, author, and member of the music faculty at Brooklyn College from 1963 to 1991, died on 22 April. Highlights of his long career include ballet scores for Martha Graham; symphonic works performed by major orchestras under such conductors as Mitropoulos, Steinberg, Bernstein, and Mehta; a violin concerto written for and premiered by Itzhak Perlman; three operas, two on librettos by his long-time collaborator, the writer Gail Godwin; and an acclaimed memoir, *Continuo: A Life in Music*. Two Guggenheim Fellowships and an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters are among his many honors.

Brooklyn College, of course, took rightful pride in listing a person of such significant accomplishments and international reputation as a member of the faculty. But Robert also gave to the college in ways that did not bring him fame or prizes but that profoundly affected our department and the students and faculty with whom he worked. A number of his compositions were premiered by our ensembles and continue to be part of their regular repertory. Robert's *Invocation for Trumpet and Winds* and his settings of Norman Rosten's poem *Brooklyn Bridge* and Thomas Wolfe's short story *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn* were performed at this year's joint concert of the Conservatory Wind Ensemble and Choruses on 8 May.

Robert brought to his teaching a wide-ranging intellect and an unusual openness to new ideas. His presence on our faculty attracted many composition majors, but his approach to teaching theory through composing also encouraged students concentrating in performance and other areas of music to explore their creative potential. Student recitals could be surprising events, with contributions ranging from string quartets to rock 'n' roll. And although his own compositional activities were confined to instrumental and vocal media, he played a seminal role in establishing the college's electronic music studio, now the Center for Computer Music, which for many years was the only such facility at a public college east of the Rocky Mountains. Robert was also committed to bringing music to general audiences. I recall him performing his piano miniatures, *Sketches in Color*, for hundreds of undergraduate music appreciation students, engaging them in a dialogue about the materials, structure, and expressive qualities of each piece. To commemorate Robert's advocacy of bringing contemporary music to wide audiences, the Conservatory is planning to permanently endow an award he established two years ago for student performances of works by living composers.

I was a totally inexperienced graduate teaching fellow when I first met Robert, who had been sent by the chairman to observe me teaching an introduction to theory class. I don't recall his comments except for one general, almost off-hand remark about being a teacher that made a tremendous impression at the time and has helped me in many situations over the years. He said, "I don't believe in playing God." To the world, Robert left a rich legacy of beautiful and moving music. Those of us to whom he was a friend and mentor will treasure his compassion and generosity, which inspire us to nurture and call upon the best in ourselves.

—Nancy Hager
Brooklyn College

ISAM Matters

Brooklyn College will long remember **Robert Starer** as musician, teacher, and friend. Our heartfelt sympathies go to **Gail Godwin** and **Daniel Starer**. Contributions to endow the Robert Starer Performance Award, established by Robert to promote the performance of music by living composers, may be made payable to the Brooklyn College Foundation (memo: Robert Starer Fund) and sent to the Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College, 2900 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11210.

* * *

In anticipation of the conference **Ruth Crawford Seeger: Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music** to be held on 26-27 October 2001 at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, we are delighted to be publishing **Judith Tick's** article "Ruth Crawford Seeger's Different Tunes." Professor Tick will deliver the keynote address at the conference. We deeply appreciate the support of the New York Council for the Humanities and the Baisley Powell Elebash Endowment. For further information, see the schedule on p. 13 or visit <depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>.

As part of our ongoing colloquium series produced in cooperation with the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities, **Robin D. G. Kelley** packed the house in February with his lecture "'Let's Call This': Monk's Challenge to Bebop." Professor Kelley will return to Brooklyn College on 11-15 March 2002 as the Robert L. Hess Scholar in Residence. During his residency, he will deliver a college-wide lecture, give several talks on his research, meet with students and faculty, and be honored at a formal dinner. Professor Kelley's article on Ken Burns's ten-part *Jazz* documentary, shown nationwide on PBS in January 2001, appears in this issue of the *Newsletter*.

If you missed our spring conference **Local Music/Global Connections: New York City at the Millennium**, you can still catch the music of New York's ethnic and immigrant communities at the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall held in Washington, D.C. on 27 June–1 July and 4-8 July. For information on the Festival, call (202) 633-9884 or visit <www.folklife.si.edu/festival2001info.htm>. To order the new Smithsonian Folkways CD set that captures the polycultural sounds of New York, please see the announcement on p. 15.

This year's winner of the ISAM student composition award is **Antonio Massa Viana's** *Macumba*, scored for keyboard percussion, timpani, and piano. Antonio is studying composition with **Douglas Cohen**.

* * *

During **Mark Tucker's** battle with cancer, he kept writing for the *Newsletter*—he didn't miss a single one. This issue contains a set of remembrances and appreciations of Mark delivered at St. Peter's Church in New York last February. The Institute will be publishing a selection of his *Behind the Beat* columns and *Newsletter* articles as a booklet, and we would be grateful to our readers for assistance in funding this project. Please send contributions to the Institute payable to the Brooklyn College Foundation (memo: Mark Tucker Fund).

—Ellie M. Hisama

Remembering Mark Tucker

Over the past few months I imagine many of us who knew Mark Tucker have felt the sudden urge to pick up the phone, draft a note, or send a quick e-mail, followed by an acute pang of loss. This happened to me a few weeks ago when I played Ellington's recording of "The Single Petal of A Rose" for a jazz history seminar. After an intense silence, one of my students, deeply moved, exclaimed: "that's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard." Since it was Mark who first led me to appreciate the wonders of Ellington's solo piano artistry, particularly through his own eloquent performances, I was saddened I couldn't share that moment with him.

I met Mark during my first year of graduate school at the University of Michigan. He had finished his doctorate there a few months before I arrived, and cast a long shadow: students seemed awed by him and faculty struggled for superlatives when describing his work in their classes. As a somewhat insecure entering student, I remember wondering what all the fuss was about. When I heard Mark's brilliant paper on Ellington's "East St. Louis Toodle-oo," at the 1986 AMS meeting in Cleveland, I found out. His dissertation on Ellington (later revised and published as *Ellington: The Early Years*) remained in my study carrel for years—an inspiring testament to what was possible in my discipline.

Though we shared a shyness and reserve, Mark became a kind and generous friend, and perhaps no one supported me more as my own professional career unfolded. I regret now that I didn't seek him out more often, especially during the several years we both lived in New York; he had a way of firing my imagination with a soft, seemingly off-hand remark. But I'm comforted in knowing his unique and creative voice will continue to speak through a rich written legacy. Whether Mark was contributing to scholarly books or journals, or to the more casual forum of this *Newsletter*, his prose was highly *personal* in the best sense of that word: though the scholarship was impeccable, and the arguments deftly shaped, the reader never lost the direct link to the sensitive musician at the helm.

On 2 February 2001 a moving memorial service for Mark was held at St. Peter's Church in Manhattan. For many of us, the sadness of the occasion was tempered by the delight at seeing old friends, some of whom would not have entered our lives had we not had the fortune of knowing Mark. Between musical tributes from pianists Neely Bruce, Harris Simon, and Bruce Barth, friends, colleagues and family shared reminiscences. The selections included below give a varied and heartfelt portrait of this remarkable man.

—Jeff Taylor

My Oldest Friend

I was seven and Mark six when we met for the first time at Hyde Park Elementary School in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was younger than the rest of us in second grade but seemed older—more serious, indrawn. An air of melancholy, like that of a doomed Puritan in a Hawthorne tale, surrounded him even then. (Throughout his life it never really lifted except when he would sit down at the piano and play or sing. Performing seemed to let Mark overcome, however briefly, his unnatural shyness.)

But we liked each other. It turned out he lived two doors down and for the next three years we saw each other almost every day. We sang in the church choir, and during the summer our families would picnic together on Friday and Saturday nights at one of Cincinnati's emerald array of public parks, some of them designed, like New York's, by Frederick Law Olmsted.

Whatever intellectual curiosity I had at that age, which wasn't much, I picked up from Mark. He also had a highly precocious moral sense, an innate kindness, qualities I was much slower to emulate.

One memory from those years: My grandmother, who had devoted her life to missionary work all over India, lived with us in Cincinnati. To me she was the old woman who, because she ate her curry so slowly, delayed my getting up from the dinner table every evening to go out and play. But Mark was fascinated by her story. He would come over not to visit me but to listen to her talk about India. She taught him to write his name in Hindi and to make Indian food, and he in turn made her feel treasured and important. It took me another twenty years to realize how unusual my grandmother was, something Mark realized at seven.

I think his wonderful first book, the collaboration on the autobiography of the musician Garvin Bushell, comes from that same kind of empathy for people whose lives, in terms of typical American experience, were quietly strange and different.

He lived such a life himself. Many books are still to be written analyzing why so many generations of white middle-class Americans and Europeans, and now Asians, throughout the twentieth century, took so much mental and emotional and spiritual nourishment from black American popular music, especially jazz and blues. We didn't grow up with those sounds. Mark and I discovered jazz on our own, without much encouragement from parents or teachers but with lots of reinforcement from each other.

Music of all kinds formed the bond for our friendship for thirty years. I still write about jazz on occasion as a journalist, while Mark became one of its foremost scholars and transcribers, as well as a pianist with deep knowledge of its vast repertoire. His books on Ellington, his unfinished writings on Monk, and his brave attempt to define the long, fractious history of "Jazz" itself in the revised *Grove Dictionary of Music* will be read well into this new century.

His father, brother, wife, and two children miss him beyond words and, as someone who admired him most of my life, I share their grief. He was my oldest friend.

—Richard B. Woodward

Mentoring Mark: Notes from a Correspondence

Ann Arbor, January 14, 1980

Dear Professor Crawford:

I've rewritten parts of this paper, incorporating most of your stylistic suggestions . . . I agree that the "there is" construction is a bit flabby . . . Nevertheless . . . [and the student then explains why that construction has survived in the rewrite.]

May 9, 1980

Dear Professor Crawford:

I have a few comments about the form and procedure of the seminar. I hope you don't mind my offering suggestions—just some personal reactions to the course. [A page of tactful criticisms follows.]

March 4, 1981 [After founding the Society for the Promotion of American Music (SPAM), as a University of Michigan student organization]:

Dear Professor Crawford:

Just because I'm gung ho about a lot of American music doesn't mean I get a kick out of dumping on Massenet, Monteverdi, or any other European [composer] . . . I hope in SPAM we've been careful not to fall prey to . . . cultural chauvinism.

June 8, 1981

Dear Rich and Penny:

Now that the soreness has gone from my arms [after a long session of splitting firewood] and the mosquito welts have gone down a bit . . . I'd like to write and tell you how much I enjoyed last weekend at your cabin in the pines.

August 16, 1981

Dear Rich:

Been playing with and working on arrangements for Misbehavin' [a female vocal jazz trio], all the while getting more fascinated by so-called "swing" music (i.e., 1930s dance band & small group variety), marveling at how difficult it is to play well. As in so many other types of [such] music, the surface simplicity or economy of means bely the subtleties involved in producing the sounds, making it flow and sound so effortless... This isn't to say I can sound like Teddy Wilson or Billy Kyle or Jess Stacy, but I'm listening to these guys and trying to learn.

August 22, 1982 [From Tolman Pond, New Hampshire]

Dear Rich:

It's grey and a bit cool and . . . the trees are already beginning to turn. The chill in the air tells of fall, too. I suppose it didn't help much to look in the mirror . . . and note that there's even less hair on my head than I imagined. . . People always used to tell me I was "old beyond my years." I suppose I took pride in this, and now maybe early baldness is one of this sin's wages.

September 14, 1983 [To his dissertation advisor]

Dear Rich:

What interests me most right now about this subject are the specific...forces that shaped Ellington's early career...the achievement-oriented elementary and secondary schools; the music in the-

atres; community bands and orchestras; the activity in the world of black concert...music in D.C.; segregation in Washington and black pride; Ellington's strong, close-knit family...I don't want to write about what makes Ellington great, at least right now—I'd like to understand what makes Ellington Ellington....

And finally, from a note received in October 1981:

Dear Rich:

I was saddened to hear of your father's death. At least he is beyond the pain and suffering now, for which one can be thankful even while mourning the loss.

Let the memory of the man fortify your spirit and lift up your heart.

Mark

—Rich Crawford

Eloquence at Columbia

I knew Mark at Michigan, where he stood out as an exceptionally sweet and talented graduate student when I was a young assistant professor, so that when he appeared a few years later on our short list at Columbia I knew right away that he was the one we wanted. Even though the search that brought him to us was in much earlier music, and some of our senior colleagues had to be convinced that jazz was a worthy subject of scholarship, the case was so clear: Mark's effortless musicianship informed every word he uttered and every note he played. As a teacher he had that rare quality of sounding at once relaxed and riveting. I heard one student stop in simple wonderment when he tried to describe Mark's



Mark Tucker

Photo courtesy of Carol J. Oja

teaching; it was clear he was groping for the word that would sum up what had been an amazingly rich experience. He finally said, haltingly: "he was just... so... ELOQUENT!" Naturally, Mark won the only teaching award the university gave to junior faculty.

At Columbia, Mark was a beacon of radiant calm and friendliness; talking to him always made me feel like I was coming home. Graduate students were bowled over by his warmth and mentorship. Sensing a perennial need in the curriculum, he inaugurated a course in writing about music which is still talked about. Words mattered to him; he believed in the handwritten letter, and he recommended the books that most engaged him (a stunner was *A Time of Gifts* by Patrick Leigh Fermor).

After Mark got tenure at Columbia in 1995, he was honored to become the first recipient of the Edwin H. Case Chair in Jazz and American Music. At last all the efforts he had made to establish

Remembering Mark Tucker (continued)

jazz at the university were not regarded suspiciously as mere ploys to get tenure, but recognized as innovations. When Mark spoke about Thelonious Monk at the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia last April, he had so clearly moved to a new level of achievement—where thinking, being, speaking, and playing were completely all of a piece, all just brilliant poetry—that the audience was left gasping. My young ethnomusicology colleague Aaron Fox, who had heard me and Bob O’Meally and others talking about Mark for months and months, came up to me after Mark’s talk and said, kind of reverently: “You’re right. He’s the real thing.”

In 1931, Duke Ellington wrote: “The music of my race is something which is going to live, something which posterity will honor in a higher sense than merely that of the music of the ballroom today.” And Mark’s own music is going to live: in Carol, the love of his life, in his beautiful children, in his family and friends, in his students, in his audiences, in his readers. I never stopped missing Mark when he and Carol left New York in 1997. I never will.

—Elaine Sisman

Making a Difference

I first met Mark when I was an undergraduate at Columbia. I stepped into his jazz history course, and life began to change for me. I remember the stories he told about Bessie Smith that day, and of course he often brought the music alive through his own performances. We always looked forward to the moments when he made the piano sing, sometimes channeling Monk, sometimes Ellington, sometimes Morton.

Mark treated each figure with respect, even as he attempted to demystify the music-making process. He was opinionated, but it was rare that he let personal prejudices interfere with his attempts to understand a musical situation. Music was something people created by thinking and working hard, by practicing, by experimenting—it didn’t come out of thin air.

While I often refer to Mark’s publications, what stood out in his teaching—and what remains with me today—was his attention to inequality in America, as it has been played out in terms of class, gender and race. His commitment to black music was the most obvious sign of how he cared (both about the music and about the unique conditions encountered by African American musicians). So, as he urged me to craft the most evocative prose to describe a musical moment, Mark’s comments also encouraged work that demonstrated social and political engagement.

I will hold on to what Mark’s example gave to me: how to live with grace under pressure, to have faith in the face of adversity, and to act, write, and teach with consideration for others—with such deep concern for one’s fellow travelers. I’ll always appreciate what he taught me about music and its many resonances in our lives. And alongside that, I can call on what his example taught me about how I’d like to live, and about the enormous potential we all have to make a difference in this world.

—Charles Garrett

Mark’s Humor

I’ll touch on a single aspect of Mark: his humor. It was not the thigh-slapping, haw-haw sort but an undercurrent that surfaced quietly in his writing.

Mark liked to quote with devilish pleasure something humorous he’d found in print—as in *Folio* (July 1871):

We don’t like Peter Phillips, the Singing Pilgrim. . . . He filters all his hymns through his nose, and has an unpleasant way of repeating the last line of each verse. . . . The effect of “His bowels melt with love” was not pretty when sung thus: “His bowels melt with love, his bow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wowels melt with love.”

I used to have the Virginia Diner send cans of its peanuts as gifts to friends. Toward Christmas 1997, not long after Carol and Mark arrived in Williamsburg, I got a letter from him, exulting:

I made a pilgrimage yesterday. To the Diner. To The Diner. To The Virginia Diner in Wakefield, about a 45-minute trip by car and ferry. . . . It was a brilliant sunny day, the kind of day when you just want to jump in your jalopy and burn up fossil fuel as you meander down the blue highways of southeastern Virginia. [Then Mark penned a map of his route, with the legend “Scale: ¼” = 5-7 miles”]. Now you’re oriented, yes? Inside The Diner, all was cozy and comforting. A flat-picky arrangement of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” came over the Muzak system—you expected Tammy and George? No, this was no roadside greasy spoon. . . . So what did I order? I went with a cup of coffee and a warm slice of the Diner’s “World Famous Peanut Pie.” How was it? Superb, delicious, and odd. . . . hearty and filling, good for at least 5,000 calories, I reckon. . . . Afterwards I passed a billboard that said “EAT VIRGINIA PEANUTS” and also, “Near this sign is the spot where the first peanuts were grown in America.” (By Native Americans? I wondered. How did they know?) Where do peanuts come from, anyway—Africa, China, Babylon?

The next spring (April 1998), after a visit of mine to Williamsburg and the Tucker/Oja ménage, a letter from Mark began this way:

Just after you left I developed a bad head cold. So you timed your visit well. . . . Yesterday I felt up to doing very little. I did read, with pleasure, almost all of [James Hynes’s book] Publish and Perish. Just the thing for a sniffly scholar. . . . I’ve always remembered C. S. Lewis’s description of his ultimate fantasy—to be slightly sick and holed up in a sunlit room in a tower over the sea, reading some medieval epic or other. Well, this ain’t no seaside tower, but sitting in a rocking chair on the screened porch, overlooking the green canopy of trees in the back woods, and reading about academic skullduggery comes pretty close to ideal.

Mark reported son Wynn’s inquiring, a few days after an overnight stay of mine: “How’s that friend of yours?” “What friend?” “The one whose name begins with Y.” From then on, Mark began his letters with either “Dear Yley” or Dear “Y”—occasionally “Hy Y.” . . . Bye, Mark.

—H. Wiley Hitchcock

Deep in the Keys

I met Mark Tucker about twelve years ago, during my first days as a faculty member at Columbia University. My friend Arnold Rampersad, the literary biographer, had told me to seek him out as a kindred spirit. And Mark *was* a kindred spirit, a quiet, immeasurably gifted man. He was one whom surely his hero Duke Ellington would have given the highest of accolades: Mark Tucker was a person *beyond category*.

Where do we find gifts like Mark's clustered together in a single human being? Drivingly energetic intellectual and writer whose three books are standard reading for those who would understand Ellington and the world of early jazz; favorite teacher—one whose students tell you, years later, something that Professor Tucker first made clear to them; rock-steady piano player who played "deep in the keys," as he said of Ellington and Thelonious Monk. In a faculty study group with scholars and musicians and public intellectuals, Mark was the only member who belonged to *all three groups*.

What stands out for me in Mark's work is the passion, the *soulfulness*. I remember Mark speaking quietly to an intensely interested group of children at the Harlem School of the Arts. I remember Mark at a conference in North Carolina, playing a section of Ellington's *Queen's Suite* and surprising everybody by singing an old song, from Duke's mother's era, that he had detected in the piece's deep structure. I recall one of Mark's first Ellington essays, arguing for the richness of the black D.C. cultural scene and for Ellington as a composer who celebrated that scene by creating works that were as big and as ambitious as a European symphony but which remained true to the alleyways and showplaces and blue-light dancehalls and churches Duke had known as a boy in Washington. And I recall a Monk lecture Mark delivered at Columbia University last spring—one of the most brilliant academic performances I have ever seen—exploring Monk's "radical anti-virtuosic" approach to the piano and his proclivity for playing "deep in the keys."

He was an impassioned professional, a generous man who often followed up conversations with a letter (who else writes such letters anymore?). Sometimes he would surprise me with a special recording coming in the mail, something he made as he reflected on something we had been saying. This is professional collegueship to an Ellingtonian power! Professionalism for Mark was a form of undying love. He was a quiet, shy man who sometimes would surprise you with a hug or with a smile that would light up a room. He was a giant of a scholar and warrior in the battle to establish a superior form of jazz scholarship. He was a moving artist, and a true friend.

At a conference last year in Lisbon, the marvelous Ellington singer Alice Babs played a tape of herself singing a beautiful tribute to Ellington called "Thanks for Everything"—sung to the tune of Billy Strayhorn's "Lotus Blossom." No one, not even Mark, could keep his eyes from glistening. That's what I want to say to this lovely man, as deeply in the keys as I can put it: Mark, thanks for working with such love and loving us so well. *Thanks for everything.*

—Bob O'Meally



THE BALLAD BOOK OF JOHN JACOB NILES

John Jacob Niles

"His most ambitious effort
in a long and rich career."
—*New York Times*

"His comments are as
valuable as the songs are
beautiful. . . . A marvelous
book."—*Washington Post*

\$30.00 paper, ISBN 0-8131-0987-6

OLD-TIME KENTUCKY FIDDLE TUNES

Jeff Todd Titon

Includes a CD of 26 rare recordings

"Documents this remarkable Kentucky folk heritage in an
engaging way that will appeal to musicians and scholars
throughout the country."—Ron Pen

\$45.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8131-2200-7

PLAY OF A FIDDLE

Traditional Music, Dance,
and Folklore in West Virginia

Gerald Milnes

"Essential reading for anyone interested in mountain music."
—*Goldenseal*

"Combines his passion for the subject and his abiding respect
for the people of West Virginia with carefully researched
material and his own field notes and recordings."—*Choice*

\$35.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8131-2080-2

COUNTRY MUSIC ANNUAL 2001

Edited by Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson

Contains essays on country music pioneer Henry Gilliland,
country music television, alternative country, Ernest Tubb's
musical roots, the Carter Family's rhythms, and country
music's relation to NASCAR, among many others.

\$20.00 paper, ISBN 0-8131-0990-6

COUNTRY MUSIC ANNUAL 2000

Edited by Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson

"These days, some of the hottest scholarly debates resound
with the beats and melodies of popular music."
—*Chronicle of Higher Education*

Contains essays on Hollywood and Nashville, country music's
relationship to religion, country music in the classroom, Minnie
Pearl, and country music in Los Angeles, among many others.

\$20.00 paper, ISBN 0-8131-0989-2

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS OF

KENTUCKY

At bookstores • 800/839-6855 • www.kentuckypress.com

In a Mist: Thoughts on Ken Burns's *Jazz*

I must begin with a confession: I served as one of those elusive advisors for Ken Burns's *Jazz*. While I was a minor player in this big band of scholars, I must bear some responsibility for the final outcome. Let me emphasize some, because in the end this incredibly ambitious and at times startlingly beautiful film is Ken Burns's vision of history—a cinematic vision that is characteristically linear, epic, heroic, masculine, and personality-driven. As advisors, our job was not to challenge the prevailing theory of history, but to get the facts straight, suggest lines of inquiry (for which there might be good visuals) and provide the much needed academic stamp of approval.

In publishing some of my thoughts about the series, my intention is neither to attack nor promote *Jazz*. While there are the obvious problems of omission, elision, and hyperbole, not to mention the reinscription of historical myths (e.g., jazz originated in New Orleans and then came up the river), I am more concerned with the construction of historical narratives and how they might reflect an implicit political agenda. The narrative that Burns and scriptwriter Geoffrey Ward present is commonsensical and at times compelling: slave songs and spirituals, transformed by emancipation, gave birth to the blues and ragtime, which begat early jazz, leading to swing, then bebop, then post-bop, avant-garde, fusion, and the neo-renaissance. This is the evolution of “jazz” in neat packages, each “stage” with differing degrees of blues roots. It is a linear history made clean by knitting together scraps of memory, recordings, and critical writings but framed largely by the marketing strategies of record companies and a jazz canon invented by critics whose livelihoods often depend on “jazz” publications. It all makes for good film, which is precisely what Ken Burns's *Jazz* is supposed to be.

What such a narrative cannot accommodate is the slipperiness of these musical categories, how the lines distinguishing so-called jazz from blues, or R&B, or “free jazz,” or rock and roll, and even older black vernacular musics are not so sharp. The sharpening of the boundaries has more to do with marketing records and artists, or the declarations of those who claim to speak for the music. Perhaps this is part of the legitimation process of making jazz “high art” or “fine art” as critic Albert Murray might put it. We can claim that jazz has its own historical epochs not unlike Europe's Baroque, Classical, Romantic, or modernist periods. The problem, of course, is that to divide European music into these grand eras is to invent fictive containers intended to make a diversity of musical styles and practices comprehensible and coherent long after their creation.

The word “jazz” functions the same way, except that its association with high culture is a relatively recent phenomenon. By treating jazz as a discrete, uncontested, clearly defined canon, Burns's documentary cannot acknowledge musicians' ambivalence toward the word. Max Roach campaigned against the term, Duke Ellington found it too limiting, Charles Mingus was never comfortable with it. To question the very label is to question the boundaries we've erected around the music. Why, for example, should we accept the line of reasoning that bebop arose out of the decline of swing? Perhaps the line we should draw is between swing and rock and roll, the newest dance music, which also incorporates some elements we identify with bebop through figures like Louis

Jordan. What do we make of the fact that Dinah Washington recorded blues, jazz, pop songs, and gospel all at the same time? How did she understand these categories and did she change her style to fit each one?¹

Had the documentary devoted more time to the last forty years, there is no way the problem of defining jazz could have been avoided. From 1960 onward, even as it achieved a stature as full-blown art music worthy of repertory, the very category of jazz was stretched and questioned at every turn—whether it was through Lou Donaldson's funky dance rhythms, the humorous eclecticism of Rahsaan Roland Kirk, or Fred Ho's revolutionary Afro-Asian fusions. But rather than treat this as a dynamic moment in the history of jazz or evidence of the music's elastic quality, the documentary presents the late 1960s through the 1970s as a period of decline. What saves jazz are the Reagan-era young lions like the Marsalis brothers who return to jazz's “true” roots—a narrative I doubt any of the “young lions,” including Wynton, are comfortable with.

The film's emphasis on the epic hero is symptomatic of a general inability to recognize “community”—a musician's community, a dancer's community, an African American community, and various overlapping communities that make up the world of jazz. It is an unfortunate absence, for the essence of jazz (if there is such a thing) is the conversational, collective, interactive character of the music. New ideas come out of collective work, improvisation, and competition but also from musicians educating each other. Contrary to the film's claims, Louis Armstrong did not invent “swing” and Charlie Parker alone did not invent “bebop” phrasing. Rhythmic and harmonic innovations came from many people and exchanges, in the big bands of Earl Hines, Cab Calloway, Billy Eckstine, in the after-hours jam sessions, in the living room of Mary Lou Williams, in conversations on the bandstand, in the subway, or at the back of the tour bus. To know how the music changed and developed, we need to understand how the community worked.

And I mean worked. The film overlooks the conditions of musicians' labor—the venues, the cabaret laws, recording contracts, pay scales, the union and how it functions, or the various ways race structures inequality in the music world. The conditions of labor deserve an entire book, but let us consider how the American Federation of Musicians dealt with pay scales for jazz and “popular” musicians versus concert artists. In 1936, according to Local 802's handbook, musicians in dance bands received a minimum of \$42 for a seven-day workweek consisting of five-hour evenings and three three-hour matinees, or forty-four hours of work. Concert performers earned \$60 for six evenings of four-hour performances, or twenty-four hours of work. They were also entitled to an additional \$10 for Sunday evening concerts.²

Jazz musicians were sometimes paid like sharecroppers. Club owners were known to start a bar tab and deduct drinks from their salary, and there are many stories of callous employers who exploited musicians with drinking problems. But if the alcohol affected one's playing, it could result in the loss of a gig. Club owners wanted to make sure these artists could attract a substantial paying audience, which sometimes resulted in limits placed on their creativity in order to please the crowd. That jazz musicians have

been historically underpaid goes without saying. Charlie Parker used to ridicule club owners on stage when he would slyly introduce his band or the next act: "The management has gone to gr-r-r-r-r-reat expense to bring you the next group. Let's bring them on with a rousing round of applause." It would have been useful to know how much money the lesser-known artists actually made, where they lived, what was union scale over time. When the film does address musicians' labor, it makes for some brilliant moments. The treatment of the road trips black bands had to endure powerfully reveals the difficult conditions of work as well as the importance of community. In the age of segregation, band members recalled, black musicians often could not find hotels that could accommodate them, nor could they always afford to pay for a room. The musicians' wives would go into black communities and request assistance with food and housing. Indeed, without the warm generosity of black communities across the country, the black bands could not have survived the grueling tour schedule, especially in the South.

Rather than expose the working conditions of jazz musicians, Burns's *Jazz* follows the now common path of attributing much of the hardship to drug addiction. While it is important to acknowledge how alcohol and heroin ravaged generations of young musicians, there is very little discussion of the conditions that facilitated the circulation and use of drugs. Jazz was played largely in the hothouse of legal and illegal drug commerce. Moreover, the poverty, the nightly demands of creative labor, and the lack of any commitment to treatment or other kinds of constructive interventions are rarely discussed in any film or books on jazz. And the number of musicians who died due to complicated diseases and/or poor medical treatment (e.g., Herbie Nichols, Eric Dolphy, Booker Little, Bud Powell, and many others) have no place in the Burns/Ward narrative. Sadly, the social conditions of work and survival are treated as personal failings. Rather than examine the context for musical "genius"—racism, exploitation, poverty—we are given instead a story of self-destruction.

Ignoring community also has consequences for those whose stories don't get told. Obviously, even a nineteen-hour documentary cannot pretend to be comprehensive, but Ken Burns pays very little attention to women in the jazz community. Of course, we discover a few vocalists along the way—Sarah Vaughan (who is honored for "thinking like a musician," implying that she thinks like a male instrumentalist) and Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith (whose stories are more about personal tragedy than musical innovation).

But women instrumentalists are virtually invisible. The talented pianist Lil Hardin appears mainly as Louis Armstrong's wife, the woman behind the genius who helped remake him for public consumption. We never learn that the great Lester Young's mother and sister, Irma, played saxophone in the Young family band. Melba Liston receives a twenty-second mention by the narrator, but she comes across as a novelty. By not delving into Liston's work as a trombonist and arranger, we miss what she brought to the music. She was, after all, one of the central modernists on the trombone, along with J. J. Johnson, Curtis Fuller, Kai Winding, and others. Mary Lou Williams is barely mentioned and she is presented as a matron saint assisting the male geniuses of so-called "bebop." We learn nothing about her musical ideas, her early experiments in extended composition, what she taught Bud Powell, or the fact that many of Monk's ideas derive directly from some of her arrangements.



Saxophone section, Prairie View College Co-eds, 1943
 Photo courtesy of John B. Coleman Library,
 Prairie View A & M University

Finally, there is a five-second mention of the emergence of "all-girl" bands during World War II, such as the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and the Darlings of Rhythm. In light of Sherrie Tucker's brilliant new book, *Swing Shift*, not to mention existing film documentaries chronicling these bands, Ken Burns and crew missed a unique opportunity to delve into what it meant to be part of a women's community of jazz musicians.³ Tucker's book examines, among other things, how race and gender shaped opportunities for women musicians, audience reception, and the overall evaluation of musicianship by women band members themselves. She also chronicles the markedly different experiences of women on the road—whether traveling to the official war front on behalf of the USO or the more familiar front known as the Jim Crow South. The absence of these bands in Burns's narrative not only leaves us with an incomplete picture of the impact of World War II on the music but we end up with an impoverished view of the jazz community as a whole. For one thing, the conditions in which women instrumentalists participated lay bare the masculine culture at the core of the jazz world. Women such as Bertha Hope, Hazel Scott, Beryl Booker, Vi Burnside, Clora Bryant, Bert Etta Davis, Ina Ray Hutton, Lovie Austin, Emma Barrett, Dorothy Donnegan, and countless others shaped the development of the music and the culture and without their stories the entire picture is distorted.

The one "community" Burns acknowledges and privileges is the nation—here defined as one big American melting pot whose borders do not stretch beyond the redwood forests and the Gulf

In a Mist (continued)

Stream waters. Jazz here is treated as a metaphor for that melting pot; despite its roots, it is not black music, nor does it have anything to do with Africa or the rest of the world for that matter. One would never know from the film that jazz had always absorbed music from all over the globe—from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. While the film mentions the usual suspects (Juan Tizol and Chano Pozo), we never get a sense of just how deeply the music of Latin America and the Caribbean influenced jazz. We can hear it in Duke Ellington's 1930 recording of "Peanuts Vendor" (El Manisero), in Sidney Bechet and Willie "the Lion" Smith's 1931 recordings as leaders of the Haitian Orchestra, in the prolific Frank "Machito" Grillo's Afro-Cuban Orchestra featuring trumpeter and arranger Mario Bauza. Indeed, from the 1940s onward, the clave as well as the Afro-Cuban rhythms of the *rumba*, *mambo*, *guaguancó*, *guaracha*, and *pachanga* became fairly regular features of jazz composition.

But in the world according to Ken Burns, jazz is not only the exclusive property of the United States, but it has been a premiere manifestation of this nation's democratic ethos. Jazz musicians are portrayed as united in their support for World War II, and at the height of the Cold War we are told that jazz was one of America's most powerful weapons in their fight against communism. What we don't learn is that a growing number of black musicians in this period were critical of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. There are countless stories of black musicians who used subterfuge to obtain a 4F status in order to avoid serving in World War II or Korea. Although we have no hard numbers, it is worth pointing out that by late 1943, African Americans comprised 35% of the nation's delinquent draft registrants, and between 1941 and 1946, over two thousand black men were imprisoned for not complying with the provisions of the Selective Service Act.⁴ Black jazz musicians were so notorious for their indifference to the war effort that those who did serve in the armed forces were called "Jodys" (hipsters) by fellow servicemen and often singled out for particularly harsh treatment.

Some jazz musicians sought alternative identities by converting to Islam or supporting African nationalist movements. While the state department tried to peddle jazz to the world as evidence of America's democratic success, black people back home were still denied citizenship. Black musicians never lost sight of this contradiction and some created new "freedom" songs. Moreover, a growing number of black musicians turned to Africa for musical as well as political inspiration. In the age of African and "Third World" liberation movements, Art Blakey wrote "Message from Kenya" and "Ritual"; Sonny Rollins, "Airegin"; John Coltrane, "Liberia," "Dakar," "Dahomey Dance," and "Africa"; and Max Roach, "Tears for Johannesburg." One of the most important recordings of the era was Randy Weston's four-part suite, *Uhuru Afrika* (1960). Weston, the brilliant Brooklyn-born pianist/composer who had been exploring the connections between jazz and African music since at least the mid-1950s, pulled together a truly diasporic big band that included artists from West Africa, East Africa, Cuba, and the U.S. Among them was the Nigerian master drummer Babatunde Olatunji. Langston Hughes wrote the text, Melba Liston did the arrangements, and the result was a truly diasporic statement that both acknowledged the music's ancient roots and charted a new path for modern jazz. For Weston, this was just the beginning: he has spent

nearly half a century establishing relations with musicians from the continent. In 1967 he moved to Morocco where he resided for six years, running a performance space called African Rhythms Club and establishing a lifelong working relationship with the master musicians of the Gnawa.

Tragically, Weston's name is never mentioned in Ken Burns's *Jazz*. Why? Because his very work counters the film's burning assumptions: that jazz is exclusively American to be exported to the rest of the world as an advance guard in the struggle for democracy. For Weston, the music was there before "jazz" ever entered the lexicon; it is world music, Africa's contribution to civilization that has been taken up, transformed, and expanded in endless directions. Music is not an American export but a universal means of cultural exchange that resists any national identity. Had Weston been included, the narrative would have had to change. Besides challenging the film's implicit American nationalism, we would have followed Weston back to Africa and discovered a parallel and connected history of "jazz" in the townships of Johannesburg and the after-hours clubs of Lagos and Tangier. We would have learned about South Africa's Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim), Chris McGregor, and Johnny Dyani, or the Yoruba jazz band called the Cool Cats, who were hot in Lagos the same year Weston recorded *Uhuru Afrika*.

Weston represented something else that the film missed: an attempt to take the music out of the overpriced, exploitative, white-owned clubs and bring it to the very communities from which it sprang. From the late 1960s onward, a committed group of avant-garde or "free jazz" musicians, for example, sought performance spaces in black community centers, churches, schools and parks. Collectives such as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in Chicago, the Black Artists Group of St. Louis, and the Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension (UGMAA) run by the late Los Angeles pianist Horace Tapscott, held free concerts, set up institutions for music education, and reached a new generation of young people with the power of improvisational music. I would argue that these collectives not only kept the music alive during the 1970s, the alleged "dark ages" of jazz, but they pushed the boundaries of the music even further, embracing sounds, textures, and instrumentation from Asia, Africa, Oceania, Latin America, and the Caribbean. And yet, in Burns's narrative these very artists are blamed for the death of jazz. By creating music the masses could not understand, music that did not "swing," they lost their audience. They don't tell us how many students came through the AACM schools in Chicago, or how Tapscott's community-based performance space trained a new generation of hip hop artists, or the fact that during this period very few jazz artists could fill a room or sell a significant number of records. Again, had the film followed the story into these communities and ignored the strictly placed boundaries of the "jazz canon," we might have had a different story.

In the end, I'm as grateful as anyone to Burns and his funders for giving us so much music and so much history into one project. I'm honored to have been a part of its making and appreciate the

Continued on page 15

Modern Music

As Carol J. Oja notes in her marvelous and densely packed book, *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (Oxford University Press, 2000; \$39.95), “Artists and intellectuals chronically avoid being aligned with ‘isms’” (p. 231). Thus in 1928, Roy Harris advised Aaron Copland to “avoid neo-classicism like the pest that it is” (p. 234), while the manifesto of Edgard Varèse’s International Composers’ Guild (founded in 1921) “denie[d] the existence of schools; [and] recognize[d] only the individual” (p. 183). Such sentiments on the part of creative artists are entirely reasonable, as it is their uniqueness (rather than their commonness) that they wish to be remembered for. Yet these desires are in direct opposition to the very natural tendency of the human mind to try and make sense of the disparate through categorization and compartmentalization. Musicologists, of course, have in general been no less prone to such activities than, say, mycologists, except that their taxonomies are period, place, and “ism” rather than the common characteristics of particular fungal genera.

One of the many laudable achievements of *Making Music Modern* is that, contrary to this tendency, it follows to a very considerable degree the ICG manifesto in denying the existence of schools, and recognizing only the individual. True, Oja of logical necessity groups her chapters by topical themes: “Spirituality and American Dissonance” brings together studies of Dane Rudhyar, Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell, and Ruth Crawford, while “New World Neoclassicism” does the same for Copland, Virgil Thomson, and a representative quartet of Roger Sessions, Walter Piston, Harris, and Carlos Chávez. But she wisely recognizes both the internationalism of the music scene in New York during the 1920s—for instance in the section dealing with “European Modernists and American Critics” and the chapter titled “The Transatlantic Gaze of Aaron Copland”—and the huge importance of the developing new music infrastructure that emerged during the 1920s. This latter is discussed in the three chapters grouped as “Myths and Institutions,” and the opening “Introduction: The Modern Music Shop,” which—inter alia—conjures up the forgotten image of the eponymous 1920s store (phone number “DRY dock 3732”) variously located on East 48th Street and East Broadway.

Even more impressively, Oja avoids the cultural exclusivity so prevalent among musicologists in her virtuosic contextualization of the emerging new music in the broader world of arts and ideas. Thus chapter 4, “Engineers of Art,” effortlessly moves from the Model T through the rise of mass communication and Alfred Stieglitz’s magazine *Camera Work*, to “the Theremin, the Clavilux,

the Crea-tone, the Vitaphone, and the Martenot,” all of which “promised to liberate composers from the constraints of historic instruments” (p. 67). Elsewhere, well-chosen and extremely pertinent quotations from Langston Hughes, Gertrude Stein, Frank Zappa, Paul Rosenfeld, Alexis de Tocqueville, E. M. Forster, and F. Scott Fitzgerald complement and counterpoint the topics under consideration. A further example of Oja’s inclusivity is demonstrated in the extensive appendix, which gives a comprehensive listing of the “Programs of Modern-Music Societies in New York, 1920-1931,” from Joseph Achron to Massimo Zanotti-Bianco, and Orlando Gibbons (!) to Henry Brant. Perhaps most admirable of all is Oja’s democratic thoroughness in attending not only to the contributions of figures both obvious (Varèse, Copland, Gershwin) and obscure (Marion Bauer, Frederick Jacobi, Emerson Whithorne, Louis Gruenberg), but also in making convincing arguments

for the restitution of neglected pioneers including Leo Ornstein and Dane Rudhyar. Additionally, she does much to exorcise the myths concerning the critical reception of Varèse, who—contrary to received wisdom—“had attained considerable stature” by 1927 (p. 41), and the vitally important role of “Women Patrons and Activists” (chapter 12) in fostering musical developments in America (and especially New York) during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Inevitably, one has a few quibbles. Oja’s approach does lead on occasion to some very short chapters: that discussing “Virgil Thomson’s ‘Cocktail of Culture,’” for instance, contains a mere twelve pages, of which five are largely occupied by illustrations or music examples; for “Ruth Crawford and the Apotheosis of Spiritual Dissonance” the figures are nine and three respectively. Couldn’t this

material have been included in other chapters? A further result of Oja’s primarily “individual” treatment is a perhaps inevitable reliance on a “biography followed by commentary” format, this being found in perhaps half of the book’s twenty chapters. There is also the suspicion that the text at times strays from its principal purpose—the examination of “the extraordinary network of composers and ideologies that made up the modernist movement in New York City from World War I until the early years of the Depression” (p. 4)—in order to include figures now perceived as more important than perhaps they were at the time. Ruth Crawford, for instance, arrived in the city in 1929, and before 1930 had received only two performances there (the same number as Henry Eichheim and Carl

Continued on page 15



Roy Harris against the Manhattan skyline (1931)
Nicolas Slonimsky Collection, Library of Congress
Reproduced by permission of Electra Yourke

Different Tunes (continued)

ture appeared on conference material. Pool would soon organize the First National Congress on Women and Music the following year. At the time Crawford served as a focal point. Pool remembers:

I decided the best thing to do was anchor the whole conference around Ruth Crawford Seeger. She was a major composer, and her *String Quartet 1931* was a pivotal work done by a woman. If we anchored the conference there, then I would have the ability to present the new works, the new string quartets on her shoulders.¹⁶

Other female composers looked to Crawford as a role model as well. Here was a composer whose excellence and modernist credentials assuaged their "anxiety of authorship" over the absence of female composers from conventional music history.¹⁷ Vivian Fine stated that "it was of incalculable importance that I had Ruth Crawford as a teacher and as a model in my life."¹⁸ Fine carried this message to others, among them the noted composer Pauline Oliveros. In her "Sound Journal," Oliveros wrote about the impact of Fine's testimony on her own sense of musical identity:

February 9 [1973]: Vivian Fine appeared and was truly fine. She teaches at Bennington College, Vermont. Besides composing, she is a terrific pianist. Her own music rings with authenticity.... She was a pupil of Ruth Crawford Seeger (a remarkable composer who died too young), thus unlike most of us females, had a model and never considered herself unnatural, consciously or unconsciously, for writing music.... She related her experience of the '30's and reminded us that there were not many composers around in those days. Then, they all knew each other. She mentioned "Boulangerie" and how Ruth Crawford was a member of the early Avant Garde. Significant that there was at least one woman in that early group and that Nadia Boulanger, a woman, influenced so many of the American composers.¹⁹

The last twenty years have witnessed some important developments within the overlapping categories outlined above. In general, one can point to the greater inclusion of Crawford in general surveys.²⁰ More specifically, the coverage has shifted somewhat, so that even in some general surveys, the *String Quartet 1931* is no longer the only piece on which Crawford's historical position is based.²¹ This reflects a widening of interest in Crawford's work as a whole, a trend reinforced in the specialized analytic literature. Here an article by David Nicholls in 1983 led the way, especially in noting the stylistic watershed represented by Crawford's *Music for Small Orchestra*.²²

A trend in the recent analytic literature about Crawford concerns Charles Seeger's contributions to Crawford's development. With respect to modernist theory, Seeger had been known primarily for his classic article on "dissonant counterpoint."²³ While it had been understood that he had been Crawford's teacher, no connections had been drawn between this article and her musical development. This changed in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Mark Nelson used Seeger's article as his starting point, as did other scholars, notably David Nicholls, who highlighted Seeger's centrality in the first full-scale study of the American experimental tradition.²⁴ Several years later scholars rediscovered Seeger's unpublished theoretical treatise,

"Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music," an extensive document containing two sections, "Treatise on Musical Composition" and "Manual of Dissonant Counterpoint." This was published in a scrupulously edited version by Charles Seeger's biographer, Ann M. Pescatello.²⁵

In fact, Crawford considered her work on Seeger's treatise so important that a co-authorship did not seem implausible to her.²⁶ Seeger's own dedicatory reference to Crawford's collaboration corroborates this detail. In many respects Charles Seeger reversed the classic relationship between male and female musician, for if anything, he was Ruth Crawford's muse as well as teacher. Nevertheless, the extent of Seeger's influence upon Crawford may be a matter of debate, and the temptation to overstate the case is great. Nancy Rao's article on the partnership between these two handles the issue directly as well, describing Crawford's "crucial role in the creation of Seeger's treatise, quite opposite to the common portrayal of her merely as the typist, sounding board, or muse of the treatise."²⁷

With respect to women's history, the growing stature of this field, particularly since the late 1980s, brought increasing visibility to Ruth Crawford Seeger. Matilda Gaume's biography appeared in 1986, as did the publication of her biographical essay in *Women Making Music*.²⁸ In my biography, I took multiple points of view toward the life and work of Ruth Crawford Seeger, dealing with issues of gender as well as American cultural history. Moreover, I attempted to integrate the two parts of her life, that is to say, her composition and her work with folk music, as part of the reciprocal relationship between traditional ethnic musics and early modernism. More recently, other scholars have applied feminist critical theory to Crawford's music. Here Ellie Hisama has led the way.²⁹

Even from the beginning, Crawford's placement within twentieth-century music has moved between margin and mainstream—between the American experimental tradition on the one hand, and serial practice on the other. This suggests that Crawford's music does not fit neatly into one or the other of these categories. Within the analytic literature written since 1980, we see various kinds of discourse being used to describe her work. Some theorists are exploring the influence of Crawford and her generation on later experimental figures such as Elliott Carter and John Cage. In a widely acclaimed study of Carter's music, David Schiff cited Crawford as one of a number of composers whose music "reflected and refracted his [Carter's] thinking" ca. 1948-1950.³⁰ Anne Shreffler makes more explicit connections by linking the ultra-modern idiom in general and Crawford in particular to the development of Elliott Carter's style.³¹

With respect to serial discourse, we can see consensus emerging between earlier and more recent assessments. The noted historian Carol J. Oja describes the quartet as "prefiguring subsequent total serialism in the USA."³² Joseph Straus explicitly links Crawford's work to a renewed appreciation of the ultra-modern circle in general with respect to integral serialism, and explained the historical import of Crawford's "astonishingly radical" rhythmic and melodic organization:

Continued on page 14

Ruth Crawford Seeger Celebration

The centenary of Ruth Crawford Seeger is a timely occasion to consider the life, music, and cultural significance of an extraordinary composer and folk music activist. The first woman to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in music, Crawford Seeger developed a unique modernist musical style in the 1920s and early 1930s. Her best-known work, the *String Quartet 1931*, stands as a striking example of modernist musical experimentation and establishes her as a brilliant and inventive composer. She was a vital participant in the "ultra-modern" school of composition in New York City, a group of composers that included Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, and Dane Rudhyar. Through her transcriptions and arrangements of traditional American music, and her association with the Lomaxes and her stepson Pete, Crawford Seeger emerged as a leader in the folk song revival of the 1930s and 1940s.

Ruth Crawford Seeger: Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music will focus on Crawford Seeger's influence on modernist composition and the Seeger family's far-reaching impact on the urban folk revival. During Crawford Seeger's lifetime, her music was enthusiastically endorsed by the composers Henry Cowell and Edgard Varèse, musicologist Charles Seeger (who was her composition teacher before he became her husband), and the music patron Blanche Walton. Shortly after her marriage to Seeger in 1932 and the birth of her first child, Michael, in 1933, she stopped composing and turned instead to the task of teaching music to children and of collecting, transcribing, arranging, and publishing folk songs, projects she would continue until her untimely death from cancer at the age of fifty-two.

In the received history of early twentieth-century music, European composers tend to be represented as having made more significant contributions than their American counterparts. An even more entrenched notion is that twentieth-century art music was an exclusively male preserve. The musical legacy of Crawford Seeger, Amy Beach, Marion Bauer, Margaret Bonds, Elisabeth Lutyens, Miriam Gideon, and numerous other women challenges this myth. The conference's concentration on Crawford Seeger's life, music, and cultural activism will help to dispel lingering notions about the absence of talented and influential female musical figures in this century.

Our focus on Crawford Seeger's prescient contributions to American modernism and on her advocacy of traditional music presents a provocative view of twentieth-century music. The conference will help to break down the notion that modern and traditional music are diametrically opposed. To straddle both of these worlds was by no means unique, but the Seegers' lasting and unusual musical legacy—one that embraces Elliott Carter and Pete Seeger, serialism and socialism—deserves recognition and further study. By presenting an interdisciplinary perspective on a pathbreaking figure who managed to bridge the modern and the traditional, the conference will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how musical movements such as ultra-modernism and the urban folk revival helped to shape twentieth-century culture.

—Ellie M. Hisama

The Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College, the Ph.D./D.M.A. Program in Music, and Continuing Education and Public Programs at the CUNY Graduate Center Present:

RUTH CRAWFORD SEEGER Modernity, Tradition, and the Making of American Music

Preliminary Conference Schedule

Friday, 26 October 2001

Brooklyn College, City University of New York

Towards a Revised History of Modernist Musical Practice

Joseph N. Straus, Ellie M. Hisama,
Lyn Ellen Burkett, Taylor A. Greer

Ruth Crawford Seeger's Imprint on 20th-Century Music

Tania León, Pauline Oliveros, Christian Wolff

Concert of Chamber Works

Saturday, 27 October 2001

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

Folk Music, Culture, and the Politics of the Left

Bess Lomax Hawes, Benjamin Filene

Keynote Address by Judith Tick

Remembering Dio:

A Seeger Family Scrapbook

Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger, Pete Seeger

New Perspectives on the Seegers' Folk Song Collections

Anthony Seeger, Larry Polansky, Roberta Lamb

Seeger Family Tribute Concert

Mike Seeger, Peggy Seeger, and Pete Seeger perform folk songs and arrangements by Ruth Crawford Seeger

This conference is made possible by the New York Council for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Baisley Powell Elebash Endowment.

For more information, please call ISAM at 718-951-5655 or visit the ISAM website at <depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/isam>.

Different Tunes (continued)

Crawford has obviously understood the potential isomorphism of pitch and rhythm and, in that profound sense, has “serialized the rhythm” of the piece. I don’t want to exaggerate Crawford’s achievement—the rhythms are not serialized in any consistent or systematic way. Nonetheless, these things happen often enough in her music to suggest clearly that she is aware of a profound analogy of rhythm and pitch, and of the possibility of projecting the same musical motives in both dimensions. The next time a history of rhythmic practice, or of serialism is written, I think Crawford will have to occupy a prominent place—she currently appears hardly at all.³³

Issues and controversies surrounding Crawford’s historical significance and the nature of her influence remain volatile at this point in time. Theoretical work by both Shreffler and Straus has yet to be assimilated into mainstream historical writing. Most recently, Teresa Davidian has begun to explore affinities and influences between Crawford and Cage. Even if she overstates the case, Davidian has a point when she writes, “For all the attention and tribute paid to Crawford over the years, scholars have stopped short of investigating her influence on other composers.”³⁴

With respect to women’s history, the question has to be placed against a void: how often in mainstream historical writing does one encounter the acknowledgement of a female composer as an influence on a male contemporary or successor? Rarely. Given the vicissitudes of reception, one never should underestimate the burden of proof required to link one composer with another, especially when a female composer is involved. No doubt the present generation of new scholars will contribute greatly to the stabilization of Ruth Crawford Seeger’s historical placement. Perhaps in the future, we will see her more securely anchored within mainstream modernism, and treated less like an anomaly who followed her own path within an historically marginalized tradition. In the meantime, the encompassing nature of Ruth Crawford’s musical empiricism and her “different tunes” continue to challenge the very definitions of the categories through which modern music history has been constructed.

—Northeastern University

Editors’ note: This article is a revised excerpt from Judith Tick’s “Writing Female Composers into Mainstream Music History: Ruth Crawford Seeger as a Case Study,” published in Frauen- und Männerbilder in der Musik: Festschrift für Eva Rieger zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. Freia Hoffmann, Jane Bowers, and Ruth Heckmann (BIS Universität Oldenburg, 2000).

NOTES

¹ Peggy Seeger, “Different Tunes,” in *The Peggy Seeger Songbook, Warts and All: Forty Years of Songmaking*, ed. Irene Scott (Oak Publications, 1998), 230.

² George Perle, “Atonality and the Twelve-Tone System in the United States,” *The Score* (July 1960), 58-59.

³ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 314, incorrectly lists the concert George Perle attended as the performance in 1950.

⁴ Interview with George Perle by the author, 16 February 1987.

⁵ Letter from George Perle to Charles Seeger, 20 October 1959, Seeger Collection, Library of Congress.

⁶ Eric Salzman, “Distaff Disk. Ruth Seeger’s Work Ahead of Its Era,” *The New York Times*, 16 April 1961.

⁷ Telephone interview with Teresa Sterne by the author, 12 December 1999.

⁸ Andrew Porter, “Modern Pleasures,” *The New Yorker*, 10 February 1973.

⁹ John Rockwell, review of recording by the Composers Quartet, Nonesuch H71280 in *High Fidelity Magazine*, July 1973.

¹⁰ John Rockwell, writing in *The New York Times*, 21 February 1975, as cited in Jane Weiner LePage, *Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century: Selected Biographies* (Scarecrow Press, 1980), 49.

¹¹ Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Her Life and Works* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1973).

¹² Rita H. Mead, *Henry Cowell’s New Music, 1925-1936: The Society, the Music Editions and the Recordings* (UMI Editions, 1981).

¹³ Telephone interview with Matilda Gaume by the author, 30 November 1999.

¹⁴ Mead, *Henry Cowell’s New Music*, 257.

¹⁵ Telephone interview with Teresa Sterne by the author, 12 December 1999.

¹⁶ Interview with Jeannie Pool by the author, 30 November 1999.

¹⁷ The “anxiety of authorship” is a phrase coined by the literary critics Sandra Gilbert and Sandra Gubar to refer to the discouraging effects of the absence of female models as artists. For a definition see Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (Columbia University Press, 1995), 13-14.

¹⁸ Heidi Von Gunden, *The Music of Vivian Fine* (Scarecrow Press, 1999), 71.

¹⁹ Pauline Oliveros, “Many Strands,” in *Software for People: Collected Writings, 1963-80* (Smith Publications, 1984), 89-90.

²⁰ Although absent from the index, Crawford Seeger is mentioned in Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America* (Norton, 1991), 297. She is excluded from Bryan R. Simms, *Music of the Twentieth Century: Style and Structure* (Schirmer, 1986).

²¹ See Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-Century Music* (Prentice Hall, 1992), 201, for commentary on the *Preludes for Piano*, and Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (Schirmer, 1997), 42, for a discussion of *Music for Small Orchestra*.

²² David Nicholls, “Ruth Crawford Seeger: An Introduction,” *Musical Times* 124 (1983), 421-25.

²³ Charles Seeger, “On Dissonant Counterpoint,” *Modern Music* 7 (June-July 1930), 25-31.

²⁴ Mark D. Nelson, “In Pursuit of Charles Seeger’s Heterophonic Ideal: Three Palindromic Works by Ruth Crawford,” *Musical Quarterly* 72 (1986): 458-75; David Nicholls, *American Experimental Music 1890-1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁵ Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology II: 1929-1979*, ed. Ann M. Pescatello (University of California Press, 1994), 17-274. While I used this document in my biography of Crawford, Joseph N. Straus made it the foundational basis of his analytic study, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

²⁶ Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger*, 131-32.

²⁷ Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “Partnership in Modern Music: Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford, 1929-31,” *American Music* 15/3 (Fall 1997), 374.

²⁸ Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memories, Memoirs, Music* (Scarecrow Press, 1986) and Gaume, “Ruth Crawford Seeger,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 370-88.

²⁹ Ellie M. Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁰ David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (Eulenberg, 1983), 69.

³¹ Anne Shreffler, “Elliott Carter and his America,” *Sonus* 14/2 (1994), 39, 49.

³² Carol J. Oja, “The USA, 1918-45,” in *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Prentice Hall, 1994), 213.

³³ Straus, “Ruth Crawford’s Serialism,” unpublished speech, Cornell University, 26 October 1992.

³⁴ Teresa Davidian, “Ruth Crawford Seeger and John Cage: New Connections between Two American Originals,” paper presented at the 16th annual congress of the International Musicological Society, London, 19 August 1997; Davidian, “From Crawford to Cage: Parallels and Transformations,” *Musical Quarterly*, forthcoming.

In a Mist (continued)

filmmakers' efforts to struggle with us and with each other over the meaning and content of *Jazz*. Nevertheless, we must call it what it is: a work of canonization and legitimation. The recurring theme is that these individual artists took gutter music and transformed it into an art form. For me, this is the film's fundamental problem, for it presumes that black vernacular music is simply not art. Why? What makes the music "art"? Innovation? An expression of genius and creativity? In a culture that emphasizes collective participation and individual self-expression, ensemble playing and solo improvisation, were there not always innovators who could move or confuse the crowd depending on their intent? What made this particular manifestation of black music an art form all of a sudden? The answer, I surmise, can be found in Tower Records. Jazz became an art form when it was turned into a prized commodity, when the dominant culture clamored for it, when the price of the ticket was too steep for the descendants of jazz's originators. And when the arbiters of taste declared the music color-blind.

—Robin D. G. Kelley
New York University

NOTES

¹ Some of these questions are explored eloquently in Guthrie Ramsey's book, *Race Music* (University of California Press, in press).

² Robin D. G. Kelley, "Without a Song: New York Musicians Strike Out Against Technology," in Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Three Strikes: The Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century* (Beacon Press, forthcoming), 136.

³ Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Duke University Press, 2000). A few of us suggested that the filmmakers contact Professor Tucker and incorporate some of her research into the film, but instead they asked her to write an essay for the Ken Burns's *Jazz* website. It was an unfortunate compromise since the stories she captures in *Swing Shift* possess a rich cinematic quality.

⁴ Gerald R. Gill, "Dissent, Discontent and Disinterest: Afro-American Opposition to the United States' Wars of the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1986), 164-68; George Q. Flynn, "Selective Service and American Blacks during World War II," *Journal of Negro History* 69 (Winter 1984), 14-25.

Modern Music (continued)

Engel). George Antheil, meanwhile, spent much of the decade based elsewhere, including a long stint in Paris.

None of this, however, should be allowed to diminish the impact and importance of Oja's remarkable study. For while neither Crawford nor Antheil was physically based in the city, both were able to achieve a virtual presence because "New York had become an international marketplace of modernism... [and was] one of the main sites where the newest compositions were written, performed, and"—most importantly in this respect—"discussed" (p. 3). Ultimately, then, it is not individual composers or their works that take pride of place in Oja's book, but rather New York City itself, which "placed young composers at an auspicious cultural crossroads. There they could stand, with all their belongings in one suitcase, free to roam in whatever direction their imaginations might lead" (p. 6). I, for one, feel the same way about this pathbreaking, highly readable, and enticing volume, for it, too, has led my imagination to many new thoughts and insights.

—David Nicholls
University of Southampton

NEW YORK CITY GLOBAL BEAT OF THE BOROUGHS



MUSIC FROM NYC'S ETHNIC & IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES 2 CDs

NEW YORK CITY: GLOBAL BEAT OF THE BOROUGHS

SFW CD 40493

 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

From Irish *céilís* groups to Caribbean steelbands, Gypsy ensembles to Chinese orchestras, African American gospel choirs to Latin jazz, *New York City: Global Beat of the Boroughs* presents the cultural diversity and musical virtuosity of NYC.

Featuring outstanding grassroots ensembles from more than a dozen of New York's most vibrant ethnic communities, this Smithsonian Folkways release pairs the traditional with innovative cross-cultural fusions.

2 CDs, extensive notes, 40-page booklet
Specially priced at \$15.

To order contact:
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings
750 9th St. N.W. Ste 4100
Washington, D.C. 20560-0953
1-800-410-9815
www.si.edu/folkways



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



*Randy Weston
photo: Anne Smolderen*

Inside this issue:

Robin D. G. Kelley on Ken Burns's *Jazz*

Judith Tick on Ruth Crawford Seeger

Remembering Mark Tucker

Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____.
Suggested donation: \$25. Please make payable to:
Brooklyn College Member Organization (memo ISAM)
All contributions are tax-deductible.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____



Are you among the 4,000 scholars,
composers, and performers passionate
about American music who receive the *ISAM*
Newsletter twice a year and free of charge?

Please become a voluntary subscriber.

*Your help is essential
to continue issuing this publication.*

Brooklyn College
Institute for Studies in American Music
Conservatory of Music
2900 Bedford Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11210

Address Correction Requested